

# Chapter 13

## Structural Exclusion and Just Development

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### ABSTRACT

*The work of feminists and other critics of global development has successfully demonstrated the persistent failure of development to promote just and equitable social change. The author examines a central cause of this failure, which she refers to as the problem of structural exclusion. Structural exclusion occurs where participation in decision-making is restricted to a narrow range of structural perspectives and interests. The author provides a systematic account of structural exclusion as an epistemic obstacle to just and effective development policy. Drawing on this account, she then propose a principle of structural pluralism, which requires that all relevant structural perspectives be included on equal terms and have equal right and effective opportunity to contribute to or influence deliberations at all levels of decision-making about the appropriate vision and policies of development.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite seemingly widespread claims about the success of development efforts, an examination of recent research reveals a much more complicated and much less optimistic picture. While it is true that progress has been made in many areas and for many persons, such progress has been limited in a number of respects. First, the benefits of development have tended to be concentrated among certain groups of relatively better-off persons, while progress has often bypassed the worst off groups.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the reality of development is one of uneven progress in which the needs and interests of the most vulnerable tend to be overlooked or under addressed. Second, where policy has improved the lives and well-being of the worst off, such improvements have tended to be superficial, leaving intact the systems of power and unequal structural relations that systematically and unequally constrain their choices and actions. Feminist scholars and other critics of mainstream development have successfully demonstrated myriad ways in which development efforts not only fail to challenge structural inequalities and injustice, but can often function to reinforce them. Yet, despite recognition of these problems and widespread calls for

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the integration of equity and structural justice concerns into policy, in 2015, after more than 60 years, global development policies continue to systematically and disproportionately favor certain, relatively privileged, groups over and even at the expense of others—namely, the world's worst-off populations.

This paper will examine a central cause of development's failures—namely, the exclusionary decision-making processes by which mainstream policies are produced and implemented. I refer to this as the problem of *structural exclusion*, which occurs when participation in decision-making is restricted to a narrow range of similarly situated persons. The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic account of structural exclusion as an epistemic obstacle to just development, which functions to limit the potential for decision-making procedures to produce policies that are both just and effective.<sup>2</sup> To be clear, I do not purport to break new ground by pointing out the epistemic costs of exclusionary decision-making. Such concerns have received extensive attention in feminist scholarship, particularly among feminist epistemologists, philosophers of science, and political philosophers. The epistemic significance of participation has also been examined in scholarship on development, particularly in work on participatory development. However, such discussions and analyses have tended to be limited—for instance, focusing on the inclusion or exclusion of *specific* groups, in *specific* contexts, or with regard to *particular* projects or issue areas. What is missing from this literature is a broader, more *systematic* account of the epistemic significance of participation, particularly as regards participation of structural social groups.

My aim in this paper is to make progress toward filling this gap. In offering an account of structural exclusion as a general epistemic obstacle, I hope to offer important insight into the persistent structural failures of mainstream development policy. I begin by offering a brief account of the conception of just development that underlies my analysis of the epistemic reliability of mainstream decision-making. Using this standard, I contend that dominant decision-making procedures are epistemically unreliable—that is, they lack the potential for producing just and effective policies. This, I argue, is, at least in part, due to the exclusionary nature of such procedures, which tend to restrict participation to a narrow range of structural perspective and interests. I lay out this argument in section three where I offer a systematic account of the problem of structural exclusion. In the final section I offer recommendations for moving forward. More specifically, I recommend a principle of structural pluralism, which calls for decision-making procedures to meet three conditions: structural diversity, substantive equality, and inclusive communication.

## **2. A NORMATIVE STANDARD OF JUST DEVELOPMENT**

My project is motivated by a recognition of the failures of mainstream development policy to foster just and effective social change. At the heart of this claim is a particular understanding of just development, which is derived from the UNDP's Human Development (HD) Paradigm. This conception of just development serves two important roles: First, it constitutes a normative ideal of just development, which is to serve as a guide for policy-makers. Second, and most importantly for this paper, it represents a standard against which to evaluate development policies, as well as the procedures by which they were produced. My concern here is primarily with the latter role, which is to serve as a standard for judging the epistemic reliability of dominant decision-making procedures. It is by appeal to this standard of just development, that I claim such procedures are unreliable—that is, they lack the potential to produce

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