

# Social inclusion and integrated urban water management

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## Abstract

Ensuring that decision-making institutions and processes, including research and innovation processes, are socially inclusive is a priority for the SWITCH project, because it is essential if the project outcomes are to be socially sustainable and equitable. But securing the meaningful participation of the most deprived can be difficult. A lack of assets, confidence and voice can lead to such groups being left out of decision-making processes and in some cases development interventions can lead to them being more marginalised and disempowered.

There are three main dimensions of social exclusion. People can be excluded because of: a) *what they have* (or what they do not have in the way of resources, also termed - economic deprivation); b) *where they live* (spatial deprivation, such as the stigma from living in the 'wrong part of town' which may prevent otherwise good candidates from getting a job); and, c) simply because of *who they are* (identity-based discrimination including gender). This paper sets out the conceptual underpinnings of social inclusion and exclusion and explains why it is relevant to urban water management.

**Keywords:** social inclusion, social exclusion, participation in decision-making, urban water resource management,

## 1 What is social inclusion?

Social inclusion describes the state of being included in a community and society as a whole; a condition in which individuals and groups can access the range of available opportunities, services and resources and contribute to planning and decision making. It also refers to the actions and processes needed to transform the situation of those who are socially excluded, by influencing institutions and changing the perceptions that create and sustain exclusion (Beall, 2002).

Social inclusion, in both these senses, is something that the SWITCH project aims to achieve. It has been prioritized within SWITCH to ensure that efforts to improve the governance of water in the participating cities are sustainable and equitable in nature. Achieving a more inclusive approach to urban water management in SWITCH starts with understanding how social exclusion comes about and is perpetuated and accentuated over time.

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## 2 Understanding social exclusion

Social exclusion is a widely used term, which sometimes has different interpretations. In SWITCH we are using the following definition:

*Social exclusion is a ‘process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household’ (DFID, 2005, p3).*

Social exclusion is the result of different kinds of discrimination which disadvantage certain social groups, preventing them from effectively participating in decision making and accessing resources and information. It is usually a barrier to escaping poverty, undermining the well-being and sense of self-worth of the excluded groups.

Three dimensions of social exclusion can be identified. People can be excluded because of: a) **what they have** or do not have in terms of access to resources (a lack of resources can be termed economic deprivation); b) **where they live** (spatial deprivation occurs when stigma or a bad reputation of a specific neighbourhood acts as a barrier to creating social contacts or finding a job etc); or c) simply because of **who they are** (discrimination flowing from specific group identities as perceived by others in society). These dimensions all apply to urban water management.

<b>Dimensions of social exclusion in the Context of Urban Water Management</b>	
<b>What you have</b>	Discrimination because of limited access to material resources. This could mean the type of house you live in and its connectivity to water and sanitation services, your existing rights to these services and your ability to purchase available services, assets which enable you to derive benefits from the available services (for example lack of access to space or sunlight will limit use of available water for growing plants including vegetables).
<b>Where you live</b>	Discrimination resulting from characteristics of a location. Urban neighbourhoods can be separated from adjacent areas by violent sub-culture and squalor, preventing participants from getting work or accessing services. Residents suffer stigma from living in the ‘wrong part of town’. In situations of rapid urban expansion, “squatter” settlements are typically disadvantaged in terms of access to water and sanitation services. These areas, which have grown in an unplanned way on sites are also more exposed to higher risks than the planned parts of cities in terms of flooding, land-slides, water born diseases, and intimidation by developers and local authorities. Internal and international migrants may also lack access to water related services as they are seen as being in the ‘wrong place’.

<b>Who you are</b>	<p>Processes of exclusion occur when certain groups are regarded by the more powerful in society as being of lesser worth. This is expressed through <i>'beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour which disparage, stigmatise, stereotype, make invisible and discriminate'</i>, often using socially accepted references to religion or 'tradition', or by evoking fears of 'the other', or of 'the unknown'.</p> <p><i>Identity-based social exclusion</i> affects groups of people who are defined by their distinct cultural practices and shared way of life (e.g. caste, ethnicity and religion) forming <i>distinct</i> or <i>'bounded'</i> social groups. It can also affect individuals, or <i>'unbounded'</i> categories defined by a single shared characteristic (e.g. gender, age or disability) who otherwise may share very little in common. The resulting cultural devaluation undermines the confidence and capacity for action of those in question and can sometimes have serious effects in terms of poverty.</p> <p>Particularly in cities, "who you are" may be closely connected with what "where you live" and also "what you have". In this case one aspect of social exclusion may compound with others to increasingly marginalise particular social groups and categories from access to water and sanitation services, from the productive use of these services, and from participation in decision making about water-related service planning and development.</p>
<b>Time issues</b>	<p>Exclusionary processes and outcomes can persist or alter over time. They persist through the transfer of poverty from one generation to the next widening the gap between urban rich and poor; the cumulative effect of multiple stresses (e.g. malaria/HIV, unemployment, over-crowded housing, reduction of state services) on the livelihoods of excluded groups; time-related exclusion experienced by migrants, or sudden changes, such as illness, leading to a rapid change in position for an individual.</p>

(Source: adapted from Kabeer, 2005.)

Disadvantage has multiple sources and manifestations, which can overlap at any one point in time, affecting the life chances of individuals and social groups. People can be excluded from different things simultaneously; such as employment, earnings, livelihood opportunities, property, housing, minimum consumption levels, education, the welfare state, citizenship, personal contacts and respect (Silver, 1994).

The different types of social exclusion can interact and reinforce each other. For example, social exclusion based on identity can restrict access to economic and livelihood opportunities. It can also limit access to better housing, social services and other resources and prevent participation in political life (e.g. the right to organise, protest or vote etc). Gender is an important factor influencing discrimination and access to resources (CAP-NET, GWA 2006), but other factors, such as ethnicity, caste or religion, may be relatively more important in some situations. Gender discrimination often articulates with these other forms of discrimination.

Such patterns of disadvantage, while exhibiting some changes over time, can also be very persistent, especially where social prejudices are deep-seated and embedded in social institutions. In these circumstances individuals find it difficult to escape poverty and the effects of stigma, because discrimination on the basis of identity and spatial location can lead to the transfer of poverty across generations.

### **3 What are the concepts underpinning the notion of social exclusion?**

The notion of social exclusion has come to the fore in recent years, because of a change in thinking about poverty and wellbeing. Having moved beyond narrow measurements of poverty based on income, more sophisticated understandings of well-being have emerged. These focus not only on access to material goods, but also in access to social networks, political representation, good health, a clean environment etc. This understanding of disadvantage broadens the idea of deprivation from one of economic disadvantage to include social and political deprivation; the suffering people can experience because they cannot fully participate in social and political life. The ways in which people gain access to resources or face barriers to obtaining basic rights and livelihood resources is now being given greater attention as the role of agency, power and identity become more central to analyses of development processes.

Social exclusion and poverty are not necessarily the same. Occasionally some wealthy groups may be regarded as of lower social status, and conversely not all poor groups are considered inferior. However, more frequently, poverty is a contributing factor to social marginalisation and socially excluded groups may become impoverished as a result of discrimination and lack of access to opportunities. Even if an economy grows, the socially excluded may not be able to escape poverty (DFID, 2005). They may be forced to participate on unequal terms, for example in labour markets which exploit their relative powerlessness and reinforce their disadvantage (Hickey and Du Toit, 2007). Tackling social exclusion can help development initiatives to achieve more equitable and sustainable impacts, but failing to address social exclusion can lead to outcomes that exacerbate poverty by further marginalizing the already disadvantaged.

