

Summary of the discussions

Achieving Social Inclusion – A Global Challenge

Wednesday, 12th February 2014, SDC, Berne

With:

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Žarko Šunderić, Team Manager, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Serbia

Kensuke Tanaka, Head of Asia Desk, OECD Development Centre, Paris

Introduction by **Pio Wennubst**, SDC Assistant Director-General

Moderation by **Nathalie Ducommun**, RTS - Radio Télévision Suisse

The panel of experts addressed in particular the concepts and challenges related to social inclusion, possible ways to enhance social inclusion – using examples from different regions – and implications for international cooperation :

Concept and challenges related to social inclusion

The recent report of the World Bank “*Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*” proposes a broad definition of social inclusion as “*the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society*”, stressing that social inclusion is a process. Social inclusion can also be perceived from different perspectives: in a human rights approach, it is about giving everyone the same opportunities; from an economic perspective, exclusion of people who could contribute to the economy hinders competitiveness; from a political perspective, social inclusion is a factor of stability; and from a social perspective, social inclusion is ultimately about fostering well-being and happiness. Social inclusion is also relevant in the context of the “new growth paradigm”, leading several countries, in particular in Asia, to adopt policies aiming to promote inclusive growth.

“Social inclusion requires a comprehensive approach – linking policies to one another. Strengthening institutional capacity to implement the sets of policies is important.” (Kensuke Tanaka)

Social exclusion is related to poverty and inequalities, as well as to discrimination. It was stressed that the concepts are ultimately not so important, as long as social inclusion is practiced. In this regard, data collection is essential, in order to identify the victims of discrimination. Very often, concepts that seem at first sight difficult to measure, such as dignity, may actually be measured. It is also key to go beyond diagnostic and understand *why* people face negative outcomes, or *why* they make certain choices.

How can social inclusion be enhanced?

The discussion highlighted that policies are very important and necessary. But very often, **it is necessary to change habits and perceptions to achieve social inclusion**. It is much more difficult and requires information sharing, strengthening of excluded groups, and ultimately changes in power-sharing patterns. In this process, it is essential to discuss the problems. In Brazil for instance, soap operas contributed to launch discussions on disability and inclusive education or homosexuality.

“Brazil could address racial inequality because it started to *discuss* the problem. We need to face the taboos.” (Rafael Guerreiro Osório)

In order to succeed, policies promoting social inclusion must receive a **broad support from the society. Building alliances and creating trust is thus essential.** Social inclusion is not a linear process, and it may imply trade-offs in the short term. It is a very long-term process – and basically a never ending challenge. The panelists also highlighted that social inclusion requires differentiated solutions depending e.g. on the countries, actors, groups (such as indigenous groups) or cultures concerned.

“Policies that address social inclusion don't necessarily do more; they do things differently.” (Maitreyi Bordia Das)

What are the implications for international cooperation?

The panelists underlined that in the context of the post-2015 discussions, it is essential to look at inequalities within and between countries. The High Level Panel Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, released in May 2013, called for a new discussion (“Leave no one behind”). In this context, it is important to pay attention to the heterogeneity existing between countries, and not to jump to conclusions.

Panelists disagreed on the role of international agencies as a driver for change towards social inclusion: Some perceived the role as decreasing, national solutions becoming more important, while others stressed the importance of international institutions and regional integration, such as in the EU, to push for reforms. International organisations can influence more inclusive policies through their financial support, but also by facilitating discussions at the national level. In addition, they may play a useful role by fostering a knowledge-based approach. Collective peer pressure – for instance via rankings or indexes – may also foster the adoption of more inclusive policies.

During the general discussion, the constraint of result orientation was stressed: Donors want results immediately, whereas social inclusion is a long-term process. It was also noted that the fight against inequalities is about providing equal *opportunities*. It was also questioned whether social inclusion could bring adequate answers in contexts where violence, conflict or extreme poverty prevails. It was also stressed that if social inclusion is a value per se, institutions play a key role: Strong institutions and a bottom-up approach are necessary to implement social inclusion.

“Social inclusion leads to a society founded on trust.” (Žarko Šunderić)