

August 2024

Purpose: These international best practice principles for Social Inclusion for Impact Assessment (IA) aim to make explicit and guide the role that IA can play in supporting the equal participation of individuals and groups in societies.

Rationale: IA delivers comprehensive, trusted and influential advice to identify, assess and manage all types of impacts. The values and principles underpinning that advice play an important role in the issues and impacts that are addressed, and in the recommendations made. By making the importance of social inclusion explicit, and setting out its relationship to IA, these Principles can improve IA practice and the outcomes delivered for local communities.

How to cite this publication:

Bice, Sara et al. (2024) Principles for Social Inclusion for Impact Assessment. Special Publication Series No. XX. Fargo, USA: International Association for Impact Assessment.

Authors:

Contributors: Etisang Abraham, Adwaa Alqasir, Janet Blackadar, Aaron Goldschmidt, Edith Kahubire, Elena Madden, Ruth O'Connor, John Pilgrim, Emerson Sanchez, Melina Santomauro, Ahmed Shukry [PLEASE

ADD YOUR NAME]

Principles for Social Inclusion for Impact Assessment

At IAIA24 in Dublin, Ireland, a special session was held on “Principles for Social Inclusion for Impact Assessment.” The session discussed the need for principles of, and guidance on, explicit integration of social inclusion within impact assessment practice and advice in response to increasingly intense and impactful project environments and the necessity of climate adaptation and a fair and just transformation.

Introduction

Social inclusion—ensuring that all groups and individuals in a society have equal opportunities for socio-economic participation and development—is a growing concern for contemporary project planning and delivery. World-wide, governments and project funders are integrating social inclusion as a key budgeting/investment principle and making planning decisions with the diversity of growing populations in mind. Research shows that social inclusion and related social cohesion—a sense of belonging to a society or community—are vital to thriving communities.ⁱ Social exclusion leads to lower wages and lifetime earnings, poorer health outcomes, economic disadvantage, worse mental health and poorer labor force outcomes.ⁱⁱ The World Bank estimates that about one-third of the global population is at risk of social exclusion and all of the flow-on effects that exclusion entails.ⁱⁱⁱ

In urban settings, a focus on social inclusion can guide decisions about social housing,^{iv} public transport,^v equal access to amenities^{vi} and affordable housing and services. In regional and rural areas, social inclusion encourages a focus

on ease of access, proximity to resources and services, and efforts to reduce or avoid social isolation.^{vii}

Consideration of social inclusion in impact assessment can help to inform investment and project approvals decision-making. It is a concept accepted and valued across diverse national and governance settings. Social inclusion is an explicit aim of the United Nations, for example, and for many of the leading multinational development banks. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Economic Inclusion Strategy^{viii} and the COP27 MDB Joint Statement offer further examples of international commitments to social inclusion.^{ix}

The importance of Principles for Social Inclusion for IA

Social inclusion is inarguably of concern to the IA profession and the governments, projects and communities it seeks to serve. Social inclusion is implicit in best practice impact assessment. IAIA's values state: "IAIA believes the assessment of the environmental, social, economic, cultural, and health implications for proposals to be a critical contribution to sound decision-making processes, and to equitable and sustainable development." And also, "We believe that impact assessments should be inclusive and comprehensive, addressing the broader social and health impacts as well as any impacts on the biophysical environment."

The concept of social inclusion can, however, be ambiguous. The pursuit of social inclusion is often implied. Explicit acknowledgement and integration of Principles for Social Inclusion in IA policy and practice is an important and direct means of supporting IAIA's values and advancing best practice IA. The Principles for Social Inclusion offer a simple, shared definition of social inclusion and set out Basic and Operating Principles that can be followed in all types of IA. By making understanding of and commitments to social inclusion clearer and explicit, IAIA demonstrates the central importance of the concept and improves the likelihood that IA practice and advice will advance social inclusion.

Principles

Basic Principles apply to all stages of IA processes, from strategic/planning to operations of policies, plans, projects and programs. Basic Principles should be applied comprehensively to the overall process. **Operating Principles** advise how the Basic Principles should be put into practice and applied throughout the individual stages of IA.

Basic Principles

Inclusion: Working proactively to ensure that all stakeholders who are impacted by, can influence or benefit from the policy/plan/project/program being assessed are known and engaged. Inclusiveness means ensuring that all disadvantaged groups, those at risk of being overlooked, those who are marginalised or face barriers to access for reasons of race, indigeneity, class, socio-economic status, migration status, sexual or gender orientation, religion, culture, ability, ethnicity or other defining characteristics, are represented, do not experience discrimination and have equal opportunities for voice and participation.

Procedural fairness: Ensuring that all stakeholders, following the principle of inclusivity, experience decision-making processes characterised by fairness, openness, accessibility, unbiased consideration, equal opportunity for participation and clear feedback about the rationale for why certain decisions are taken.

