

Social Justice and the Millennium Development Goals: the Challenge of Intersecting Inequalities

Naila Kabeer¹

1. Introduction: The Fundamental Values of the Millennium Declaration

At a UN summit held at the dawn of the new millennium, 189 of the world's leaders came together to sign what has been described as "the world's biggest promise - a global agreement to reduce poverty and human deprivation at historically unprecedented rates through collaborative action".² The fundamental values embodied in the Millennium Declaration (Declaration), including freedom, equality, tolerance and solidarity, together spelt out a firm commitment to social justice as the guiding spirit of the Declaration.

"Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice (...) The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured (...) Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most (...) Human beings must respect one another, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should neither be feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity".³

Unfortunately, the commitment to social justice was not carried over into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were intended to translate the Declaration into a set

of concrete measures on which the world's nations could act. The eight goals finally adopted, along with 18 targets and 48 indicators to monitor progress on the goals, represented a highly selective interpretation of the various commitments made in the Declaration. Furthermore, the fact that the targets and indicators were couched in terms of national "averages" and "proportions" meant that they could capture overall progress within a region or country, but could not assess whether this progress had been equitably distributed across the population.

For instance, one of the targets to monitor progress on MDG 1; the overarching goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, was to halve - between 1990 and 2015 - the proportion of the world's population below the international poverty line of a dollar a day.⁴ It is perfectly possible to achieve this target by lifting out of poverty those living close to the poverty line without ever impacting on the lives of the very poor. Only one measure under MDG 1 touched explicitly on inequality: the share of the national income that went to poorest income quintile in a given country. However, this was also the measure that has featured least frequently in MDG reports.

This paper is concerned with inequality. Its point of departure is the growing body of evidence that inequalities matter for the wellbeing and prosperity of a society.⁵ Inequalities matter at the macro-economic level because

they slow down the pace at which a given rate of economic growth translates into poverty reduction.⁶ Inequalities also matter at the macro-social level because of their negative impacts in terms of tensions, crime, violence and conflict and the knock-on effects of these on investments in the human, social and material capital of a society.⁷ These latter impacts are, of course, some of the manifestations of inequality as they play out in everyday life. And finally, in relation to the MDGs, they matter because they make sections of the world's poor population harder to reach than the rest of the poor. The result, as this paper will argue, is that certain sections of the world's poor have been systematically bypassed by the "average" rates of progress reported on the MDGs, thus betraying the promise of social justice held out by the Declaration.

2. Intersecting Inequalities and Social Exclusion: a Conceptual Framework

There are two broad approaches to inequality within the development studies literature. The first revolves around understandings of poverty in terms of resource deficits at the individual (or individual household) level. Early studies envisaged these deficits primarily in income terms. This has been gradually replaced by a more multi-dimensional understanding of poverty, extending the analysis of deficits to assets as well as human capabilities (health and education), but poverty continues to be measured at the level of individuals. This has given rise to what has been described as a "vertical" model of inequality based on the ranking of individuals or households by their income, assets or human resource deficits.⁸ The share of the national income that goes to the poorest income quintile that was noted earlier as an indicator of MDG 1 derives from such an understanding of inequality.

The second revolves around the analysis of social discrimination. It takes identity-based disadvantage as its entry point into the analysis of inequality where the disadvantage in question operates at the level of groups rather than individuals. This gives rise to what has been described as a "horizontal" model of inequality that cuts across the different strata that make up the vertical model.⁹ The inequalities at work here are the product of social hierarchies which define certain groups as inferior to others on the basis of devalued aspects of their identity. These may be inherited aspects of identity (such as race, ethnicity, gender and caste) or they may reflect the cultural meanings associated with aspects of the life course (such as childhood or old age) or with deviations from what is considered the norm in different societies (such as disability or sexual orientation or minority religion). Social hierarchies are created between groups through norms, values and practices which serve to routinely disparage, stereotype, exclude, ridicule and demean certain groups relative to others, denying them full personhood and the right to participate in the economic, social and political life of their society on equal terms with others.

The two approaches thus focus on quite distinct axes of disadvantage: resources ("what you have") and identity ("who you are"). It is possible to be economically deprived, to lack the means to meet basic needs, without necessarily being despised for it. For instance, the distinction made between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor in many parts of the world reflects a distinction between those who are believed to be poor through no fault of their own, and hence deserving of respect, and those who are thought to have brought it on themselves through their feckless behaviour.

Similarly, it is possible to face discrimination on the basis of social identity without necessarily facing material deprivation. Gender, for instance, cuts across economic strata so that women tend to occupy a subordinate status relative to men within these different strata. However, since they are fairly evenly distributed across the economic hierarchy, gender is generally a marker of disadvantage, but not necessarily of poverty.

The concept of social exclusion can be used to analyse groups who are defined by the intersection of these distinct axes of disadvantage - economic deprivation and identity-based discrimination. While, as noted earlier, the identities in question can take many different forms, the most enduring forms of disadvantage in most societies are associated with identities that are socially ascribed from birth, such as gender, race, caste and ethnicity.¹⁰ By their very nature, these disadvantages tend to be passed on over generations. So while we noted that gender on its own may be associated with discrimination rather than poverty, the intersection of gender with poverty and other forms of inequality generally means that women and girls tend to be disproportionately represented among the most disadvantaged sections of society.

There are other dimensions to social exclusion that are not fully captured by the interplay between economic deprivation and identity-based discrimination. For instance, social exclusion frequently entails a spatial dimension. In rural areas, it may relate to the remoteness of a location or the nature of the terrain which makes it physically difficult for its inhabitants to participate in broader socio-economic processes. In urban areas, it is likely to be associated with slum neighbourhoods which are poorly served by infrastructure and social services and characterised by

high levels of violence, criminality, drug dependence and squalor.

The spatial dimension of exclusion is not entirely divorced from its identity and resource-based dimensions since it is often culturally devalued and economically impoverished groups that inhabit adverse physical locations.¹¹ Consequently, in certain contexts, it may be possible to capture the causes and consequences of social exclusion through an analysis of the intersection of deprivation and discrimination. In others, however, location may exercise an independent effect, over and above, those associated with economic or cultural disadvantage.

