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The term *social exclusion* came into use among French sociologists to describe “a breakdown of the relationship between society and the individual.” [414] When these connections are broken the consequence may be poverty, alienation, or disqualification from the rights and benefits of participation in society.

The concept of social exclusion is meaningful in the French context because of the Republican tradition of solidarity, but it has also come into play in two other contexts: the formation of the European Union, and the crisis of the welfare state under the pressure of global economic restructuring. The article summarized here explores whether social exclusion is also a useful lens for examining dimensions of disadvantage in developing countries as well.

Defining Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is related to poverty, but it incorporates social and political matters as well, extending the notions of advantage and disadvantage beyond an immediate accounting of income to issues of economic security, civil rights, and social integration. The French intellectual tradition holds the Republican state responsible for political cohesion, for joining the individual to society. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon tradition highlights relationships between individuals acting in a competitive marketplace.

Social exclusion is a multidimensional construct, including economic, social and political elements. The common thread is disadvantage. Several analysts of poverty embrace themes that resonate with social exclusion. Amartya Sen developed a theory based on the presence or absence of capabilities that enable an individual to thrive physically or to engage successfully in community life. Dasgupta’s theory, applicable mainly to agrarian societies, maintains that the landless poor are especially vulnerable in the absence of social norms. Those who have land may undercut those with no assets in labor markets so that the landless may not even have nutritional resources adequate for employment. A third theory, developed in the United Kingdom, “defines poverty in terms of ‘relative deprivation’ as a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the local community or the wider society or nation to which an individual, family or group belongs.” [417] Deprivation may have a material basis, for example inadequate food or shelter, or a social basis, such as a lack of family ties or educational opportunities.

“The European Commission emphasizes the idea that each citizen has the right to a certain basic standard of living and the right to participate in the major social and occupational institutions of the society - employment, housing, health care, education and so on.” [415] However, in a 1992 statement, the Commission also noted the emergence of structural barriers that may displace some segments of the population to the fringes of society and prevent them from sharing in the general prosperity. Since many European states provide at least minimum living standards, the European Union adopted social exclusion rather than poverty as a construct for analyzing social problems.

Some researchers have made a distinction between poverty, or distributional deprivation, due to inadequate resources, and social exclusion, or relational deprivation, predicated on inadequate social ties. But the distinction is not practical. Many social questions like literacy or infant mortality are closely associated with income levels. The distribution of income affects the capacity to function in society (in the sense that Sen defined functioning). Furthermore, the distribution of wealth and income is dependent on the structure of property rights which define social relations of ownership, control, participation and access. The rich have more power and influence on the state than the poor and therefore have better access to political rights and liberties as well as to economic resources.

Economic, social and political dimensions of social exclusion can be identified, but these elements are not completely separate. The *economic dimension* involves income, production, employment and the satisfaction of basic needs. The *social dimension* extends the economic analysis to discussion of relationships which mediate the distribution of income. For example, “socially enforced moral rules can constrain or expand entitlement to food and its distribution in conditions of famine.” [419] The social dimension of exclusion often overlaps economic and political aspects, but it is concerned with conditions which enhance or diminish access and opportunity. The *political dimension* of social exclusion is involved with rights and participation in the political process.

Global Relevance

New efforts at social integration in Europe focus on civil society as a vehicle for “reinforcing the social ties between the individual and society.” [420] Is it appropriate to apply similar policies in developing countries which do not share the same history of the welfare state? For the first time since the 1930s, the developed and developing countries share problems of unemployment and poverty. Unemployment is rising in Europe and poverty and exclusion are growing in the United States. Poverty is growing in many developing countries. Democratization is spreading among developing countries, but its effect may be offset by reduced autonomy for nations in a globally integrated, interdependent world.

The analytical concepts are similar for both developed and developing countries, but the weights attached to different elements of exclusion differ. Distributional questions may be particularly important in less-developed countries where inequality is high. But, developing countries generally lack formal, state supported, systems to address distributional problems. “The family, kinship relationships and religious groups therefore act as redistributive mechanisms, as well as means of promoting interpersonal relations and the social identity of individual members.” [423]

Structural adjustment programs further inhibit the development of public welfare programs in developing countries.

Relational issues focus on families in developing countries rather than on relationships between individuals and the state or civil society. Three kinds of social relationships are associated with different stages of development: 1) relationships within families and extended families; 2) communal relationships, found in developing and some socialist countries; 3) relationships between the individual and the state.

An Operational Framework

In order to track progress in fighting exclusion, a yardstick is needed, however, measurement of such a multidimensional construct is problematical. It is not easy to aggregate economic, social and political elements into a single index - especially since they may be moving in different directions. Weighting each element is also difficult since the importance of each one varies with the stages of development. Separate indicators may be more appropriate.

Economic indicators - Measuring GNP or GDP per capita is not sufficient. The lowest income groups are often left out of the benefits of growth. Specific measures of poverty and inequality, such as Sen's index or the Gini coefficient are more useful for a full understanding of the economic foundation of exclusion.

Social indicators should include access to public goods and services such as education, health care, etc.; access to good, secure jobs; and indicators of cohesion or fragmentation in society, e.g. membership in civic groups, crime rates, etc.

Political indicators - The UNDP and other indexes of political freedom include "personal security, rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation, and equality of opportunity." [426]

Economic, social and political indicators do not always move in the same direction and some countries are high in one element and low in another. Well-being is not always correlated with national wealth; conversely in some countries even the poor are not deprived of basic needs. Globalization has had uneven effects across countries. Africa has become more marginalized in terms of foreign investment and exclusion has increased within African countries. "During the 1980s, social exclusion and human insecurity also increased as is reflected in the process of de-industrialization in many countries, the withdrawal of the public sector, and drastic cuts in public expenditures as part of structural adjustment programmes." [427]

Precarious Jobs and Social Exclusion

Precarious employment reflects both distributional and relational aspects of exclusion. It may be more valuable as an indicator of exclusion than unemployment, because it captures recent shifts toward informal labor in developing countries and atypical forms of work in developed countries. Flexible production is often incompatible with good secure jobs. Unemployment in European welfare states indicates exclusion, but in developing countries or weak welfare states

such as the U.S., unemployment may be relatively low while many workers simply eke out a living in insecure, poorly paid, formal or informal employment. Exclusion in these cases means a lack of access to *good* jobs.

While precariousness may be a useful concept, it raises methodological difficulties because it is not well-defined. In some cases atypical work, especially part-time work, may reflect personal choices. A prominent French research center developed a complex instrument for studying the risks of various types of exclusion, using categories for conditions of employment, income distribution, and social vulnerability (family and associative support networks). “The CERC results show that precariousness is at the heart of economic poverty and social vulnerability. The risk of being excluded from the labour market has the potential of progressive disintegration of social ties.” [429]

Such an elaborate survey would be difficult to undertake in many developing countries because of the expense and lack of a sufficient data-collection infrastructure. It is particularly difficult to involve respondents in informal labor markets, yet information on the informal sector is crucial to an understanding of employment-related aspects of social exclusion.