Understanding the *causes* of poverty is central to notions of social exclusion and this implies analysing the institutional mechanisms by which exclusion occurs. There are varied ways in which people are prevented from claiming their basic rights and participating in society on an equal footing. Exclusion can operate through formal and informal institutions and in intentional and unintentional ways. Essentially, both formal and informal institutions can reflect the prejudices, beliefs and attitudes that prevail in society or that are held by more powerful groups, and this can lead to the exclusion of the less powerful. Some mechanisms are quite formal and prejudice can be quite openly embedded in public policy (such as in Lesotho where until recently land tenure laws prevented women from inheriting land or property). Other mechanisms include informal social institutions, such as the household, and situations where exclusion may be quite subtle (e.g. where ethnic minorities are excluded from social life by language barriers) (DFID, 2005, p4).

### **4 How is social inclusion relevant to SWITCH?**

In the context of the SWITCH project, stakeholder participation is a key element of the overall approach to research and innovation. SWITCH is promoting a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach via its city learning alliances. While participatory approaches were developed as part of efforts to tackle poverty, not all stakeholder participation processes manage to ensure that less vocal, less powerful groups gain an equal voice in discussions and decision-making. This is why SWITCH is prioritising social inclusion via a specific work package (6.3)– to help ensure that the participatory processes of innovation facilitated by the learning alliances are inclusive in nature and that the socially disadvantaged can participate in decisions relating to the use, access and management of water.

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The aim of having a specific work package on social inclusion is two-fold:

- a) to support the involvement of the most excluded and hard-to-reach in water planning and management, otherwise these groups are only further marginalised by SWITCH;
- b) to try and ensure that urban water management responses, solutions and systems of governance reflect not only the priorities and interests of the better-off and powerful, but also assist poor people, especially excluded and marginal groups.

The core ideas underpinning the learning alliance approach and the SWITCH project were set out in an earlier briefing note (SWITCH Learning Alliance, Briefing Note 1). The relevance of social inclusion to each of these ideas is presented in the box below.

<b>Social Inclusion in the context of SWITCH Learning Alliances</b>	
<b>Ideas underpinning the learning alliance approach</b>	<b>Social inclusion angle</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving from researchers devising new technologies – doing different things – to improving how multiple stakeholders in the “innovation system” work – doing things differently – will lead to interventions having greater impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Doing things differently’, and involving multiple stakeholders, should enabling previously disempowered people to have a say in decisions and contribute to finding solutions to problems. Impact will be limited if only more powerful groups are able to participate in the “innovation system”.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovations that are generated locally, taking all the relevant stakeholders into account, are more likely to lead to appropriate and sustainable solutions, to promote flexible and adaptive working practices, and to foster and strengthen the development capacity of local organizations and communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the participation of marginalised groups in generating innovations will help to secure more sustainable solutions and to develop the capacity of all groups. Efforts are required to build the capacity of the most marginalized, supporting them in negotiations and decision making, so that innovation processes are empowering to all rather than only to some, and disempowering to the already disadvantaged.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New understanding of knowledge and learning, and the emergence of learning organizations: whereas information can be generated and disseminated, knowledge is viewed as a complex, transformative process, arising less from any accumulated stock of information, and more from intra- and inter-organizational processes in which experimentation – action research – and communication feature strongly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and knowledge are related to power, as are processes of transformation and social change. Challenging inequitable power relations includes experts relinquishing their total control over knowledge generation, and finding ways of enabling the disempowered to fully participate in knowledge generation. In this context social inclusion implies a transformative process involving different kinds of organisational and individual interactions exchanging views, experience and knowledge. Gender and other social difference perspectives are integrated to ensure that the innovation outcomes reflect the priorities, needs and constraints of all social groups, including the least powerful - and not just the most powerful.</li> </ul>

## 5 What does tackling social exclusion mean for SWITCH?

Social inclusion needs to be a core element of SWITCH which is mainstreamed in an integral fashion throughout the SWITCH project cycle. It is important to have a **social inclusion strategy or coordinated response** in SWITCH cities, to ensure that the research approaches and solutions identified through learning alliance activities are responsive to the interests of disadvantaged social groups; assist these groups in articulating their needs, strengthening their capacities and capabilities; and involve them in planning and decision-making.

The achievement of “sustainable” technical and institutional solutions is unlikely unless social inclusion and exclusion are addressed. This is because sustainability is not only about environmental sustainability, but also about social equity and human rights. If social exclusion issues are not addressed across SWITCH, it is likely that SWITCH outputs will be less effective, and will only further exacerbate the disadvantage already suffered by excluded social groups.

### Box 1. Urban Expansion, Land Tenure and Water Supply and Sanitation in Peri-Urban Dar es Salaam

Informal urbanization is the dominant feature that characterizes urban growth in Dar es Salaam. One of the main causes of this phenomenon is the conflicting land tenure regimes and particularly of customary and quasi-customary land tenure systems in peri-urban areas. The two systems are facilitating access to unplanned and unsurveyed land for housing. The latter has given rise to crowding and dysfunctional spatial urban growth, especially in peri-urban areas. Some of the major adverse effects of informal urban growth in Dar es Salaam include over-densification in low-income housing areas, pollution and faecal contamination of ground water sources as housing density increases. Excessive housing density is mainly a problem associated with the lack of a regulator framework for informal housing land development coupled with the absence of coordination between land use and Water Supply and Sanitation development processes. Subsequently, sustainability of the current ground water supply sources and the public health and livelihoods of settlers in the peri-urban interface are increasingly being threatened as unregulated informal housing densification takes a toll.

Source: Allen, Dávila and Hoffmann (2006).

Understanding how exclusion and cultural devaluation works is not always easy, especially in terms of identifying where it occurs in one’s own culture. Prejudices can be widespread, persistent and widely accepted, and thus appear ‘given’ or ‘natural’, even though they are in fact socially constructed. It is important to remember that exclusion can and does happen in every society in the world and needs to be challenged if positive development outcomes are to be achieved in reality. Understanding the overlapping strands of discrimination and the dynamics and mechanisms involved is the main purpose of the **social exclusion analysis** being undertaken by the city teams.

Moving from analysis towards engaging disadvantaged groups and confronting prejudice and discriminatory beliefs is not a straightforward task. It requires resources, facilitation skills and commitment to tackle exclusion in an **integrated and coordinated** fashion. Piecemeal efforts are unlikely to be successful in securing the necessary social changes required. Hence partnerships with other agencies already addressing social inclusion issues will be essential.

Sometimes, challenging vested interests and the status quo can lead to disputes and conflict. Efforts are required to try and foresee where these might occur (through skilled analysis of stakeholder positions and interests) and for support to be provided for mediation and negotiation as necessary, particularly for vulnerable groups. It is clear from gender mainstreaming efforts to date, that an integrated approach is required, but also an explicit

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recognition of the essentially *political nature* of social change in development processes – otherwise solutions will be superficial and bureaucratic, rather than transformational.

Finally, a key question remains as to what exactly it is that people are being included in, on whose terms, and in whose interests? (Beall, 2002). The idea of inclusion in society goes to the heart of debates about the appropriate role of the state and the very different development pathways that exist at a macro-economic, national level. It is possible that a focus on inclusion as the response to exclusion has encouraged limited, reformist policy agendas, rather than more radical, transformational ones (Beall, 2002). Also, where the focus is on inclusion, some marginalised groups might fear that they will be made to conform to dominant social norms, as they are integrated against their will.