The language of “vertical” and “horizontal” inequalities is not always helpful in capturing what is at issue here because of the “grid-like” symmetry evoked by these terms. Instead, the intersection, rather than addition, of different forms of inequality, economic, social, spatial and political, the fact that they reinforce and exacerbate each other, is better captured by the language of “sharp discontinuities” and “intensifications” which have been found to distinguish the poor from the poorest in many regions of the world.¹²

The analysis of social exclusion can benefit from the insights of different disciplines because different disciplines have focused on different aspects of the phenomenon. Insights from the literature on group-based disadvantage can enrich the analysis of poverty because they help to show, among other things, that the chronic or extreme poor in most countries are not “just like” the rest of the poor, only poorer or poor for longer, but that they are set apart by their group-based identities. They bring an appreciation of the multiple and intersecting casual path-

ways that underlie poverty to the growing literature on its multiple manifestations¹³.

Equally, insights from the literature on material deprivation can help to bring a class perspective to the analysis of social discrimination.¹⁴ It is worth noting, for instance, that despite the focus on poverty reduction as the overarching MDG, there is no recognition in the choice of indicators adopted to monitor progress on MDG 3, the goal relating to gender equality and women's empowerment, that women may not experience progress on the MDGs in uniform ways. Increasing women's share of parliamentary seats, one of the indicators measuring progress on MDG 3, may have little or no bearing on the needs and interests of poorer women just as increasing women's share of non-agricultural employment (another indicator) fails to distinguish between the quality of non-agricultural jobs that are likely to be available to women from different class backgrounds.

3. Intersecting Inequalities and the MDGs: Empirical Findings

The MDGs spell out a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty, rather than the earlier uni-dimensional, money-metric understandings that had dominated the literature. And while the MDGs themselves have not been particularly attuned to the challenges of social exclusion, the massive efforts to document progress on the different goals across different countries have not only highlighted the uneven progress across countries and in relation to the different MDGs but also the presence of certain groups that have been systematically left behind on almost all measures of progress. In other words, the multiple deficits of poverty are clustered around these groups.

While the specificities of the disadvantages faced by these groups may vary across the world, it is clear that their disadvantaged position persists because of its deep roots in their region's history. This tends to be tied up with past experiences of colonisation, frequently accompanied by the genocide of indigenous populations, with slavery, war and conflict, with long-established hierarchies, such as caste, as well as the continued practice of discrimination into the present day.

We use evidence from different regions of the world to illustrate the clustering of the MDG deficits around socially excluded groups. However, because the focus of the MDGs is on extreme poverty, rather than inequality or social exclusion, this evidence is largely available on the developing regions of the world: Latin America, Asia and Africa. It is from these regions therefore that our evidence is drawn.

3.1 Latin America

In the Latin American context, race and ethnicity are the key markers of social exclusion. There are more than 50 million indigenous people and more than 120 million individuals of African descent (Afro-descendants) in Latin America and the Caribbean, making up around 33% of the population, but with greater concentrations in some countries than others.¹⁵ The spatial dimension to social exclusion within these countries is evident from the fact that a substantial proportion of indigenous or Afro-descendant population are concentrated in rural areas.¹⁶ Indigenous groups are most likely to be found in remote and hard-to-reach parts of their countries, often pushed out of more productive areas by non-indigenous groups.¹⁷

While historically the Latin American region has been one of the most unequal in the

world, progress is evident. Not only has moderate and extreme poverty declined in many of the Latin American countries in recent decades, but income inequality has also been going down. However, extreme poverty remains much higher among indigenous people and Afro-descendants. In Brazil, for instance, while extreme poverty was around 17% among the white population between 1995 and 2002, it declined from 41% to 38% for indigenous and Afro-Brazilians. Afro-descendants continue to comprise the majority of households in the bottom income decile (73%) and a small minority (12%) in the top decile.¹⁸

In Bolivia, for the same period, extreme poverty declined from 28% to 26% for the white population and from 58% to 46% for the rest.¹⁹ The intersection between spatial, ethnic and economic inequalities is evident in the fact that extreme poverty was twice as high among the indigenous compared to the non-indigenous population (33% compared to 17%), that extreme poverty was three times higher in rural than in urban areas (45% and 16%) and that 73% of the indigenous population living in rural areas was extremely poor compared to only 17% of those in urban areas.²⁰

According to demographic and health surveys from the region, children from indigenous groups were considerably more likely to die than those from other groups across Latin America: around 1.5 times more likely in Bolivia, Brazil and Mexico and over 2.0 times more likely in Ecuador and Panama.²¹ They were also between 1.6 and 2.5 times more likely to be undernourished than children of non-indigenous origin.²² Marked ethnic inequalities persist in enrolment ratios at all levels of education, although there has been a narrowing in disparities at primary and secondary levels in a number of countries.

For instance, between 2000 and 2007, average years of education rose from 9.7 to 10.5 among non-indigenous groups and from 6.0 to 7.2 for indigenous groups in Bolivia.²³ The intersection of gender, ethnicity, class and location in Bolivia has meant that the average years of school education was the highest for urban-based, non-indigenous men in the highest income quintile (13.6 years) and the lowest for rural-based indigenous women in the poorest income quintile (2.9 years).²⁴

3.2 Asia

Social exclusion in the Asian context is largely associated with ethnic and indigenous identities, but religion and language also feature in some countries. As in Latin America, indigenous ethnic minorities in Asia are often located in remote geographical areas. And as in Latin America, this location has not always been a matter of choice. The mountain ranges that stretch from Afghanistan to the Gulf of Tonkin have long been a refuge for indigenous communities who occupied a marginal position in relation to the dominant majorities in the valleys and plains. Ethnic and indigenous groups make up around 8% of the population in China, 10% in Vietnam, 8% in India and 37% in Nepal.²⁵ Their spatial concentration means that they are to be found in the poorest areas: rural areas of China's western region; the remote, usually upland, mountainous areas of northern and central Vietnam; the hilly and forested regions of India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Caste features as an additional marker of group-based disadvantage among the Hindu populations of the South Asian subcontinent. The "untouchable" castes, or Dalits, make up around 17% of the population in India. They tend to be more geographically dispersed than indigenous or Adivasi groups,

but around 80% live in rural areas.²⁶ Nepal's population is divided between a Hindu majority (58% as of 2001), Janajatis or indigenous minorities (37%), and religious minorities, mainly Muslims (around 4%).²⁷ Dalits make up around 12% of the population.

Strong economic growth in much of Asia has led to major reductions in poverty, but this has been accompanied in many countries by significant increases in income inequalities. The poorest 20% of the region's population has seen their share of national income drop steeply, between 1990 and 2004 where it fell from 7.2% to 6.7% in South Asia and from 7.1% to 4.5% in East Asia.²⁸ A disaggregated analysis of these trends shows how excluded groups have fared in relation to the MDGs.

