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Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration: Lessons learned from existing policies
and practices

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Essam Ali

"It is very painful that people treat me as Me3afen w Zibala" (rotten rubbish).

A 15 years-old boy living in the street in Egypt

The concepts:

As a preparation for the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development published a study on social integration which stated that “when promoting the goal of social integration, it is always necessary to ask the additional question: inclusion in what and on what terms?” (UNRISD, March 1994). The Social Summit was organized by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and approached social integration in terms of goals, principles, and processes, and defined the goal of social integration as the creation of “a more stable, safe and just society for all”, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. The outcome of the Summit suggested that an inclusive society be based on the principles of embracing – not coercing or forcing – diversity and that participatory processes should be used, which involve all stakeholders in the decision-making that affects their lives.

In a recent study, DESA further defined the concept of social integration by introducing the three main ingredients necessary for building integrated societies - *participation, justice* and *inclusion*. Participation refers to citizen action and involves the active and constructive engagement of people. While justice can be viewed as an objective or as an ultimate goal, a broader interpretation of justice as a continuing process of achieving a shared sense of fairness is also emerging. By this broader definition, justice is a process that enhances the quality, credibility and ownership of decisions” (DESA, 2007, p.111). Inclusion refers to actions taken by policymakers, in the forms of policies and institutional arrangements, which are designed to include people in decision-making processes.

Decision-making lies the core of **participation** “where different actors share power and set agendas jointly.” Participation, will thus always involve some level of conflict, and “demands a capacity to analyse, negotiate and alter unequal relations at all levels.” (VeneKlasen *et al*, 2004, p.5). Participation also refers to the action and agency of persons (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001).

There are various and divergent schools of thought on the conceptualisation of **justice**. Amartya Sen (2009) presents this divergence in his book “Ideas of Justice”, where he uses the analogy of Anna, Bob and Carla fighting over a flute. In this story, Anna claims that she should get the flute that is lying on the ground because she knows how to play it, Bob says he should get it because he is poor and has no toys of his own, and Carla says she should get the flute because she made it. Sen comments that “the differences between the three children’s justificatory arguments do not represent divergences about what constitutes individual advantage, but about the principles that should govern allocation of resources in general.” He goes on to argue that social justice is not just about social arrangements and social institutions, but that what really matters are social outcomes. This concept not only holds in developing countries, but in developed contexts as well. In fact, it has been stated that “injustice in society is seen as the main reason why people live in need throughout the enlarged Europe” (Böhnke, 2004, p.9)

The need to implement inclusive policies, comes from recognition of experiences of **social exclusion** within a given society. The concept of **social exclusion** is problematic as it is a combination of many different elements. Economist and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, links it to deprivation, noting that “focusing on social exclusion can substantially help in the causal as well as constitutive analyses of poverty and deprivation” (Sen, 2000). This perspective of social exclusion offers useful insights for diagnostics and policy. In Asia, the focus has been on its link to

processes. Naila Kabeer has presented social exclusion as “a useful way to think about social policy because it draws attention to the production of disadvantage through the active dynamics of social interaction, rather than through anonymous processes of impoverishment and marginalization” (cited in UN-ESCWA, 2008). The concept applied by the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia sees social exclusion as “a concept and an experience, [which] brings together deprivation, discrimination, and disempowerment.” (UN-ESCWA, 2008)

UNICEF provides a good example of the adaptation of this conceptualisation of social exclusion in assessing the development and or inclusion of a specific group within wider society. According to UNICEF, “children are considered excluded if they are deemed at risk of missing out on an environment that protects them from violence, abuse, and exploitation or if they are unable to access essential services and goods in a way that threatens their ability to participate fully in society in the future” (UNICEF 2006).

Social exclusion goes beyond the political explanation, which sees the excluded as groups left behind in the process of development or who did not ‘enjoy’ the benefits of economic growth, and who politicians must find ways to involve. It is worth noting here that the applied understanding of the concept of social exclusion will shape policy choices and intervention designs. Adopting the capability-deprivation perspective will lead to policies that favour capacity development on one hand and the elimination of root causes of deprivation on the other. On the other hand, adopting a process oriented perspective will lead to policies that tackle the dynamics and mechanisms producing exclusion. In addition, attention must be given to both intentional/active exclusion and unintentional/passive exclusion as, “in many cases, the existing pattern of development itself may be unviable or unjust” (UNRISD, March 1994).

Analysis from Arab/ African perspective:

It is important to know mechanisms of exclusion and the root causes leading to exclusion and injustice. Dealing with HOW and WHY in an accurate and concrete manner, requires a focus on the perspective of groups of countries with common political and economic features and indicators. Social exclusion is a problem in Sweden and Egypt –for example- but the root causes and mechanisms may vary. My analysis will be from the perspective of Arab and African countries. The concepts discussed here could be considered, or not, depending on the particular circumstances of a given country or group of countries.