In relation to participatory planning processes and research innovation it is important that the socially excluded are able to influence the research and planning agendas; not limited to contributing to decisions only on questions that have narrowly defined parameters. The terms of inclusion are very important because of the considerable **barriers to participation** of the most socially excluded. These include constraints on their time and mobility, their lack of assets, apathy and disillusionment arising from past failed initiatives and lack of confidence to voice their needs and opinions. These factors can lead to such groups being left out of decision-making processes. Ensuring the participation of the most deprived can be difficult because ‘powerlessness can undermine people’s self-confidence and aspirations and their ability to challenge exclusion’ (DFID, 2005, p4) and assistance is needed to support their empowerment.

### **Box 3. A Partnership Approach to Water and Sanitation in Tshwane, South Africa**

The Winterveldt Community Sanitation Project, launched in 2001, sought to build on earlier improvements in community health achieved through provision of clean drinking water. The project was designed to tackle both lack of awareness regarding appropriate sanitation practices and lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities.

Winterveldt community consists of approximately 25,000 tenant households in peri-urban settlements north of the City of Tshwane South Africa’s administrative capital, in Gauteng Province. Rand Water, an independent public authority, is Tshwane’s main water supplier, supplying about 70% by volume. The remainder is supplied by the city’s own sources. Low revenue collection rates from informal and low-cost housing areas coupled with the specific challenges of provision of water services to peri-urban settlements rendered development of new services difficult.

The Winterveldt Community Sanitation Project was initiated as a direct result of community pressure for improved sanitation services. It began with a pilot initiative from which lessons learnt were applied to planning for other under-serviced areas in Winterveldt.

The innovation, in terms of socially inclusive approaches to water services for peri-urban areas, entailed a new way of stakeholders working together.

The starting point was the establishment of a partnership model on which to base the awareness raising and facilities construction activities. The partnership structure included the local community, an independent public authority (Rand Water), the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and an NGO (Mvula Trust), with the trust’s input mainly confined to overall evaluation.

Initially the community water and sanitation committee felt that tenants would be reluctant to contribute to construction of improved facilities owing to lack of land tenure, and that plot owners might take the opportunity to add to the value of their land by using subsidies to build communal toilets for tenants. This was addressed by approaching individual plot owners to explain the importance of ownership, and by targeting the subsidies at households. It was thus agreed that the householders, and not the landowners, own and would be responsible for maintenance of their facilities.

Also important, was the distinct set of working principles guiding the multi-stakeholder

partnership, namely:

- the need for strong relationships at community level, supported by appropriate incentive structures, with the community acknowledged as client;
- the requirement for extensive social intermediation to be undertaken by both Rand Water and community organizations to provide support to community members with training and advice;
- the belief that a demand-driven approach increases sustainability;
- the necessity to delegate genuine control of the project to the community, whilst maintaining central support and monitoring; and,
- the importance of an appropriate community-level financial framework, in which ceilings for per capita grant finance allocations and upfront contributions from the community are integrated to achieve incentives and to enhance sustainability.

With these principles in mind, the project incorporated two additional components: promotion of local economic activity and a community-based lending scheme.

By 2003, a total of 1,050 ventilated dry-pit latrines – deemed by the project partners to be the most appropriate and cost effective means of providing sanitation in this peri-urban setting – had been constructed, largely through the efforts of small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) established with mentoring from the project.

Financing of the dry VIP latrines was made possible through the community-based lending scheme established through the introduction of a social investment fund designed to provide financial support, training, information and technical assistance to organized community water and sanitation committees. Lastly, both women and men had the opportunity to become trained latrine masons - with more than 50% of the builders being women.

Sources: Allen, Dávila and Hoffmann (2006). Gadd and Holden (2003).

## 6 Conclusion

SWITCH teams in their city planning for water management and service provision and for their demonstration activities, have to build on an understanding of social inclusion issues, to create opportunities and space for participation of the socially excluded.

Planning and policy-making processes do not represent level playing fields. Some groups are more excluded than others. One of the key challenges at the heart of sustainable and equitable development is to find ways to level this playing field and help these groups to change their position in society - for the benefit of the whole society - by having greater voice and negotiating power in decision making.

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