The national incidence of poverty in India declined from 46% to 27% between 1984 and 2004, but the pace of this decline varied at the national level from 40% to 35% for Dalit and 31% for Adivasi groups.²⁹ As a result, the incidence of poverty remained much higher for Dalits (38%) and Adivasis (44%).³⁰ As might be expected, Dalit and Adivasi groups were disadvantaged with respect to other indicators of deprivation as well. While under-five mortality was 74 per 1000 live births at the national level in 2005-2006, it was 96 for Adivasi groups and 88 for Dalits. The gap between mortality rates among Adivasis and the rest of the population increased between 1992 and 2006.³¹

In Nepal, the overall decline in poverty between 1995 and 2003 varied between 46% for the upper caste Brahman/Chhetri groups at one end of the social hierarchy to 10% for Janajatis living in the hills and 6% for Muslims at the other end.³² Despite improvements in overall literacy rates from 23% in 1981 to 54% in 2001, 30% of Janajatis living

in the hills had never been to school, compared with just 12% of the upper castes.³³ A similar pattern is reported for child mortality in 2006: the Newars and Brahman/Chhetri castes had the lowest rates while Dalit and Janajati groups had the highest.

In China, poverty declined from 33% in 1990 to around 10% but income inequalities rose. Ethnic minorities, largely concentrated in the western region, remained at a clear disadvantage: they made up 8.4% of the population, but accounted for 46% of people living in extreme poverty in 2003.³⁴ However, the association between ethnicity and disadvantaged location may be driving ethnic differentials in income rather than ethnicity *per se* as there were no significant differences in poverty rates of ethnic minority and majority groups in the western region. Rates of decline in child malnutrition have also been much slower in the western provinces, giving rise to persisting regional disparities: for instance, 2005 figures on child malnutrition suggest 5.8% of children were underweight and 10.7% were "stunted" in the Eastern provinces compared to 12.5% and 16.3% in the western provinces.³⁵

In Vietnam, the rate of poverty among ethnic minority groups declined at an average rate of 2.6% a year over the last decade compared with 3.4% for the majority Kinh/Chinese community.³⁶ Educational attainments were, and remain, lower among ethnic minority groups although they have been improving across all groups. Ethnic disadvantage varies by location. Ethnic minorities living in the lowlands have seen a dramatic rate of poverty reduction, while those in the northern mountains, the central highlands and the south and north central coasts remain in extreme poverty.³⁷ Steady progress in reducing under-five mortality has been accompanied

by widening inequalities: the ratio of under-five mortality rates of the poorest to the richest quintile rose from 2.8 in 1997 to 3.4 in 2002.³⁸ Only 23% of children from the majority Khinh/Chinese groups were underweight (“wasted”) compared with 34% of children from ethnic minorities in the northern mountains, and 45% in the central highlands and coastal areas.³⁹

3.3 Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to more than 2,000 distinct ethnic groups characterised by different language, culture and traditions, and, sometimes, religious beliefs. Ethnic groups in Africa vary in size from millions of people to a few hundred thousand, and are often associated with a specific territory. Much of the region continues to suffer from the carving up of the continent by colonial powers in 1884 with scant regard for existing social, political, ethnic and linguistic contours. As a result, the political geography of the region, which has more countries than any other region of the world, has long been characterised by regional and civil armed conflicts.

In countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe, where colonial powers had a strong presence, intersecting inequalities have a strong racial dimension. More pervasive across the rest of the sub-continent are social cleavages associated with ethnicity, frequently reinforced by geographical location and distance from main urban centres.

South Africa represents an extreme case of intersecting inequalities given its “infamous history of high inequality with an overbearing racial stamp”.⁴⁰ Ironically, this is also why it has the most comprehensive data on intersecting inequalities in the region. While

the country is well on track to meeting the MDGs, deeply entrenched inequalities persist. Poverty has fallen in the post-apartheid period, but it remains acute for the African and “coloured” population. The majority African population has remained at the bottom of the income hierarchy, earning 16% of white income in 1995, a share that declined to 13% by 2008.⁴¹

Infant and under-five mortality rates have declined between 1998 and 2003 from 45.4 to 42.6 per 1,000 live births and from 59.4 to 57.6 respectively.⁴² However, infant mortality risk is four times higher among black African children than white children, even after controlling for demographic factors such as the mother’s age and the timing and number of births.⁴³

The implications of the intersecting inequalities between gender, race and poverty in South Africa are illustrated by poverty data for 1993, 2000 and 2008 which show that for each of these years, the incidence and share of poverty was higher for Africans as a group than other groups in the population and that among Africans, both the incidence and share of poverty was consistently higher for women than men.⁴⁴

Elsewhere in Africa, data on the relationship between ethnic identity and poverty are less consistently available and generally captured by spatial variations that are known to have an ethnic dimension. For instance, in Nigeria, the northern states, which are dominated by the Hausa and Fulani, have higher levels of poverty than the south where the Yoruba and Igbo are predominant.⁴⁵ Over 60% of Hausa speakers have less than four years of education compared to less than 10% of Yoruba speakers. The interaction between ethnicity, gender and location means that Hausa

females from poor rural households are the most educationally deprived section of the population.⁴⁶

Child malnutrition, in terms of “stunting”, “wasting”, and being underweight is the highest among children of the Hausa ethnic group, followed by those of the Yoruba ethnic group, whereas children of the Igbo ethnic group have the lowest malnutrition rates.⁴⁷ Child mortality rates follow this pattern; they are considerably higher in the northern zones. Again, regional and ethnic disparities reinforce one another; child mortality rates are lower for *Igbo* and *Yoruba* ethnic groups.⁴⁸

One issue that has received continent-wide attention since the 1960s is ethnic differentials in early child survival. Data from the early 1990s confirms that these differentials do persist and have been spreading. Multivariate analysis suggests that socioeconomic differentials intersect with ethnicity; there was a close correlation between child mortality differentials, on the one hand, and ethnic inequalities in household economic status, female education, access to and use of health services and the degree of concentration in the largest cities, on the other hand. This suggests that, along with policies to reduce economic disparities among ethnic groups, “child survival efforts in African countries should pay special attention to disadvantaged ethnic groups and the locations in which they are concentrated”.⁴⁹

4. The Intersecting Dynamics of Inequality: Why Social Exclusion Persists

The empirical evidence cited in the preceding section allows us to make two important points. Firstly, the intersecting inequalities which give rise to social exclusion are deeply entrenched in the historical structures and

everyday practices of societies, making them appear remarkably resistant to change. Secondly, despite this apparent intransigence, these inequalities are not immutable. Change is evident in every region, more rapidly in some contexts than others, and more rapidly in relation to some MDGs than others. Efforts to tackle these inequalities in a more systematic way need to be cognisant of both sides of this equation: the forces that perpetuate inequality and the factors that have helped to bring about change. This section examines the persisting dynamics of social exclusion in greater detail while the next section focuses on promising avenues for change.

4.1 The Cultural Dynamics of Exclusion

The cultural norms and practices through which certain groups are defined as inferior to others on the basis of their socially ascribed identities are among the key mechanisms that serve to perpetuate social exclusion in the everyday lives of excluded groups and across generations. The effects of exclusion can work in silent and invisible ways which nevertheless have a profound impact on those who are excluded. Alternatively, they may work in ways that are visible and noisy, with negative spill-over effects within the larger society.

The everyday cultural dynamics of exclusion were meticulously documented in a survey of 565 villages across India published in 2007.⁵⁰ It found that in over 70% of the villages surveyed, Dalits were denied entry into the home of the higher castes; in over 60% of the villages, they were denied access to public places of worship; in nearly half of the villages they were denied access to burial grounds; in 30% of the villages, they were forced to stand in the presence of upper-caste men while in 11% of the villages, they

were chastised for wearing sandals on public roads. In short, in almost every aspect of daily life, including using the post office or public transport, wearing decent clothes or even sunglasses, Dalits as a group were subject to a humiliating regime designed to remind them on a constant basis of their lowly status in their society.

Such norms and practices can have a profound effect on the sense of self-worth and identity of those who are treated in this way. An experimental study by Hoff and Pandey illustrates this point with respect to caste.⁵¹ The experiment, which was carried out with a group of school children in India, involved a maze-solving puzzle in exchange for payment. The study found that Dalit children performed as well as children from other caste groups when their caste identities were concealed. However, once the caste identities of the children were made public, the average number of puzzles solved by Dalit children declined by 23%. The number declined even further when the children were segregated by caste group. If such a finding can be generalised, it suggests that “internalisation” of ascribed inferiority can have a powerful effect on the capacity of excluded groups to respond to available opportunities.⁵²

In Nepal, a survey measuring the impact of social identity on various measures of empowerment and inclusion found that the upper castes scored twice as high as Dalits with regard to knowledge about rights and procedures, confidence in accessing services, exercising rights, social networks and local political influence.⁵³ While 90% of the upper caste groups had never faced any restrictions or intimidation (the 10% exceptions were women), 100% of Dalit respondents had experienced some degree of restriction on entering certain public spaces, and 20%

reported high levels of harassment, intimidation and restriction. In general, the upper castes scored higher on most indicators followed by Janajati groups and then Dalits. A disaggregation of the results showed that Dalit women scored lowest of all groups.

The Latino-barometer, an annual public opinion survey carried out in 17 countries in the Latin American region by the Latino-barómetro Corporation, included a question about which group were most discriminated against in their country in the survey carried out in 2000. Respondents in countries with large proportions of Afro-descendants and indigenous people were most likely to name these groups as facing the most discrimination while those with a more homogenous ethnic composition named “the poor”.⁵⁴ Those who believed that ethnic groups were most discriminated against believed that they faced such discrimination in all spheres of life: at work, in school, in political parties, as well as in the justice system.⁵⁵

Evidence from a number of countries suggests that the internalising, self-destructive effects of cultural devaluation can lead to harmful activities, such as substance abuse, which ultimately serves to further their stigmatisation and compromise their life chances and those of the next generation. In Sri Lanka, for example, high levels of alcoholism among the predominantly Indian Tamil labourers in the plantation sector are seen as a major cause of the poverty, indebtedness and social stigma reported by these workers as well as high levels of domestic violence.⁵⁶ In South Africa, higher levels of alcoholism and substance abuse by the coloured population compared to the black African population suggests that ways of coping with exclusion are not uniform across excluded groups.⁵⁷ The Demographic and Health Sur-

vey of 2003 reported that 9.1% of adolescent women in the coloured population group reported harmful levels of drinking in the past 12 months compared with just 1.1% of black African adolescent women.⁵⁸ Western Cape is reported to have one of the highest rates of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in the world.⁵⁹ This may account for the higher levels of infant and child mortality among the coloured population noted in recent studies.

If depression, addictive behaviour and sense of inferiority represent some of the silent consequences of social exclusion, the association between intersecting inequalities and levels of crime and drug-related violence represent its noisier consequences. It has been estimated that in urban Colombia, crimes were most likely to be committed by people from households with a per capita income below 80% of the national average.⁶⁰ A survey from urban South Africa shows that patterns of crime vary by class and race. While the wealthier quartiles were more likely to report crimes without injury, it was the poorest and predominantly black population in informal settlements and townships who suffered the brunt of violent crime.⁶¹

4.2 The Economic Dynamics of Exclusion: Asset Inequalities and Marginalised Livelihoods

The poverty of socially excluded groups is frequently mediated by cultural norms and practices which dictate what they can do and what they can own. In some cases, excluded groups are not permitted to own or buy land by virtue of who they are. This has long been the case for the “untouchable” castes in India and Nepal, and even today, the vast majority of people belonging to these castes are landless.⁶² In other cases, ethnicity differentiates the amount and quality of land people own.

In Peru and Ecuador, for instance, indigenous groups had landholdings that were between two and eight times smaller than those of non-indigenous groups and only 13% of all irrigated land in Ecuador was in the hands of indigenous farmers.⁶³

Indigenous people are more likely to be dispossessed of their land because their customary tenure systems may not be recognised by law. Non-recognition of customary land arrangements for forest dwellers and upland people has been a major factor in their impoverishment.⁶⁴ Forest departments have traditionally held police and judicial powers, in addition to administrative powers, to enforce tight state controls over forest lands. This has resulted in forest dwellers being treated as criminals or squatters on their own land; in some countries (Thailand, for example), forest dwellers are not recognised as citizens.⁶⁵ Indigenous people have also been at the receiving end of large-scale mining ventures, the expansion of the agricultural frontier, and other infrastructure projects from which they cannot expect to benefit.⁶⁶

The nature of livelihoods pursued by, or available to, marginalised groups can also serve to reinforce their marginal status. In many parts of the world, indigenous groups pursue a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life that is regarded as “inferior” by the rest of society. In Thailand, for instance, the reliance of the Hmong, Akha, Lahu and Lisu on swidden agriculture in upland forested areas is perceived to signify their “uncivilised” way of life, in contrast to the settled wet rice cultivation practised by lowland villagers.⁶⁷

In other cases, social exclusion is associated with the cultural assignment of excluded groups to the worst paid and most demeaning jobs. The Hindu caste system in India and

Nepal assigns the lowest castes to the removal of night soil, sweeping, garbage collection and other jobs that are considered to be menial, degrading and dirty.

