



## Inclusive & equitable education and social justice: A study

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### Abstract

Achieving sustainable development has been hampered by trade-offs in favour of inclusive & equitable education growth over social Justice Well-being and ecological viability, which may also affect the sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the member states of the United Nations. In contrast, the concept of inclusive education emphasizes the social, ecological and political dimensions of development. In this context, this paper addresses the question: What does inclusive development mean and to what extent is it taken into account in the framing of the SDGs? It presents inclusive development as having three key dimensions (social, ecological, and relational inclusiveness) with five principles each. This is applied to the 17 SDGs and their targets. The paper concludes that while the text on the SDGs fares quite well on social inclusiveness, it fares less well in respect to ecological and relational inclusiveness. This implies that there is a risk that implementation processes also focus more on social inclusiveness rather than on ecological and relational inclusiveness. Moreover, in order to de facto achieve social inclusiveness in the anthropogenic, it is critical that the latter two are given equal weight in the actual implementation process.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, inclusive and equitable education and sustainable development

### Introduction

Inclusion and equity are not just about kindness or fairness, they are concerned with the fundamental manifestations of human rights, justice and the experience of living in a democratic society based on the rule of law. However, we know that it is now possible to overcome the social and economic lottery of birth by creating a just society in which children grow and develop. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The building blocks of a nation are the citizens of its tomorrow. The way these seeds will sprout will always depend on the way you choose to water them. India's education sector is one of the largest sunrise sectors in the economic and social development of the country. India's education sector has expanded rapidly in the last decade but the quality of learning remains pathetic on account of unimaginative and misguided policies. In an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, quality education is more important than ever. It is being held by many educators that inclusive education is implicit of equitable quality education since inclusion implies adjusting education as per the needs of education.

Respect for diversity, which is basic premise of inclusion, leads to devising intervention that every child is able to learn. This implies that teachers have to be reflective and creative to devise ways and means to match children's styles of learning. "Diversity and inclusion, which are the real grounds for creativity, must remain at the centre of what we do."

### Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is a notion of inclusive education and a sketch note on paradigm shift toward inclusion pertains to educating all children in age-appropriate general education classes in the same school irrespective of their diversity and wherein children with special needs are presumed to be

competent and capable of developing positive social Relationships with peers, and are deemed fully accepted and participating members of the school as a community of learners."

More Indian children are in school today than ever before, but the quality of public schools has sunk to abysmally low levels, as government schools have become the reserve of children at the very bottom of India's social ladder.

Education has the potential to become a powerful catalyst for development, serving as a bridge from poverty to prosperity, from division to understanding, from exclusion to participation. But for education to achieve these objectives, it must inspire and develop children to think creatively, reason systematically and release their potential to shape their own future. Education can be truly transformative if it is holistic, ambitious, and inspirational in its approach. Yet even after more than seven decades of independence; India is facing a major education crisis. Literacy is officially defined as the capability of "a person aged seven and above who can both read and write with understanding in any language" — is admittedly an inadequate measure of human capability in a modern economy. Based on this minimal definition, India's literacy rate according to the 2011 Census was 72 per cent, well below the global average of 86 per cent. This has improved only slightly since then.

### Relationship among Equality, Equity and Social Justice

Equality, equity and social justice in the context of this debate the notion of equality before the law is extended to all dimensions of human interaction; nothing can supersede the fundamental criterion of common humanity. Diversity in education is all about recognizing difference and respecting the individual irrespective of the nature of the difference and then working explicitly to secure inclusion and equity. Not only does the idea of equality apply to all aspects of life but

it is rooted in the principle that: Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. (Rawls 1971 p3) However it is argued that it is not enough to be equal. There also has to be parity in terms of the measureable outcomes of living in society it is not enough just to be equal: Equity is not the same as equal opportunity. When practiced in the context of education, equity is focused on outcomes and results and is rooted in the recognition that because children have different needs and come from different circumstances, we cannot treat them all the same. On this basis leadership for diversity would seem to imply the following criteria being the basis for life in community– irrespective of personal circumstances:

1. A sense of self-worth: value, dignity and integrity.
2. Equity and parity of esteem.
3. A sense of the worth of others; empathy and sensitivity.
4. A recognition and respect for difference.

