

## **Social exclusion: A concept for the World Summit for Social Development**

The World Summit for Social Development (the Social Summit), organized by the United Nations, is to take place next March in Copenhagen. Finance and trade are going global and are overriding social issues, which, for the most part, remain confined within national boundaries. This has produced an imbalance in the distribution of the benefits of growth and labour, a decline in the power of States to provide for social protection and redistribution, and uncertainty as to the impact of tripartite negotiations or other initiatives undertaken by national social actors. Indeed, the mechanisms that are supposed to alleviate poverty and promote social justice in the world are being called into question. The holding of the Summit is therefore a matter of necessity. Its three major themes are poverty, unemployment and social integration. In a recent issue, we presented the views of the ILO on employment,<sup>2</sup> in anticipation of the Summit. This perspective focuses on another contribution to the debate, namely that made by the International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in which the concept of social exclusion is used to examine the struggle against poverty and for social integration (see box 1).

### **Overcoming social exclusion**

The Institute's decision to approach social integration and the fight against poverty in terms of exclusion stemmed from the advantages this concept seemed to offer. Indeed, it had implicit moral content, it presupposed the identification of "target" groups and it offered a comprehensive theoretical framework for global policy development and evaluation. However, it also raised two major questions that had to be answered. First, given the European (if not exclusively French) origin of the concept, could it be applied universally or, at least, be transposed into contexts of mass poverty and acute social inequalities? And second, paradoxically, given the variety of its possible interpretations, was there not a risk that the debate would get interminably bogged down in futile semantic issues?

Accordingly, the Institute combined theoretical research, empirical observation and aids to decision-making: (i) a theoretical study of the concept;<sup>3</sup> (ii) bibliographical analyses of poverty, deprivation, labour market dysfunctions and other questions relating to social exclusion, one of the objects of which was to analyse the validity of the concept in different regions and to see whether or not it was applied; (iii) national case-studies

---

<sup>2</sup> "Towards full employment: An ILO view", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 133, 1994, No. 3, pp. 401-407.

<sup>3</sup> See the article by H. Silver in this issue of the *Review*.

**Box 1.****Overcoming social exclusion:  
Abstract of the Institute's contribution to the Social Summit\***

The three issues at the heart of the Social Summit – poverty, unemployment and social integration – can all be understood in terms of social exclusion. Poverty involves exclusion from basic goods and services; unemployment is a symptom of exclusion from the labour market; and social integration and social exclusion are two sides of the same coin.

Over the past few years, political decision-makers and other social actors have become increasingly interested in means of preventing or eliminating social exclusion. Although the issue first arose in Europe, it is equally disturbing elsewhere. There are many types of exclusion: from goods and services, public or private; from labour markets or from jobs with satisfactory protection and working conditions; from land or other assets; and even from human rights, such as the right to organize and the right to security, dignity and identity. Exclusion encompasses most aspects of poverty, but also broader issues associated with participation in society and in the development process. Groups which are widely found to be vulnerable include ethnic, religious or cultural minorities; the handicapped; groups defined by sex or age; the illiterate and the underskilled. Particular forms of exclusion (from employment, from land or from housing) tend to reinforce each other and lead to a cumulative handicap.

Looking at these issues in terms of exclusion makes it easier to understand the significance of the various dimensions of deprivation, while focusing on the mechanisms responsible for exclusion, identifying the social actors involved in the process of integration and exclusion, and demonstrating how the forms of exclusion depend on the dominant model of social integration. Above all, this approach opens up new perspectives in respect of the policies to be applied. These fall into four categories according to the level at which intervention occurs: the global or international level, which is the source of many manifestations of exclusion; the national level, where access to markets and institutions is of vital importance; the local level, where coalitions between the different actors should help them to work more effectively; and, finally, the level of the excluded themselves, who should not merely be the targets of policies, but also agents of their own integration.

The Social Summit should address these issues. It should promote a coordinated attack on exclusion, encourage the systematic collection of information, identify the different levels at which intervention is possible, and highlight the essential role to be played, not only by the State but also by the many social agents and actors, in the design of the policies to be implemented. Above all, the Social Summit should reaffirm that action against exclusion lies at the heart of socially responsible growth.