Poverty, Deprivation and Disparity

Poverty itself is not inherently a purely “individual” phenomenon. The probability of being poor is not randomly distributed across the population. This raises an important question: Why are people poor? They are poor because they have deficits in assets, education, health, stable employment, and no access to services. Amartya Sen suggests that such “capability” poverty is intimately linked to income poverty, and that gender, regional location, age and marital status act as poverty clustering mechanisms.

In the latest iteration of the Human Development Index (HDI), of the 24 countries listed in the category of low human development, two countries were in Asia while the remaining 22 were African. The three lowest regions, out of the nine sub-regions listed, were Arab States, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa respectively. Similarly, of the lowest 33 countries in Human Poverty Index the vast majority are African, with only four countries falling in the Asian region. Concerning

Gender-related Development Index, last 30 countries are African Arab states and Sub-Saharan Africa are lowest two regions in economic performance and equality and within Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of population below income poverty line (1.25 US\$ a day) varies from 34.3% in Gambia to 83.7% in Liberia (UNDP, 2009).

Even in a country with very high HDI, such as Sweden, the relation between poverty and social exclusion is clear. In their strategy for social protection and social inclusion 2008-2010, the Swedish has stated that "The proportion of people living in poverty in 2006 was around three times higher among those born abroad than among persons born in Sweden". In addition, reports coming from enlarged Europe indicate that "the poor themselves stress living conditions such as long-term unemployment, social welfare cuts, having too many children and – especially in the acceding and candidate countries – living in a poor area and lack of education as reasons for social exclusion." (Böhnke, 2004, p.11)

The recent Human Development Reports presented the 'poverty map' as a tool to demonstrate the geographical distribution of poverty on one hand, on other hand, to define the types of poverty within each region. The important finding of the 'poverty map' in Egypt –for example- is that higher rates of poverty are associated with higher unemployment rates, higher illiteracy rates, greater dependency ratios, and lack of basic services (UNDP, 2008).

Recognizing the benefits of different strategies implemented in the developing countries to reduce poverty to achieve MDGs, we might need to promote **disparity reduction** targeting people who are poor and people who are rich to ensure that a country achieved poverty reduction while disparity increased.

Fragmentation of the Social Policy:

Most of the Arab and African countries adopted free-market economy with some measures to reduce the "side effects" of that policy on people who are poor. These governments are adopting so-called "inclusionary measures" such as exempting children who are poor from the school fee, the distribution of special pensions for families without income, and/or monthly distribution of small amounts of food. Sen cautioned against these types of policy, which tackle deprivation by adopting so-called "inclusionary measures". Sen emphasised that non-functional and/or unfavourable *inclusionary measures can contribute to the perpetuation of social exclusion*. To be included in such measures, children and families have the responsibility of proving need. In the case of Egypt this results in the issuance of what is called a 'poverty certificate'. Due to lack of accurate, updated and disaggregated information system, the process of getting these certificates is subjective, very long, and complicated. Moreover, such a process compromises the dignity of any human being and contributes to the perpetuation of social exclusion. Sen instead promoted the concept of "*protective security*" for individuals excluded from opportunities for health care, credit and other services (Sen, 2000).

Lack of coordination within the same ministry and between different ministries dealing with social policy is common among Arab States. The last amendment of child law in Egypt, in 2008, provides a good example¹. Analyzing the process of drafting this law indicates a miss-conception of

¹ The legislative committee in National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), which consists from persons working directly in the legal system (lawyers, judges, police, etc), prepared a draft law. The draft was distributed to NGOs for comments. The final draft was sent to other ministries mentioned in some articles to get their feedback. The

coordination. Every institution builds their own policy, law, regulations, etc., then –in best cases– share it with other institutions to give their feedback in a short time, finally it is up to this institution to adopt some of these comments or not. In some cases, it appears as the mutual interest of both sides not to step on the foot of the other. Moreover, it reflects the traditional approach that law is the business of law enforcement, economy is business of economists, and politics is the business of politicians. The multidisciplinary system that the members can think, search, plan and work together is an inclusionary measure to have integrated policies.

The social policy is based on charity approach, which is responsive to disasters and individual cases. This approach is not preventive by default.

Corrosion of the Social Structure

This category of root causes is looking to the impact of political, economic and social changes into the social structure of the society.

Some political analysts thought that free-market policy in Egypt since 1974 (especially its competitiveness) destroyed the traditional mechanisms for social solidarity and led to new social mechanisms, which caused corrosion of social structure at the level of community and families (Said, 1999). Parents working outside their countries and living without their children for years, high percentage of divorce among the poor families, percentage of the families headed by women, domestic violence, increasing number of brutal fights in the community and others are manifestations of this corrosion.