In just the same way that it is now accepted as one of the key features of a modern democratic society that everybody is equal before the law and wealth; social position or influence should have no bearing on the legal process so it is argued that all the other elements of social life should work to the same principle. Social justice has to be impartial; just as the statue of Justice is depicted as being blind so social justice has to be rooted in fairness, nothing can compromise the essential parity which serves as the starting point for all social action. In essence it is not acceptable to have, for example, political equality if there is systemic poverty that diminishes and marginalizes people and thereby inhibits or compromises social and economic equality. This raises the very challenging notion that in order to secure social justice it may be necessary to discriminate in favour of certain groups. This is Rawls’ concept of the difference principle – the idea that inequalities are acceptable only to the extent that they benefit the worst off. Equality and equity have to be balanced.

**Equality:** every human being has an absolute and equal right to common dignity and parity of esteem and entitlement to access the benefits of society on equal terms

**Equity:** every human being has a right to benefit from the outcomes of society on the basis of fairness and according to need

**Social justice:** justice requires deliberate and specific intervention to secure equality and equity

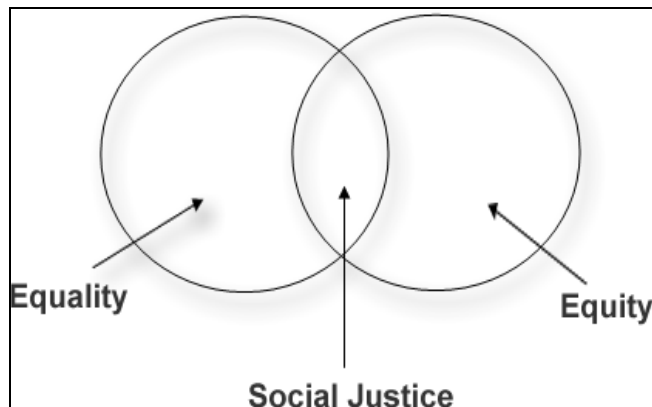


Fig 1: Equality, equity and social justice

The implication of the model set out in above figure is very simple. Social justice only exists in the extent to which the principle of equality is reflected in the actual concrete experience of all people found in any given social situation and that experience has to be measured in the extent of equity in outcomes. The more the two elements are integrated the greater the level of social justice i.e. in the diagram the more the two circles Overlap the greater is the potential for social justice. This leads on to a further proposition – social justice requires the recognition and acceptance of diversity as a manifestation of equity and inclusion as a practical exemplification of equality.

**Present Status of Inclusive Education**

The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018) surveys — the most authentic barometer of India’s educational health — shows that its findings are not inspiring, and in some cases quite dismal. The fragile foundation of basic education augurs a dim horizon for India’s future human capital. The students are not able to learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic and do not meet even elementary mathematics standards. While enrolment has improved sharply since 2006 for both boys and girls, not only at the primary but also in the 11-14 age groups, literacy and numeracy skills remain dismally below par. The ASER survey covered 5.46 lakh children in the age group 3-16 across 596 districts. What is alarming is the decline in reading and arithmetical abilities at the Class VIII level since 2012, with government schools faring worse than private ones: more than a quarter of all children at this level cannot read a Class II text, while over half of all children cannot do division (three digits by a single digit number). Seen along last year’s ASER survey on learning abilities of the 14-18 age group, those about to enter the workforce, it would seem that India’s “demographic dividend” is turning into a sour joke.

These figures are a serious concern in a country where only 74 per cent of its 1.2 billion inhabitants are literate, making India home to the largest illiterate population in the world. We all know that a sound and productive education system needs to focus on science, math, engineering and technology — the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future.” Inefficient teaching methods, such as rote learning, which focuses on memorization as opposed to critical reasoning, are still widespread at the primary and secondary school levels. The rote teaching methodology has demonstrated shortcomings. Studies by the Program for International Students Assessment, an OECD initiative, and Wipro found that students at the primary and secondary school level have fallen back in math, science and reading literacy in recent years.

The call for higher investments in education has been made since independence. The famous “Bombay Plan” (authored by country’s foremost experts and published in 1944 as “A Plan of Economic Development for India”, proposed public investment in literacy, including adult literacy, and school and college education, including “scientific education and research”. It said that “extreme forms of poverty will prevail... as long as the overwhelming majority of the Indian people are able neither to read nor write.” The document’s arguments in favor of public investment in education and human capability building have been made more vigorously. The skewed priorities of the government in this vital sector manifest in low learning levels. The

United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals include a commitment to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. While we are on the right course, our obsession with universal coverage of education has compromised the quality of learning. It is time that India moves beyond a singular focus on enrolment numbers and grapples with the problem of poor quality. The usually parroted reasons for the poor standard of education are teacher absenteeism, poor student attendance, bad infrastructure, inadequate teacher preparation programs, and rote learning practices.

