

GENDER AND DIVERSITY AS CROSS CUTTING THEMES

An analysis of approaches to diversity across in-depth case studies of social innovation. Diversity and inclusion are critical to achieving many of the UN millenium goals – including poverty alleviation, education and employment – and so it is not surprising that they appear as cross cutting themes in SI-DRIVE social innovation cases. Our analysis suggests, however, that they seldom address the systemic roots of exclusion, and are thus unlikely to result in systemic change.

Wendy Cukier

INTRODUCTION

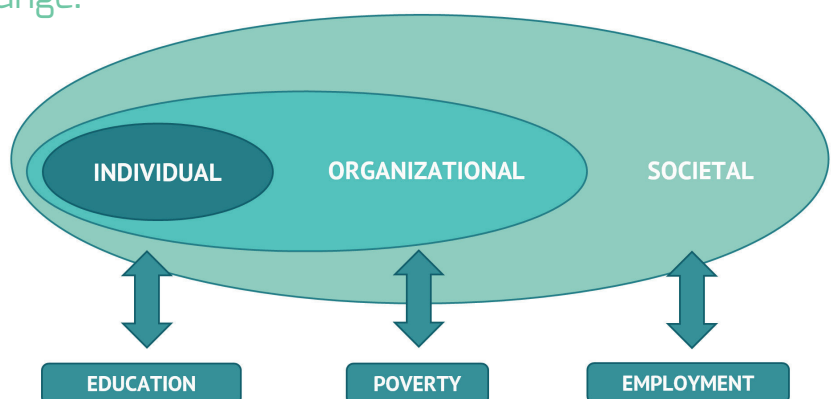
Key to the UN sustainable development goals is a commitment to human rights and equity. While definitions of diversity are often context specific and multidimensional, we understand dimensions to include gender, race/migrant status, disability, indigenity, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity and age. There is growing evidence that diversity and inclusion are linked to positive outcomes not just at the individual level, but also, for organizations and societies [1][2]. There is also evidence that the economic, social and political exclusion of groups defined by demographic characteristics underpin many pressing global issues, including poverty, health, and violence. This snapshot reviewed 82 in-depth case studies of social innovation

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initiatives, and finds that gender, migrant status and disability serve as prominent cross-cutting themes, while race, ethnicity and aboriginal status are less frequently noted. We find that marginalized social groups are typically framed as target populations for social innovation initiatives, rather than as potential agents of change. Nor do there tend to be discussions of the systemic barriers which prompt their marginalization (sexism, racism, etc.), and consequently they have limited potential to generate systemic change.

DIVERSITY ACROSS CONTEXTS

Definitions of diversity terms are fluid, varying across time and regions. Gender has traditionally been based on the male/female dichotomy, but there has been an acceptance that the concept, along with sexual orientation, is more complex and multi-dimensional. Understandings of race, ethnicity, and migrants also vary considerably. In Europe, for example, there is resistance to discussions of race, rooted in part on the legacy of WWII. In other countries, “migrants” constitute a designated group, and are a racialized “other.” Official and popular understandings of disability also vary greatly, with some nations deeming it a narrow range of physical/intellectual impairments, while others conceive it as encompassing mental health and addictions. Indigenous people also garner more attention in some countries than others. Though commonly used, there is growing recognition that categorizations of individuals according to demographic markers are problematic, and that



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intersectional effects (e.g. race, class, gender) produce consequential variations in the lived experiences of what are often erroneously perceived as “homogenous” groups (e.g. Indigenous Peoples, African Americans).

WHY DIVERSITY MATTERS?

Women are essential for local, national and global development. Across developing countries, studies show that investing in women’s education produces socio-economic benefits [3]. In industrialized economies, studies have linked women’s leadership to corporate performance [4]. Research also finds that immigration and cultural diversity more broadly are positively correlated with regional development and economic prosperity [5].

Despite these documented benefits of diversity, complex social structures perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Such structures are constituted by barriers at the societal (e.g. legislation, norms and stereotypes, structure of women’s work); organizational (e.g. policies and practices and informal networks, overt discrimination and unconscious bias) and individual level (e.g. attitudes, skills, behaviors). Significant variation across nations and organizations are instructive in highlighting the sort of barriers marginalized groups faced. Moreover, a review of existing indices used to benchmark diversity and inclusivity can help to inform impact assessments of social innovation initiatives.

Increasingly, we see empirical efforts have been made to study and benchmark social inclusion at the macro level. For example, the Gender Inequality Index produced by the United Nations incorporates measures of women’s reproductive health, government representation (via parliamentary seats), educational attainment and labor market participation. The Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD) considers discriminatory family codes, laws which limit women’s control over their bodies, civil liberties and ownership rights. The Gender Equality Index (European Union) accounts for income, health, and violence against women. The Gender Empowerment Index (UN) includes factors like participation in high-paying positions with economic power and female share of income.

The Migrant Integration Policy Index measures access to institutions like education, health, and the labor market, along with family reunion policies, and pathways to nationality and permanent residence. The Migrant Integration Statistic by Eurostat is similar and The European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index produced by the British Council also considers anti-discrimination, family reunion and naturalization policies. Broader indices of inclusion, such as the Global Inclusiveness Index (Hass Institute, UC Berkeley) focus on the occurrence of group-specific violence (e.g. ethnic, race, religion, sexual orientation), political representation of marginalized groups, income inequality, and anti-discrimination laws.