\* ILS/UNDP: *Overcoming social exclusion: A contribution to the World Summit for Social Development* (Geneva, ILS, 1994).

conducted to the same end;<sup>4</sup> (iv) discussion of the material thus collected during regional and international seminars; and (v) publication of findings, for use at the Social Summit and in subsequent ILO work. The fourth and fifth phases are in progress at the time of writing, but a number of conclusions can already be drawn from this work.<sup>5</sup>

### An exportable concept?

Having first appeared in France (see box 2), the concept of social exclusion gained currency in various neighbouring countries and was eventually endorsed by the European institutions. Indeed, it seems to correspond closely to realities prevailing in the region. The question therefore arises: since "exclusion" presupposes an earlier stage of "inclusion" – in this case, in the labour market and in the Welfare State, both of which are now in crisis – what meaning can the concept have outside such a context? There are also *a priori* exclusions stemming from the impossibility of enjoying certain rights, goods or services. The aforementioned bibliographical studies on Africa, South and South-East Asia, the Arab world and Latin America provide some answers, of which the following is a brief survey.

The concept of exclusion is rarely used in Asia,<sup>6</sup> for the reason mentioned above, though it can apply to a number of specific situations. In some countries, the most flagrant occur where women are deprived of their legal rights for cultural or even institutional reasons. Exclusion from the land is increasing and exacerbating the poverty of dependent landless peasants or families whose small plot provides no more than a precarious subsistence. The difficulty or impossibility of obtaining credits excludes many people from remunerative activities and condemns them to poverty. Attempts at remedial action come up against several difficulties: reaching target groups, understanding the functioning and segmentation of labour markets, getting round power structures that obstruct the implementation of certain programmes, and discerning the complex interaction of the different factors involved in exclusion.

The same preliminary observations can be made about Africa,<sup>7</sup> where a number of situations can also be interpreted in terms of exclusion. The

---

<sup>4</sup> See the articles by P. Lee and P. Townsend, N. Tchernina, and I. Yépez del Castillo in this issue of the *Review*.

<sup>5</sup> The findings presented here are taken from B. Figueiredo: *Main features and findings from the ILS/UNDP Social Exclusion Project* (Geneva, ILS, 1994), mimeographed paper, and from ILS/UNDP: *Overcoming social exclusion: A contribution to the World Summit for Social Development* (Geneva, ILS, 1994). See also G. Rogers: *Overcoming social exclusion: Livelihood and rights in economic and social development* (Geneva, ILS, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> A. de Haan: *Poverty, exclusion and inclusion: Bibliographical review on social exclusion in South Asia prepared for the International Labour Office* (Geneva, ILS, 1994), mimeographed paper.

<sup>7</sup> C. Gore: *Social exclusion and Africa South of the Sahara: A review of the literature* (Geneva, ILS, 1994).

**Box 2.*****Exclusion, the focus of public debate in France***

The impressive number of publications on social exclusion shows the importance attached to this concept, as an intolerable symptom of the crisis besetting French society. This is reflected in M. Gaudier's bibliographical study (*Poverty, inequality, exclusion: New approaches to theory and practice*, Geneva, ILS, 1993, Bibliographical Series No. 17) and in the articles by I. Yépez del Castillo and H. Silver in this issue of the *Review*.