More generally, social discrimination combined with human, material and social resource deficits trap socially excluded groups in occupations with poorer pay and working conditions than other sections of society. In Vietnam, for instance, migrants from ethnic minorities earn half as much as those from the Kinh majority, are far less likely to have a work contract, and far less likely to receive help in finding a job.⁶⁸ In Peru, white workers were more likely to be found in the higher hourly income quintiles than indigenous workers, and were more likely to be professionals, technicians and executive staff. In South Africa and Brazil, Afro-descendant and indigenous populations reported higher levels of informal employment. Moreover, in every employment category, hourly earnings were highest for white workers and lowest for black workers.⁶⁹

The interaction between gender and ethnic inequalities generally places women from ethnic minorities at the bottom of the income hierarchy: for example, indigenous and Afro-descendant women in Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru were more likely to earn “poverty wages” (\$1 an hour, purchasing parity power adjusted) than either men from their ethnic group or men and women from the rest of the population.⁷⁰ In Brazil, Afro-descendant women earned the least, while white men earned the most for each level of education.⁷¹

Lack of access to financial services, or access on extremely usurious terms, has been a major constraint for poor and excluded groups everywhere. In India, Pakistan and Nepal, the prevalence of bonded labour is a stark indica-

tor of the unfavourable terms on which such groups obtain credit. They are disproportionately drawn from lower caste and ethnic minority groups. Such forms of indebtedness tend to serve as a mechanism for the inter-generational transmission of poverty, since the children of bonded labourers often become bonded labourers themselves.⁷²

4.3 The Exclusionary Dynamics of Service Provision: Access and Quality

The poor, more than any other group, rely on basic public services to meet their needs for health and education. The failure of such services to address their needs is a major factor in explaining the uneven pace of progress on relevant MDGs. Unequal spatial distribution of services, and the costs, quality and relevance of the services on offer, are some of the aspects of this failure as is the behaviour of those responsible for service provision.

In India, the most important source of variation in the per capita state provision of doctors, nurses and teachers in rural districts is religion and caste; the higher the percentage of Dalits and Muslims in the district population, the lower the provision of medical and educational services.⁷³ Not surprisingly, religion and caste affect the uptake of maternal health and delivery services, along with household wealth status and women’s education.⁷⁴ In addition, acts of discrimination against Dalits along with prejudice towards religious minorities are reported in the public health services. This includes avoidance by health workers, particularly paramedics and nursing staff, of physical contact with Dalits and reluctance to visit Dalit households. In turn, both real and anticipated discriminatory behaviour on the part of health workers deters Dalits from using health providers, particularly for services that involve physical contact, such as giving birth.⁷⁵

Teachers in India are also predominantly upper caste and bring their caste prejudices into the classroom. Dalit children are expected to run errands and are assigned menial tasks such as sweeping and cleaning the classrooms. Higher rates of teacher absenteeism were reported in areas where children were mainly from Dalit and tribal communities. In West Bengal, for example, teacher absenteeism was 75% in such schools compared with 33% elsewhere. Such treatment has particularly negative effects because Dalit children are likely to be first generation learners.⁷⁶

In Vietnam, ethnic minorities have to travel further than the rest of the population to get to a school or a market place, are further away from all-weather roads and less likely to have access to improved water and sanitation facilities.⁷⁷ Compared to a national figure of 17% in 2002, 33% of women in the north east, 65% in the northwest and 40% in the central highlands gave birth with no assistance from qualified health workers.⁷⁸ Ethnic minority women in Vietnam are less likely to report assistance from qualified health workers when they give birth partly because of their reluctance to seek help from male health workers and the difficulties of recruiting women to work in remote mountainous areas.⁷⁹

Nigeria reports large disparities in antenatal care between the north and the south.⁸⁰ Only 4% of women in the north east received care from a doctor compared with 52% of women in the south west, while only 8.4% of mothers in the north west delivered in a health facility compared with 73.9% in the south east.⁸¹ Women from the north cited lack of money, distance to facilities and concern that there were no drugs available as the main reasons they did not deliver in a health facility.⁸²

A study of skilled attendance at childbirth in rural Tanzania found that ethnicity, education and household assets were important predictors of service take-up. Social positioning, past experience, entitlement, shame, and self-identity reinforced some women's preference to deliver at home.⁸³ Some had experienced substandard treatment, or been turned away from health facilities and felt humiliated.⁸⁴

More generally, in sub-Saharan Africa, pastoralist livelihoods are closely associated with specific ethnic groups. These are among the most excluded from education services. In many cases, national education systems have failed to offer relevant curricula, provide appropriate textbooks and respond to the realities of pastoralist livelihoods, which involve children travelling for long periods to tend cattle.⁸⁵

In Latin America, belonging to an indigenous group or being monolingual in an indigenous language constitutes a barrier to access health care.⁸⁶ In Colombia, racial and ethnic disparities in health status and access to health care were largely explained by differences in socioeconomic characteristics, employment status, type of job and geographical location.⁸⁷ In Brazil, utilisation of maternity-related services was found to be related to education and household resources, as well as location.⁸⁸ Households in rural areas and in the poorer north and north east were less likely to make use of such services.⁸⁹

4.4 The Political Dynamics of Exclusion

When group-based inequalities are reproduced in the exercise of political power and access to public institutions, they undermine the confidence of socially disadvantaged groups in the government's abil-

ity to rule fairly. Excluded groups are often minorities, and there is little incentive for political parties to take their interests into account.⁹⁰ When the economic prospects of such groups are undermined by uneven development, when differential access to essential services persists, and when political opportunities for voice and influence are denied, grievances emerge and often spill over into group violence, riots and civil war, what could be seen as the “noisiest” consequences of social exclusion.

Studies of conflicts in different regions of the world point to the recurring significance of group-based disadvantage as a factor.⁹¹ Social exclusion does not inevitably lead to conflict, but it dramatically increases its likelihood. A report by the Indian government into the long-standing Naxalite insurgency, which affects 125 districts spread over 12 states, found that the movement’s main support comes from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It also found that while there are many districts with high concentrations of Dalits and Adivasis which did not have a Naxalite presence, it was generally the case that areas of Naxalite influence had a higher than average proportion of Dalits and Adivasis in their populations.⁹²

Nepal was, till very recently, governed by the 1854 Muluki Ain (Law of the Land) which essentially codified the inequalities of an orthodox Brahminical order, distinguishing between the pure, “twice born” castes (the Brahmins, Chhetri and high caste Newaris) at the top of the caste hierarchy and the rest of the population who were further distinguished by varying degrees of impurity: those regarded as “untouchable” (Dalit castes), those from whom water could not be accepted (Muslims and foreigners) and the liquor-drinking groups (non-caste indig-

enous groups) who were further subdivided into the “enslavable” and “unenslavable”.

The legalised ranking of social groups was evident in the political structure. Brahmins and Chhetris maintained around 60% presence in the legislature right through the period from 1959 to 1999, the last decade of which included the first ten years of multi-party democracy in the country. Dalits were almost entirely absent as were women, regardless of caste. Civil service positions were also disproportionately drawn from Brahmin/Chhetri groups (83%) and the upper castes held virtually all positions in the judiciary.⁹³

There had been piecemeal efforts at legal reform but these had largely failed. Disillusionment with this continued failure finally led to a prolonged period of violent conflict led by the Communist Party of Nepal. Most analysts agree that the conflict was fuelled by grievances rooted in the structural inequalities of caste, ethnicity, gender and location.⁹⁴

In Mexico, the Zapatista uprising has its roots in the intersecting inequalities experienced by indigenous people, based on ethnic identity, location and poverty.⁹⁵ The share of the indigenous population in the State of Chiapas, where the movement began, was over three times that of Mexico as a whole and the proportion of people on incomes below the minimum wage was nearly three times that of Mexico as a whole, while the proportion of people on high incomes was less than half the national rate. Indigenous people had substantially lower school attendance and incomes than the rest of the state’s population. They had been excluded from land reform efforts and consigned to poor and ecologically vulnerable land. For years, indigenous people sought to exercise political

voice through organised resistance but were met by political repression. The adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement after a long period of worsening conditions as a result of neo-liberal policies provided a major impetus to the uprising which finally led to their grievances being heard, not just nationally, but internationally.

All post-conflict societies suffer from diminished resources. Eight of the ten countries with the worst human development index, and eight out of ten countries with the lowest gross national product per capita, have had major civil wars in the recent past, with causality working in both directions.⁹⁶ These are likely to feature prominently among countries that are most off track in relation to the MDGs, although they are also characterised by poor data for monitoring progress.

5. Addressing Intersecting Inequalities: Responsive States and Active Citizens

5.1 The Critical Role of the State: Driving Legal Change

Experience has made it clear that the state has a critical role to play in carving out an agenda for tackling social exclusion. The private sector undoubtedly has an important contribution to make because of its central role as an engine of growth, but driven as it is by profit considerations, it is unlikely to take a lead in promoting social justice. Civil society organisations are also indispensable because of their ability to mobilise against injustice and hold state and corporations accountable, but they represent specific interests. They rarely speak for, or are accountable to, society as a whole. Consequently, however flawed the state might be, it is the only institution that has a mandate to respond to claims for social justice by all its citizens. But

where states fail in their responsibility to their citizens, citizens can play an important role in exercising pressure on it to do so.

This is evident in the Latin American context where it took over a decade for social mobilisation of citizens against a succession of repressive military governments to install democratic regimes in their place.⁹⁷ The active participation by indigenous and black organisations within these movements has meant that Latin American governments lead in measures taken to incorporate various forms of affirmative action within their constitutions and legal systems. The Workers Party in Brazil, for instance, instituted a number of measures to explicitly address socially excluded groups: the establishment of quotas for Afro-descendants in public universities, the Brasil Quilombola program, the National Integral Health Policy for the Black Population, the national Policy for the Promotion of Racial Equality and, for women more generally, National Plans of Policies for women.

In Ecuador, the significance attached to the environment in the 2008 Constitution reflects the influence in the social mobilisations that had overthrown the previous military regime. The Constitution incorporated the notion of *Buen Vivir* (Living Well) as the foundational principle for nation-building and development efforts. In diametric opposition to neo-liberal privileging of the individual enterprise and market-led growth, *Buen Vivir* represents the indigenous worldview which values social responsibility, social, economic and environmental rights and harmony with nature. The Constitution also acknowledges the “multi-national” character of Ecuador, extending official recognition to indigenous languages and expanding the collective rights of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorean populations.

Nepal's new Interim Constitution, introduced after a prolonged period of conflict, granted equal status to men and women, banned discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and caste, introduced measures to improve social justice and institutionalised proportional inclusion of Madhesis, Dalits, Janajatis and women in all organs of the state. The introduction of proportional representation in the country's elections meant that the Constituent Assembly elected in 2008 had a very different composition from the parliaments of the 1990s. The most dramatic increases were for women and Dalits. Women made up 3% of the Assembly in 1991, compared to 33% in 2008. Similarly, Dalits made up only 0.5% of the Assembly in 1991, rising to 9% in 2008.⁹⁸

Constitutional reform and legal measures are clearly important means for promoting affirmative action but governments can use the law to address inequalities in other ways as well. Given the role of asset inequalities in slowing down the translation of economic growth into poverty reduction, reform of property rights could be designed to favour poor and excluded groups. Land reform is particularly important in rural economies because it is a precondition for access to water, grazing rights, residential security and other resources.

Latin America has made considerable progress in the legal recognition of women's land rights. This has been achieved through a combination of women's own mobilising efforts, the transition to democracy in many countries in the region, and the impetus provided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Land legislation could also be revised to secure longer-term tenancy arrangements, and

resolution of disputes regarding interpretation and enforcement of land rental arrangements. Where tenant protection has been vigorously implemented by the state, as in West Bengal, it has led to a rise in productivity.⁹⁹ Elsewhere, poor and marginalised groups have had to engage in collective action to press for recognition of their claims.¹⁰⁰

There is also a need to recognise different landholding patterns among indigenous people. The new Land Law in Vietnam provides for land allocation practices that accommodate communal land use patterns and also joint titling to include women. In Latin America, indigenous groups have been active in demanding recognition of indigenous territories and collective land rights. A review of the new constitutions and agrarian codes put in place in a number of Latin American countries since the late 1980s shows that they have made considerable gains.¹⁰¹

5.2 The Critical Role of the State: Redistributive Policies

Along with legal instruments, public policy represents a further set of instruments through which the state can tackle long-standing inequalities. Analysis of the factors that have contributed to the decline in income inequalities in Latin America over the past decade or so have identified the increase in social transfers and rising education as key factors, thus underscoring the redistributive potential of public policy.

As suggested by the earlier discussion, making social services more inclusive is one way to do this but it will require action on the various constraints that exclude certain groups. Directing services to areas that are underserved by service providers can be combined with a strong element of demand mobilisa-

tion to determine the shape and form of service provision. The Educational Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh, India guarantees state provision of a primary school to children in areas where there is no such facility within a kilometre, within 90 days of receiving a demand from the community. Eligible communities must have at least 40 learners in the 6-14 age group, but in tribal areas, only 25 learners are necessary.

To ensure health care outreach, a policy required doctors in Indonesia to complete compulsory service in health centres for five years, with shorter periods for more remote areas, before they could obtain a lucrative civil service post. This increased the number of doctors in health centres by an average of 97% from 1985 to 1994, with gains of more than 200% for remote rural areas. Reliance on women community health workers in countries where there are restrictions on women's mobility in the public domain, such as Bangladesh and Nepal, have made a considerable difference to maternal health.

Recruiting service providers from marginalised groups is an important means of bridging their social distance from service provision. Mongolia has experimented with the establishment of pre-school units using the traditional *Gers* (a type of Yurt) as training centres during the summer. Teachers are nomads, moving with their families and stock, together with a group of households involved in pre-school education programmes.

There is also policy recognition of the need for bilingual education for minority groups, initially providing instruction in the mother tongue, and gradually moving on to the mainstream language.¹⁰² Studies suggest that the implementation of this education model can improve the performance of minority

language groups, increasing enrolment rates, improving educational results and reducing gender gaps in schooling.¹⁰³

The Brazilian government has created a law to teach the history of Africa and Afro-Brazilians.¹⁰⁴ It has also begun a national school textbook programme to substitute books depicting racist stereotypes with those that promote the diversity of Brazilian society. In India, schoolbook examples of famous Dalit personalities are gradually being recognised as a tool to create pride and address prejudice. Behaviour-change communication in general is an under-utilised tool that could be used to great effect, notably in schools, health institutions, and public offices.

Social transfer schemes have also emerged as an important means of addressing social exclusion, some explicitly designed to do so while others build in a bias towards the poor. These transfers do not only increase the resources at the disposal of poor households but are often designed to expand education – the two factors associated with declining income inequality in Latin America.

Some of these are explicitly targeted to the poor. This is the case, for instance, with Mexico's conditional cash transfer programme, *Oportunidades*, where mothers in low-income households receive monthly cash transfers on condition that their children attend school and health clinics. It appears to have benefited indigenous peoples disproportionately – although it continues to exclude the most marginalised among them – and helped to close ethnic and gender disparities in education.¹⁰⁵

Some are more broad-based: for instance, the *Bolsa Familia* (family grant) in Brazil is also a conditional cash transfer program, but

eligibility depends on a simple declaration of income by the beneficiary and conditionality is only loosely enforced.¹⁰⁶ More recently it has been supplemented with an additional programme which carries out an “active search” for the hardest to reach of the poor.

The 2006 National Employment Guarantee Scheme in India is a self-targeted public works programme with strong inclusive elements built into it. Along with providing employment if a minimum number of people in a locality demand it, it requires that a third of jobs should be reserved for women and crèches provided where there are more than a certain number of women on a scheme. It also stipulates that some of the infrastructure projects should be used to promote land improvement and other assets for socially marginalised groups.

5.3 The Critical Role of Citizens: Protesting Injustice, Claiming Rights

While active citizens have mobilised to make states more accountable, responsive states can play a critical role in promoting active citizenship among excluded groups. While there has been increasing emphasis on decentralisation as a means of bringing decision-making closer to poorer groups, there is no priori reason to expect that localised forms of governance will be any more inclusive or democratic than centralised ones. Additional measures can make the difference.

The government of Kerala, for instance, launched a People’s Campaign for Decentralised Planning in 1996 with the aim of devolving significant resources and authority to the *panchayats* (village councils) and municipalities. It also mandated village assemblies and citizen committees to plan and budget local development expenditures.¹⁰⁷ Nearly one in

four households attended village assemblies in the first two years of the campaign, and the assemblies continue to draw large numbers. Women accounted for 40% of the participants in village assemblies – much higher than elsewhere in India – while the participation of Dalits has exceeded their representation in the population.¹⁰⁸ A large survey of key respondents found that “disadvantaged groups” were the main beneficiaries of targeted schemes and the widespread view that elected representatives had become more responsive to the needs of local people.¹⁰⁹

In Brazil in the 1990s, participatory budgeting was promoted by the Workers Party in several municipalities which they controlled. It allows for direct negotiation between government officials and representatives of civil society as they seek to find practical solutions to pressing needs. It thus allows various opportunities to citizens to debate and vote on policy proposals specific to their locality or their city. Research on participatory budgeting has demonstrated that a considerable majority of participants and elected delegates have low incomes and low levels of education, suggesting that the programs “have the greatest potential to affect the political behaviour and strategies of individuals from historically excluded groups.”¹¹⁰

The capacity for active citizenship can also be built from below. Mobilisation to protest injustice and claim their rights by marginalised groups has been promoted through a wide variety of channels, including social movements, NGOs, faith-based organisations, women’s groups and trade unions, and self-organisation by the groups in question.¹¹¹ While not all of these organisations are equally inclusive or effective, many have acted as a powerful force for change on a range of inequalities. In India, for example,

civil society groups, in collaboration with progressive political parties, succeeded in getting the Indian government to recognise the right to information, the right to food and the right to work.¹¹² These rights have then been used by civil society to improve the implementation of public policy and to hold service providers accountable.

For instance, the Right to Information Act 2005, which requires all central, state and local government institutions to meet public demands for information has become an important tool in the transparency and accountability of the day-to-day functioning of government.¹¹³ The right to information has been combined with collective action by civil society to groups to ensure the proper implementation of government programmes aimed at assisting the most vulnerable and disenfranchised people.¹¹⁴

As we noted earlier, the vast majority of socially excluded groups are engaged in marginalised forms of livelihoods carried out within the informal economy – where they fall outside the purview of the traditional trade union movement. The emergence of new forms of organisation based on their livelihood needs have provided these groups with an important means to negotiate with their employers and with the state. They have succeeded in getting legal protection for their members, despite their informal status.

Development organisations have worked with dispossessed tribal groups in Orissa, India, who had been forced into bonded labour, to take up resources offered under government rehabilitation schemes and to organise themselves to bargain with their landlords.¹¹⁵ Sankalp, in Uttar Pradesh, supports the self-help organisation of tribal mine workers in

forming worker co-operatives and applying for mine leases as a tool against child and bonded labour. Social mobilisation efforts in these areas have resulted in children being sent to school and adults starting up their own literacy classes. Self-help organisations have also encouraged these groups to get more involved in the running of local schools in order to counter teacher absenteeism.

The Self Employed Women's Association in India has been working with women workers in the informal economy – both waged and self-employed – since the 1970s. It combines a trade union approach to engage in collective bargaining on behalf of its members with a co-operative approach to promote their livelihood strategies. It has more than 700,000 members spread across a number of states in India and lobbies the government to win legal recognition of members' rights, including minimum wage legislation. It has also been active at the international level and is one of the founding members of a global network of women workers, Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising, which collects data, conducts research and engages in advocacy on behalf of its members.

Public action and community mobilisation can play an important role in extending services to socially excluded groups. In Mexico, for example, mobilisation by women's reproductive health groups in collaboration with a research institute that focused on budgetary analysis highlighted long-standing inequalities in federal support to the poorest states, which had the highest rates of maternal mortality. In Bolivia, India and Nepal, community mobilisation through participatory women's groups helped to improve birth outcomes in poor rural communities.¹¹⁶ Initiatives included setting up women's organisations, devel-

oping women's skills in identifying and prioritising problems, and training community members in safe birthing techniques.

In Bolivia, community mobilisation led to a decline in perinatal mortality and an increase in the proportion of women receiving prenatal care and starting breastfeeding on the first day after birth.¹¹⁷ In Nepal, the same approach led to a reduction in neonatal mortality and an even larger and statistically more significant effect on maternal mortality rates.¹¹⁸ In the Indian context, where the intervention was carried out in two states with high proportions of *Adivasi* groups, it was associated with a dramatic fall in neonatal mortality rates.¹¹⁹

6. Conclusion

Socially diverse societies do not have to be socially divided societies but group-based differences harden into inequality, exclusion and conflict in the face of systematic discrimination – the consistent denial of resources, recognition and representation to some groups on the basis of who they are. The persistence of historically established patterns of exclusion over the course of a life time, and often over generations, can give rise to a deep sense of despair and hopelessness. But there are enough examples of progress, some of which have been touched on in this paper, to suggest that change is possible. This concluding section highlights some basic principles that can guide the efforts of state and civil society in bringing about such change.

First of all, these efforts may need to be framed by the language of rights. Given that social exclusion entails the denial of full personhood and citizenship to excluded groups, the rights discourse has proved to be a powerful mobilising force in bringing such

groups together in their search for justice. In addition, the importance of framing the demand for justice in the language of rights is that it lends itself to legal recognition. In contexts where intersecting inequalities run deep, and are reinforced on an everyday basis by culture, religion and long-standing traditions, the law may be the only discourse available to excluded groups to articulate their demand for equality of personhood.

Secondly, while building inclusive forms of citizenship requires the transformation of the relationship between the state and citizens, it also requires a transformation of relations between citizens themselves. It is not the state alone that is responsible for discrimination and it cannot be the state alone that can tackle it. This means that along with changing laws and policies, efforts to tackle exclusion must also challenge taken-for-granted norms and practices that make up the “mind-set” of a society, using the various means of re-socialisation available to it: education, media, popular culture, statistics, research as well as pro-active campaigns and public information messages.

Thirdly there is a need to balance equality and difference. For instance, to what extent can broad-based or universal policies to promote equality be combined with making special provision for those who have been systematically excluded in the past? While these are often treated as mutually incompatible approaches, they can, in fact, work successfully in tandem. Universalist approaches are essential to building a sense of social solidarity and citizenship, particularly critical for excluded groups. Universal coverage also gives privileged groups more of a stake in policy outcomes, a greater willingness to contribute to them, and hence the possibility of cross-subsidising marginalised groups.

At the same time, the fact that it is their “difference” from the rest of the poor that has led socially excluded groups to be left behind or locked out of processes of growth and development suggests that “universality” should not be taken to imply “uniformity”. There are strong grounds for plurality and diversity within universal frameworks of provision.

A fourth principle is the need to go beyond ameliorative approaches that address the symptoms of the problem to transformative approaches that address its root causes. It is quite possible to meet the basic needs of poor and marginalised groups without strengthening their capacity to challenge the dependency traps that keep them poor. There is no ready-made formula for achieving this but, given the intersecting nature of the causes and consequences of social exclusion, multi-pronged approaches that act simultaneously on different dimensions of disadvantage are likely to be more effective than a search for magic bullets. In addition, transformation is more likely to be achieved by using group-based approaches to tackle problems that are essentially group-based. Indeed, individual solutions may leave members of marginalised groups more isolated and impoverished than before. The need for more collective approaches is essential to overcome their isolation, to challenge the internalisation of inferiority or resignation to their subordinate status in society and to create forms of social mobilisation powerful enough to bring about change.

Finally, we may need to work towards a new social contract that recognises the increasingly interconnected nature of the world we live in. The MDGs provided a major impetus for coordinating national and international efforts to reduce poverty and promote human development. They helped to mainstream the

fight against poverty in the policies, plans and programmes implemented across different regions of the world. However, the MDGs fall short of the social justice agenda spelt out by the Millennium Declaration.

This paper has examined some of the structural factors that give rise to deeply entrenched and intersecting inequalities and suggested some policy options that might help to carve out pathways to social justice. The multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion require such options to be pursued as part of a broader agenda of social transformation. A new social contract to build more responsive states and more active citizens is part of this broader transformative agenda.

What has been left out of the discussion so far is the role of the international community. The problems of poverty and social exclusion are not purely national in their causes or in their consequences. They are also the product of structural inequalities at the global level. This was not acknowledged by the MDGs. It is true that while MDGs 1 to 7 spell out what the developing countries of the world would strive to achieve, MDG 8 sought to address the relationships between developed and developing countries, articulating it in the language of global partnerships. However, it failed to acknowledge the unequal nature of these relationships – as manifested in the asymmetries that characterise the rules governing aid, trade and debt between these countries. It is also telling that MDG 8 was the only MDG with no targets or indicators to monitor progress. Not surprising, it has been criticised for singularly lacking “vision, bark and bite”.¹²⁰

The predominant focus on extreme poverty in the MDGs divided the world into those

who have, and hence provide aid and advice, and those who have not, and hence receive aid and advice. The focus on sustainability in the post-2015 development framework can help to overcome this dichotomy by highlighting the stake that all countries have in the future of the planet. A strong concern with inequality has also been expressed in the consultations leading up to the post-

2015 agenda. Placing social justice at the heart of this framework would also help to unify countries around a shared agenda of tackling inequality – at global, national and subnational levels. A concern with sustainability and social justice would remind us of the challenges we face in common and provide the basis of a more genuine collaboration across national boundaries.

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- 1 Naila Kabeer is Professor of Gender and Development at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to that, she was Professor of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University and Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex where she worked for many years. She has also worked as a Senior Research Fellow at the Department for International Development, UK.
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