Trust: Building relationships with impacted communities that are based on trust, supported through application of the Basic Principles, active listening, promise-keeping, allowance for adequate time to establish trusting relationships and provision of participatory safe spaces.

Transparency and accessibility:

Committing to open, accessible information provided in formats and languages that support access and inclusion to foster informed discussion of options, including impacts and benefits.

Meaningfulness: Delivering information, consultation and engagement that is of value and meaning to impacted communities, demonstrating awareness, respect and a commitment to genuine interactions.

Contextually aware: Elevating the purview of IA to consider local norms, values, culture, politics, religion, cumulative effects, socio-economic statuses, environmental circumstances and other factors beyond the policy/plan/project/program under assessment to recognise the full context within which community members live and through which social exclusion may occur.

Operating Principles

Early: All impacted stakeholders have the right to be well informed and involved in decisions affecting their lives

and communities. IA processes should start as early as possible, allowing appropriate time for the identification, relationship-building and involvement of stakeholders to support inclusion. IA that begins late, is delivered in accelerated or rushed timeframes or that does not accommodate communities' norms around time can result in exclusion.

Stakeholder analysis with a social inclusion lens: IA scoping should work to identify all groups within an affected community, with especial consideration given to those individuals and groups who are most likely to be overlooked, disadvantaged or excluded. Special care must be given in stakeholder analysis to understand which factors within a particular location are most likely to contribute to social exclusion, and efforts made to ensure those individuals and groups at risk of exclusion are proactively included. Stakeholder analysis with a social inclusion lens should also consider how current social, political, cultural, religious or other and community issues may be influencing who is excluded.

Fit-for-purpose: IA should be fit-for-purpose. This means the assessment should be properly scoped and designed to a scale, intensity and format that is sensitive to local communities. Assessments that are unnecessarily complicated or demanding of communities will result in reduced participation, especially among those individuals or groups who

normally face barriers to participation. Fit-for-purpose also means designing information, engagement and consultations in ways that allow all members of communities to participate equally. This may include provision of information in local languages or using different formats to ensure accessibility for individuals living with disability.

Resource allocation: The IA should be designed with appropriate resource allocation, including allocation of funds, time and human resources, appropriate to need. Under-resourcing can hinder the ability to include those individuals or groups most at risk of exclusion. Under-resourcing limits the time, support and options for including individuals and groups beyond those who are more likely and readily able to participate in IA.

Monitoring and evaluation with a social inclusion lens: The activities and implementation of the IA should be monitored and enforced with attention to social inclusion. Special attention should be given to stakeholder participation rates and rectifying actions taken if certain individuals or groups appear absent or excluded. Evaluations should consider not only what measures were taken in the IA to foster improved social inclusion but also the extent to which those efforts were effective. Lessons learned, including positive and negative results, should be recorded and shared to support improvement and sustainability of social inclusion in IA practice.

Glossary

Social inclusion: Ensuring that all groups and individuals in a society have equal opportunities for socio-economic participation and development.

Social exclusion: The situation in which individuals or groups cannot access or participate fully in social, cultural, political or economic life, usually due to characteristics or circumstances beyond their control.^x

References

¹ Barron, Patrick, Louise Cord, José Cuesta, Sabina Espinoza, and Michael Woolcock. *Social sustainability in development: Meeting the challenges of the 21st century*. World Bank Publications, 2023.

² Levitas, Ruth. "The concept and measurement of social exclusion."

In *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain*, pp. 123-160. Policy Press, 2006.

³ Cuesta, Jose; López-Nova, Borja; Niño-Zarazúa, Miguel. 2022. Social Exclusion: Concepts, Measurement, and a Global Estimate. Policy Research Working Papers;10097. © World Bank, Washington, DC.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10986/37594> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

⁴ Ben Haman, Omar, Kath Hulse, and Keith Jacobs. "Social inclusion and the role of housing." In *Handbook of Social Inclusion: Research and Practices in Health and Social Sciences*, pp. 1-20. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.

⁵ Stanley, Janet, John Stanley, Dianne Vella-Brodrick, and Graham Currie.

"The place of transport in facilitating social inclusion via the mediating

influence of social capital." *Research in Transportation Economics* 29, no. 1 (2010): 280-286.

⁶ Sauter, Daniel, and Marco Huettenmoser. "Liveable streets and social inclusion." *Urban Design International* 13, no. 2 (2008): 67-79.

⁷ Farrington, John, and Conor Farrington. "Rural accessibility, social inclusion and social justice: towards conceptualisation." *Journal of Transport geography* 13, no. 1 (2005): 1-12.

⁸ EBRD. Economic Inclusion Statement (2017-2021). This has now been replaced by the Equality of Opportunity Strategy (2021-2025).

⁹ COP27 Multilateral Development Banks Joint Statement. Available: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/2e5a22f70184ae365d9a260f7e68c4ff-0020012022/original/MDB-COP27-Joint-Statement-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁰ United Nations, 2016. The imperative of inclusive development. Available: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf>