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Inclusive Development in Search of Political Will

By Nicky Pouw and Joyeeta Gupta (University of Amsterdam)

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Inclusive development builds upon the three pillars of increased human wellbeing for all, social and environmental sustainability, and empowerment. Political will at multiple levels of governance needs to be mobilized to curb the global inequality trend.

Inclusive development is development that includes marginalized people, sectors and countries in social, political and economic processes for increased human wellbeing, social and environmental sustainability, and empowerment (Gupta et al., 2015). Past economic growth pathways in poor and rich countries alike, have been inequitable and have degraded ecosystems. By pursuing individual welfare through neoliberal policies and reforms, investment in public and merit goods (e.g. education, security, maintaining the climate) have been marginalized by lack of political will. Primacy is given to economic growth in the expectation that social equality and ecosystem maintenance will follow later (Pouw and McGregor, 2014). We see inclusive development as having three elements: First, a focus on local empowerment and social protection, a development priority in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda (UN, 2015). From an inclusive development perspective social protection implies (Pouw, 2015) social security through redistributive mechanisms that are built into the economic system for long-term and with universal coverage. These mechanisms, financed through public taxes and contributions by the private/NGO sector include progressive income tax, unemployment benefits, labour laws, subsidized schooling and healthcare for all, work reintegration policies, social housing, etc.. This approach puts human wellbeing at the centre (Pouw and McGregor, 2014) and precludes a vision of society whereby some people are expected to give-up parts of their individual wellbeing to achieve growth and wellbeing for all, and thus contributes to reducing inequality. This goes beyond merely providing social protection projects for the poor and vulnerable, which provide temporary relief e.g. through schoolfeeding programmes, conditional and unconditional cash transfers, small hand-outs (food, milk) and subsidies (farm inputs) and thus providing ex-post corrections to repair the failures of a neoliberal system. It also goes beyond social protection policies for the poor and vulnerable, which provide longer-term relief and support, but on a non-universal basis, targeting (broader) sub-groups in the population (e.g. elderly people, low-income households). This approach sees development as human capital development.

Second, inclusive development in the context of the Anthropocene means ensuring the maintenance of local through to global ecosystem services on which people, especially the poorest depend upon. This implies policies and approaches to govern land and water use and pollution at the local level, but also the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions at global level that will affect local climates and the livelihoods.

Third, inclusive development from a relational perspective requires understanding the discourses and power politics that institutionalize inequality and environmentally hostile developments. Addressing these issues not only implies questioning the dominant ideologies and their instruments, but also recognizing that in a globalized world, global problems have localized effects and local experiences add up to global challenges. This 'glocalization' requires governance actors to develop appropriate discourses and instruments to tackle glocal challenges through concerted efforts at multiple levels of governance (Gupta et al., 2013).

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