The most common refrain is: "The ones who understand education are not empowered while the ones empowered have no idea about education." While these issues are valid, they do not fully explain the learning crisis apparent in our classrooms. More Indian children are in school today than ever before, but the quality of public schools has sunk to abysmally low levels, as government schools have become the reserve of children at the very bottom of India's social ladder. The Right to Education Act has been quite successful in achieving three broad objectives: higher enrolment, lower dropout and completion of mandatory basic education.

The bane of the modern examination system is its regressive testing regimen which we stubbornly refuse to reform. Exams are no longer a metric for the test of learning or intelligence. Instead, they have degenerated into an awfully pernicious ritual designed to produce compliant drones who can regurgitate facts faithfully. What we test is the acquisition of a narrow collection of facts, not whether children have the skills for fruitful employment or the ingredients for gainful adulthood. Children are being coaxed into learning merely to pass tests. Schools are not fostering love for learning. Moreover, they do not inculcate the all-round skills they need when they leave the portals of learning to the world of competition outside. Real education is more about wide reading, deep thinking and asking hard questions rather than simply reproducing crammed answers faithfully. Formal teaching needs to be supplemented by in-school pull-out programs, after-school tutoring, and summer camps supervised by NGOs with emphasis on non-conventional innovative pedagogies.

Education needs more champions than health and environmental advocates because it is one rising tide that can lift all the boats. Since education has more room for innovation than any other development sector, there is a unique opportunity for social entrepreneurs. We need to transform curriculum and teaching practices to focus less on rote learning or straightforward calculation and more on relevant skills, like communication, reasoning ability, problem-solving and reasoning ability, and critical and independent thinking. We are under an illusion that our children are digitally savvy but more often their knowledge is only screen-deep. If young people are to be empowered citizens, they will need to understand how technology affects every aspect of our life. Greater tech literacy will be essential to ensure that the human implications of the ongoing fourth Industrial Revolution are positive.

If India is to truly rise as a global economic power, the policymakers and education specialists must focus their efforts on developing its public schools into a world-class education system. Catchy announcements like "blackboard to digital boards" will have relevance only when we translate rhetoric into commitment and into genuine action.

Goals without actionable strategies are just good intentions. The proof should come by first addressing the fundamental concerns of public education. Nelson Mandela famously said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Adequate resources, higher standards for teachers and the flushing out of corruption must all be part of a reform package that seeks to make Indian education the nation's top priority. Improving education outcomes demands a relentless focus on quality, equity and results.

### **Diversity and inclusion for Social Justice**

When we consider the nature of social justice, Rawls' principles lead us to two fundamental assertions. Firstly, being inviolable social justice cannot be diluted, diminished or denied – either there is social justice or there is not. Equally there is recognition and respect for diversity and appropriate inclusion – or there is not. Secondly the principle applies to all dimensions of a person's life. An individual may or may not become involved in the legal system and if they do then they will have the protection of the rule of law. However, social justice applies to every aspect of daily life, not just the special or extraordinary circumstance. Social justice moves us from the theoretical or ideal into the practical – the right to vote has to be paralleled by the right to associate, debate etc.

### **How is it possible to Sustainable development?**

However one issue needs to be addressed explicitly at the outset of any discussion about social justice in the context of diversity. This is the point is that the a priori for every discussion has to be the fundamental dignity and value of every human being in their own right. There cannot be 'degrees' of humanity; there can be no caveats or conditions that might be used to qualify the essential identity and integrity of each person. Human dignity has to be understood in terms of being human without any artificial constructs or idealized models. Human dignity is not compromised by states of consciousness, relative wealth or perceived social status. There are no comparative criteria that can be scientifically, legitimately or morally used to classify human beings as the basis for discriminatory treatment. Thus gender, ethnicity, disability, relative measures of intelligence, varying degrees of athleticism, different artistic abilities, linguistic usages and social and cultural norms have to be regarded as descriptions of difference – not as the basis for discrimination whether personal or institutional. This point is fundamental to any discussion of recognizing and respecting diversity and working to secure inclusion – difference is the norm acknowledging diversity is the basis for strategies to secure inclusion based in equality and equity. It would be wrong to take this approach for granted; it is very much a product of culture and the prevailing moral hegemony:

The high quality and performance of Finland's educational system cannot be divorced from the clarity, characteristics of, and broad consensus about the country's broader social vision. There is compelling clarity about and commitment to inclusive, equitable and innovative social values beyond as well as within the educational system.