The French daily *Le Monde* is one of the publications best reflecting the on-going debate. On 12 October 1994 it ran a feature on "The exclusion in question" and asked: "Do we want to organize a non-working society for the 'unemployable' or go in search of a different social dynamic?" In support of the second alternative, it quoted examples of an economy of solidarity, enterprises that employ first-time jobseekers, financial facilities for enterprises that take on unemployed workers, etc. Similarly, *Economie et humanisme* (Lyons, Mar. 1994, No. 328) highlighted local experiments in fighting exclusion and in organizing population groups. The examples range from rural communities and subsidized suburban housing estates in France to the streets of Lomé in Togo. The prospective monthly *Futuribles* (Paris, Feb. 1994, No. 184) carried a special survey entitled "Arguments for and against a minimum income, universal allowances and a subsistence income", with articles by the authors most deeply involved in this debate, which is seen as a counterpart to the parallel debate on work-sharing. Published jointly by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Urban Affairs and by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training, the *Revue française des affaires sociales* (Paris, Apr.-May 1994, No. 2) discussed "Exclusion and its remedies". Some ten articles review concepts and situations associated with the notion of exclusion: young Muslims in underprivileged neighbourhoods, cultural and social activities, isolation, drugs, evaluation of policies against social exclusion, minimum income in Europe, health among recipients of the *revenu minimum d'insertion* (RMI, minimum income for social integration), integration through economic activity, and institutional tools. This overview alone illustrates the variety of interpretations to which the concepts of exclusion and integration lend themselves. Finally, *Raison présente* (Paris, Apr.-June 1994, No. 110) discusses the issue in terms of citizenship, training and education, reflecting also upon the transmission of skills within enterprises.

increasing scarcity of means of livelihood and of land cannot be attributed to population growth alone. It is also due to the contraction of employment opportunities, outside the informal sector at least. Migration from rural areas leads to urban poverty. In both rural and urban areas there is exclusion from remunerative activity, and even from means of livelihood. The author quotes an analysis which refers to "social goods", thus defined because possession or use of them is a condition of access to a wide range of other

goods. A "social good" may be land, employment, education, etc. In certain situations the monopoly over "social goods" and over state power, and the struggle for this monopoly, are reflected in the exclusion of ethnic groups from the use of these goods to which they are entitled by law. The author concludes: "The numbers of people who have no land, no means to work it productively, no remunerative jobs, and no effective political representation, will increase. Both the absolute numbers, and the proportion of the total population, who are very poor will increase as a result of these exclusions."

In the Arab countries,<sup>8</sup> the concept of exclusion, associated with that of marginality, seems more familiar. Historical studies, dating back to the nineteenth century, have been conducted there on certain marginal ethnic, social or occupational groups. In modern works, social exclusion is discussed in relation to development and in terms of the concern that all should contribute to and benefit from it. Exclusion is no longer considered "as a personal defect or a handicap inherited by the individual". An initial link is made between exclusion and illiteracy: three-quarters (on average) of the unemployed excluded from the labour market are illiterate. The same applies to 40 to 66 per cent of the women excluded from the social fabric and from the world of work, and to a large number of parents whose children have difficulties integrating at school. In these countries, which are experiencing the world's highest population growth rates, primary schools cannot absorb all the children of an age to attend them. Other factors of exclusion mentioned are unemployment, discrimination against women and both internal and external economic inequalities.

In Latin America,<sup>9</sup> the notion of social exclusion has not been widely used in social literature, except as a descriptive term lacking in theoretical content. Poverty and deprivation are seen as the result of a specific pattern of the social division of labour. The notion of social exclusion would need to have a stronger strategic content for it to be helpful as a concept expressing a variety of phenomena – poverty, deprivation, lack of access to goods, services and assets, precariousness of social rights. Perhaps this is a way of saying that its opposite, social integration, is a more useful concept.

### Practical advantages

Despite the difficulties presented by the universal use of the concept of social exclusion, it does have some advantages when it comes to action. It facilitates multidisciplinary work by linking together material deprivation and social rights; by attributing deprivations and persistent poverty not only to lack of access to goods and services, but also to exclusion from security,

---

<sup>8</sup> M. Bédoui: *Bibliographie de l'exclusion dans les pays arabes du Maghreb et du Machreq (Afrique du Nord et Moyen-Orient)* (Geneva, IILS, 1994), mimeographed paper.