Moreover, there is an exchange of pattern/ roles within the family. A young boy or girl, who should be playing and learning, became the breadwinner of the family. Other aspects, when a woman is working all day outside the house while her husband is sitting at home using her money for his drugs and sometimes beating her. In case of divorce, children get lost between their parents who cannot afford/ do not want to financially support the children. In addition step-parents may be abusive to the children of their spouses.

Freedom deficit:

The Vienna Declaration for Human Rights 1993 stated, "Democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives". The Arab human development report argues, "There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance. The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most of Latin America and East Asia in the 1980s and Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s has barely reached the Arab States. This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development" (UNDP, 2002, p.2).

Ministry of Social Solidarity (which oversees alternative family care, Juvenile rehabilitation centres, social pensions for widows, and aid equipments for disable persons) sent their comments, which were not integrated in the final version without explanation or even discussion. The Law proposed new committees for child protection, which is a good step, but there were no financial resources mentioned in the law. The drafting committee did not know what it takes to protect children outside the legality. Then they sent the draft to Ministry of Finance *'but the minister was out of Egypt this week, while the law had to be discussed in the cabinet meeting'*. (I interviewed key actors involved in this case as part of my research on social exclusion and children who live in street.)

Mechanisms/ dynamics:

Legal system: This can take many forms: first setting certain criteria to access certain services, as education law does not recognize children with mental disability or children with learning difficulties as setting middle IQ level to access public school. Second setting exceptions, as children and women working in agriculture are explicitly not protected by labour laws. Third ignoring some groups as domestic workers is not mentioned in labour laws. Fourth, there is lack of criminalization of certain behaviours as violence against children, or women.

Marginalization: Lack of welfare system or safety net for people who are poor is pushing them to seek for their own survival, which means -in most of cases- reproducing the poverty. The denial of access to health insurance for children out of schools is a form of marginalization. Paying a fee for primary public schools means people who are very poor cannot afford to send all their children to education. Having very long and highly cost judicial proceedings is keeping some people out of judiciary system.

Power concentration: There are many aspects of power concentration: politically (very weak public/community participation), economically (wealth concentration or small proportion of people run most of national and local resources), administratively (strong centralization), social services located in big cities while rural and slum areas has poor services or no services at all.

Bureaucracy & Corruption: accessing some social services is requiring huge number of papers and signatures from different public offices without clear requirements and regulations, which might lead to giving up or go the other way (corruption).

Accusation: 'THE OTHER' is the reason for the problems: high birth rate is causing the economic crisis or careless parents are the main cause for child labour and children living in the street.

These causes and mechanisms are working within a certain context, one domain of the context is **societal culture**. Culture is a sensitive issue in most discussions. My analysis looks at Arab culture, and draws on the seven dimensions of societal culture introduced by Clive Dimmock & Allan Walker (2000).

Power-distributed/ Power-concentrated:

The political and administrative systems in Egypt and most of Arab countries are central, so they are on the power-concentrated side. Community participation is very limited in any decision-making processes.

Group-oriented/ Self-oriented:

The curricula and teaching methodology do not recognize the different individual abilities of children. At the same time, the test and exam system is extremely competitive based on individual achievement. Another very common complaint is the lack of team-working spirit on many levels. The society is swinging in this continuum.

Consideration/ Aggression:

Boys in the poor districts thought that their survival is depending on their physical power, while girls using verbal and emotional bullying to resolve the conflicts with their peers.

Proactivism/ Fatalism:

When people are oppressed and become hopeless for better future, they bind to fatalism believing that changes are always coming from outside. In reality, some children in poor communities are taking responsibility for the economic survival of themselves and their families.

Generative/ Replicative:

Egypt and most Arab countries are consuming old ideas as well as old technology. The engagement and contribution of Egyptian and Arab in the scientific and technological achievements in the world is very limited (UNDP, 2003). The educational system does not emphasise creativity, problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills.

Limited relationship/ Holistic relationship:

The relationship obligations are dominating the Arab cultures than impartially applied rules. The citizens' rights are far from being in a social contract with the governments.

Male influence/female influence:

Male dominance is still huge in decision-making processes in the family, in the community and at the state level. Males dominate higher levels of education, higher positions in employment, and greater control of resources.

The analysis of these seven dimensions of societal culture in a given context draws a map of opportunities and challenges. In the Arab context, power concentration and male domination hinder the involvement in decision-making processes. People bound to fatalism need huge efforts to be mobilized and become actors for change in the society. Development in difficult circumstances, such as those in Arab and African countries, requires generative ideas and proactive citizens. Participation and inclusion need a self-oriented as well as group-oriented society. Aggression can contribute to exclusion of persons or groups victimized by this behaviour, while consideration can be the first step to be involved/ affiliated with other groups. In general, capacity development programmes should be engaged actively to reinforce 'the good' and tackle 'the bad and ugly' within the societal culture.

In addition to the drawbacks highlighted by the previous analysis, there are armed conflicts within and between countries on the African continent. The feeling of injustice and inequality –especially within the same country- has contributed to these conflicts. Culturally, there is power concentration within particular families, tribes, and/or communities, as well as gender imbalance.

In light of this, I want to emphasise some points related to the DESA's definition of social inclusion as "the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities - that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life." DESA suggests that these efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizens' participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Is it possible to promote equal results and not just equal opportunities? I think "achieve" in the DESA definition might refer to results. I argue that the ultimate goal of education is that girls and boys are equally educated, not just have equal access, because, in addition to cultural nuances, there are other factors that prevent girls from being equally educated, such as early marriage and pregnancy and their engagement in domestic work. Moreover, the educated population –women and men- is the

milestone of the development in this continent. From human rights-based approach, I argue to promote equal opportunities as well as equal results concerning education.

Some countries in the region guarantee minimum number of seats for women in local councils and parliament, despite the fact that women –legally- have the same right to run for election. This is another example where equal opportunities might not be enough to promote justice and inclusion.

Recommendations²:

1- Formulate a Comprehensive and Harmonious Social Policy:

The first element of the new social contract developed by UNDP- Egypt in 2005 was “a strong pro-poor agenda under the umbrella of a national welfare plan.” At the same time, the first action toward this social contract was to “realize social integration through the elimination of location-specific poverty and other social inequities including gender inequality;” (UNDP, 2005).

This social policy should be based on citizens’ rights. Every citizen regardless of age, sex, religion, disability, social origin, or other differentiating characteristic, is entitled to clearly defined rights and duties. Accountability of individuals and institutions regardless of their power or wealth is prerequisite of this policy.

There is a need for a social protection policy based on accurate, updated and disaggregated information system that performs the following:

- Coherent and well-structured criteria for detection and classification of ‘at risk’ and ‘protection’ cases, procedures for intervention measures, and outcome and performance indicators for policies and programs.
- Prevention of factors and circumstances which hinder vulnerable groups’ accessibility and enjoyment of their rights,
- Provision of remedial measures to restore the forfeited rights and compensate those who have been deprived of basic rights, and
- Support poor families and childcare providers with socio-economic programs that help them shoulder their responsibilities towards adequate upbringing of their children.

Some experts are promoting comprehensive a child protection system within social protection policy. Comparative study on child protection systems in five countries (Azer & al, 2008) concluded that systems that succeed in providing comprehensive child protection have the following characteristics:

- ✓ Child protection and welfare systems are well-integrated
- ✓ The system is embedded in social policies that adequately meet the welfare needs of children and families
- ✓ The system is based on a preventive approach towards child protection
- ✓ The system is based on child laws that are CRC based, comprehensive and well-implemented
- ✓ The system is based on positive partnership between the state and the family in responsibilities pertaining to child rearing

² It is important to note that these recommendations are particularly for Arab/ African countries. It sounds -from European perspective- as stated the fundamentals.

- ✓ Providing basic and targeted services to family and communities is central part of child protection work
- ✓ Services are easily accessible on a highly localized level
- ✓ Protection work is carried out through well-defined and coordinated roles undertaken by multiple agencies and actors
- ✓ Procedures for detection, intervention and monitoring are well-structured yet flexible when necessary
- ✓ Positive societal perceptions and behaviours that reaffirm children's rights on multiple levels (institutional, community, school, family)

2- Capacity development through good quality free education and other forms of trainings and awareness:

Good quality free education can contribute significantly to democratic competency "To have knowledge about and capability to understand, to work in and take part in the development of a democratic society, to be able to communicate, to have the capability to take a position and to understand reasons for other people's different positions" (Sida, Sweden, on Education). Moreover, schools should be aiming:

- To educate each and every child without discrimination of any kind
- Toward the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential
- To protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse
- To provide assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities
- In encouraging the learning and practice of citizenship rights
- To tackle prejudice and irrationality in the societal culture

Concerning participation, "capacity building must go beyond a narrow focus on technical skills to those of political analysis for assessing contexts, risks, power, and underlying causes of a problem. Challenging attitudes and values of subordination and developing critical consciousness and a willingness to act on issues are additional components. Capacity building also includes tapping sources of inspiration and hope and strengthening skills for designing and implementing a range of action strategies." (VeneKlasen *et al*, 2004, p.6)

Participation, inclusion and justice realization are dialectically related. The progressive achievement depends on each other. Work towards either participation or inclusion or justice realisation will contribute to the realisation of the other two.

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