

## **Social Inclusion and Public Services**

There is increasing awareness that across the world some groups in society are being excluded from opportunities while other groups enjoy unfair advantages. This unjust state of affairs appears to be getting worse rather than better, even in countries where wealth is increasing overall. There is agreement among many international bodies working in low and middle income countries that equality and fairness must be given more priority in future in order to improve the economic wellbeing and life chances of all people in these countries.

Failure to include all social groups in development has, for example, led to people from minority ethnic and religious groups being more likely to have low paid work, to live in slums with risky conditions and to have poorer access to healthcare, education, finance and public transport. People from these populations are also excluded from systems for justice and government and from decision-making about things that affect their lives. This kind of unfairness leads to public unrest and unstable societies.

This panel aims to explore the role of public services as a mechanism for social inclusion in terms of influencing how well people from minority populations are able to participate in society and be treated as full citizens. Strategies for developing inclusive public services in development contexts involve political and social challenges, as competition for work and resources often drives conflict between ethnic groups. Research evidence on ways in which public services have tried to reduce unfairness and how research can help facilitate social inclusion is welcome. Reviews of the evidence available as well as gaps in knowledge and what further research might help move things forward are of particular interest.

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