<sup>9</sup> V.E. Faria: *Social exclusion in Latin America: An annotated bibliography* (Geneva, IILS, 1994).

from justice, from political representation and from citizenship. Moreover, "inclusion" and "exclusion" are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they may feed on one another. For instance, premature labour market entry – as in the case of child labour – is itself the result of social exclusion and may lead to exclusion from education, from vocational training, from a subsequent occupation, and thus perpetuate exclusion from one generation to the next. The concept also makes it possible to take into account subjective or symbolic aspects, such as the feelings of exclusion or stigmatization of specific population groups.

The second advantage that the Institute sees in the term "exclusion" is that it describes a process rather than a state, it exposes the mechanisms that generate poverty and deprivation, and thus brings out the difference between two forms of exclusion. One is permanent and affects groups that live on the margins of the mainstream of social activity; the other is fluctuating and depends on the operation of social forces that lead individuals from precariousness to vulnerability, dependence or marginality. Particular patterns of development have exclusion built into them. This happens where economic growth is monopolized by specific groups or concentrated in specific regions: the gains are captured by national or international élites, and the need for cheap and docile labour leads to the suppression of rights. Identification of the mechanisms of exclusion leads to identification of its agents: public authorities, enterprises, the armed forces, churches, élites, academics or international organizations can be agents of exclusion or of integration. The distinctions between permanent and temporary exclusion, and between the mechanisms and agents responsible for it, are essential to a correct balance in the policies to be pursued.

### **Designing a policy against exclusion**

Policies relating to social exclusion may be passive or active. A passive policy would limit the harmful effects of economic development by providing safety nets or assistance for social groups left behind by economic growth. An active policy would involve the promotion of social cohesion and a fair distribution of the benefits of development, which implies integrating the fight against exclusion into economic strategy. At national level, overcoming social exclusion calls for intervention against exclusion from the labour market, from land, from safe jobs, from decent wages, from public services (health, education, public safety, justice), from social protection and from basic rights. The Institute identifies the most fundamental issues in this respect: (i) control of market mechanisms; (ii) development of coalitions between the various actors capable of promoting integration; (iii) balance between active and passive policies; (iv) identification of dualistic or unbalanced growth patterns; and (v) design of new institutions for social policy when the old institutions collapse.

At international and regional levels, the key issues are (i) migration; (ii) capital mobility, which places pressure on social protection and tends to exclude rural populations from land; and (iii) international agreements and charters guaranteeing livelihood and basic rights through obligatory contributions and enforcement mechanisms. The Institute notes the extent to which the work of the ILO involves action against exclusion in many fields, including training, labour markets, employment creation, the informal sector, worker representation, labour legislation, conditions of work, child labour, discrimination, social security and disabled workers.

### **Representation of excluded groups**

Apart from the advantages mentioned above, the analysis of exclusion points to the linkage between deprivation and injustice, on the one hand, and the waste of resources, on the other. It also stimulates reflection on inequality, not as an abstract theoretical concept, but in terms of its practical implications for people's lives. If widespread poverty in the Third World is assumed to be the result of low productivity alone, the relevance of the concept in this context remains to be established. But if development were conceived as a process based on participatory institutions and a general sharing of benefits, the concept's relevance would no longer be in doubt. The analysis of exclusion shows that while there is as yet no evidence of the social benefits expected to accrue automatically for the liberal model, there are mechanisms that exclude many groups from the market itself and from public goods and services. This observation suggests that the role of the State should be reconsidered. An alternative to disengagement and passive, compensatory policies would be to design proactive social policies based on an understanding of the mechanisms of exclusion. However, the State is divided between the interests of excluded groups and those of the groups on which it depends more directly. Institutions are therefore required to provide excluded groups with effective representation, autonomy and influence in order to work out a "social project" based on compromise or consensus in society as a whole.

### **Service sector employment and the productivity challenge**

With the recent completion of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and especially the new General Agreement on Trade in Services, multilateral trade liberalization is being extended to major tertiary industries, such as business services, communications, distribution and financial services. The GATT negotiators have also agreed to hold further talks on the "movement of natural persons", i.e. people moving temporarily abroad to provide services. In any event, "rapid technological advance and the development of new services (such as multimedia) are speeding up liberalization almost