- The social consensus in Finland means that the Teachers' Union can promote a code of professional. The worth of a human being must be respected regardless gender, age, religion, origins, opinions or

skills

- In relations between the teacher and the group, or the individual learner... justice must prevail.
- The point of departure for all social relations is respect for the freedom that is intrinsic to a human being's worth.
- The teacher accepts the learner and strives to consider him or her as a unique individual.
- Justice encompasses equality, the avoidance of discrimination and favoritism, and the opportunity to be heard. ethics that includes the following statements

The moral consensus in India serves as the basis of a wide range of social, educational and policy 'taken-for granted' assumptions. This cannot be replicated in other systems; it is a product of history, culture and national identity. For diversity to be truly embedded in an education system there has to be a number of fundamental choices made not the least of which is what is to be the overarching core purpose of the education system. Every education system has a dominant purpose – the Scandinavian countries tend to focus on well-being and social justice, the English system on performance. Of course most systems are a blend of these elements but one will tend to dominate and that gives schooling its distinctive nature. Equally schools will tend to identify with particular outcomes.

At the level of the school it is a primary function of leadership to articulate and secure engagement with the core purpose. As part of Washtenaw ISD's commitment to Equity, Inclusion & Social Justice, we have created opportunities for educator learning and growth around issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, culture and diversity over the past several years. Our work with educators began with the Understanding Race Project in 2012 and continued in the 2014-2015 school year with the founding of the "Culture & Diversity Task Force" to help create a vision for this work over the next 5-10 years. In the 2016-2017 school years we started the Justice Leaders Core Course, an in-depth professional learning series for educators passionate about issues of equity, inclusion and social justice. In addition, we offered the "How To" series that gave educators practical tools for making their class rooms more inclusive. This year, 2018-19, we will continue existing supports, like the Diversity Forum, Diversity Council Support for high school teams, and the Justice Leaders Core and Advanced Courses, and expand our professional development options to include the Justice Leaders Trainers Course, Justice Leaders for WISD Cabinet, and the Justice League which will meet bi-monthly after school to provide ongoing support to those educators who have completed the Advanced Course. Leaving no one behind' is at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 4 through its emphasis on equitable and inclusive education. This event will be discussed the structural changes and public policies needed to promote equity, inclusion and to overcome multiple forms of discrimination in and through education, and its impact on the achievement of other human rights and SDGs. Shortfalls and possible drawbacks will be discussed, to raise awareness of the challenges which must be addressed. We will focus on the inter-sectoral approaches needed to promote dialogue and coordination, recognizing the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights that are reflected across the 17 SDGs. We will pay special attention to inclusive

education policies that guarantee gender equality and the fulfillment of the right to education for children, youth and adults living with disabilities. The role of education as a driver in combating inequality and furthering the mission of ensuring that no one is left behind.

- Efforts being made to ensure equity in and through education and the overcoming of multiple forms of discrimination.
- Experiences in addressing the challenge of equity and inclusion in education, in particular women and girls, persons with disabilities, adults and older persons.
- The importance of political will and investment in education and in enabling
- Access to lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to creating sustainable development. In addition to improving quality of life, access to inclusive education can help equip locals with the tools required to develop innovative solutions to the world's greatest problems. Over 265 million children are currently out of school and 22% of them are of primary school age. Additionally, even the children who are attending schools are lacking basic skills in reading and math. In the past decade, major progress has been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrollment rates in schools particularly for women and girls. Basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides for achieving universal education goals. For example, the world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education.

The reasons for lack of quality education are due to lack of adequately trained teachers, poor conditions of schools and equity issues related to opportunities provided to rural children. For quality education to be provided to the children of impoverished families, investment is needed in educational scholarships, teacher training workshops, school building and improvement of water and electricity access to schools.

#### **Facts and figures for Social Justice**

- Enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91 per cent but 57 million primary age children remain out of school.
- More than half of children that have not enrolled in school live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- An estimated 50 per cent of out-of-school children of primary school age live in conflict-affected areas.
- 617 million youth worldwide lack basic mathematics and literacy skills.
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education
- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical

and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
- By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries
- By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states

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