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In high-income countries, businesses and non-profits have begun to benchmark diversity and inclusion at the organizational level. Forbes Magazine, for example, publishes a ranking of corporations based on measures of age, country of birth, disability, and ethnicity. The Lucerne School of Business publishes another holistic diversity index for major Swiss organizations with at least 250 people, taking into account age, gender, nationality, religion and health. The Disability Equality Index, produced by the American Association of People with Disabilities and the U.S. Business and Leadership Network, uses survey data on organizational culture, employment practices and support services to rank companies with respect to their treatment of disabled employees. And there are many other variations. At the individual level, Project Implicit (Harvard University) has created a widely used test, with multiple variants, which assesses attitudes and unconscious bias. These indices can inform evaluations of the impact of social innovation initiatives and the logic models to drive systems change.

DIVERSITY & SI DRIVE INITIATIVES

The 1005 initiatives documented by SI-DRIVE creatively address a plethora of social problems across several domains (see article “Social Innovation on the Rise - Results of the first Global Mapping). In-depth case studies of 82 of these conducted by SI-DRIVE were examined, revealing that roughly a third (31.7%) explicitly referenced gender (including a variety of derivatives, e.g. “girls”, “woman”, “female”), and smaller groups referenced “migrant status” (18.3%), disability (14.6%), aboriginal status (4.9%) or race/ethnicity (3.7%).

GENDER

Across case studies, it was recognized that gender shaped the experiences of individuals with poverty, or with institutions such as schools or the labor market. Several initiatives sought to help women overcome specific barriers. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Lifelong Learning Centre (Turkey) and Servicios Sociales Integrados cooperative (Spain), provided women with skills training to facilitate workplace participation. Mama Works in Russia also helped women by providing flexible work arrangements and financing young mothers’ business projects. The Dignity and Design initiative in India similarly provided sewing machines and small scale garment production equipment for 21,225 marginalized people (of which more than 90%

	Gender	Migrant	Disability	Race/ Ethnicity	Aboriginal People
Total Mentions	350	95	47	4	4
Unique Case Studies	26 (31.7%)	15 (18.3%)	12 (14.6%)	3 (3.7%)	4 (4.9%)

Note: “Total” mentions refers to the raw number of times words associated with theme appeared across all case studies.

Themes across SI-DRIVE Case Studies (82 Total)

are women), who previously survived by scavenging. The Iss mich (Eat me!) project, offered flexible employment to young mothers lacking education and skills in catering and delivery services in Germany. Meanwhile, Strengthening Popular Finances (Ecuador) facilitated access to commercial bank credit for rural women, empowering them to potentially start their own business or make other meaningful purchases.

Each of the abovementioned initiatives sought to facilitate labor market entry, through education, equipment or capital, while leaving the underlying social structures prompting the absence of such resources unaddressed. Seldom were women depicted as agents of change. For example, Sweden’s Qvinnovindar, a women’s only wind energy cooperative, strove for sustainability through alternative energy. The She Taxi initiative in Kerala, India, employed female drivers to provide safe travel for women at high risk of sexual violence, thereby also enhancing their workforce participation, but also, their daily life.

MIGRANTS

Immigrants and refugees were mentioned across nearly a fifth (18.3%) of case studies, especially in relation to poverty reduction (38.5%) and education (38.9%). Several programs addressed the needs of migrants in traditional ways, such as through meeting their unfulfilled educational needs. PROSA (Austria), for example, aims to provide access to education for asylum seekers who are not yet eligible for public education. The Talent Scout program (Germany) similarly aims to provide flexible and accessible education, including basic language classes, technical and skills-based education, to marginalized groups, including refugees. Lernhaus (Austria), an institution providing free tutoring, though not specifically targeting migrants, also services a significant share of children from this community. The Learning Circles (Colombia) program also emerged to promote the educational attainment among children from vulnerable groups, including those from displaced communities. A UNESCO evaluation found that Learning Circle students scored higher in math and language tests than their conventional school counterparts. However, no comparably rigorous efforts to evaluate the impact of like initiatives were reported.

Other initiatives sought to provide support for the lesser recognized needs of migrant communities. For instance, the Luggage Hands-Free program in France provides storage lockers for homeless people, and particularly migrants, who face stigmatization as they cart their belongings with them throughout the day.

A few also recognized the agency and assets of immigrants and opportunities for mutual benefit. The Taste of Home (Croatia) initiative, for example, provides migrants with the opportunity to introduce their hosts (via cuisine) to the culture and customs of their countries of origins, building mutual understanding. The Scattered Hospitality (Italy) also advanced integration of refugees by matching them with a host family with whom they stayed with from six months to a year, building social networks, knowledge of their new communities, and enhancing mutual understanding of difference. This asset-based approach, however, was far from the norm.

DISABILITY

Roughly one in seven (14.6%) in-depth case studies cited individuals with disabilities. Their referencing was most common in case studies associated with mobility (33.3%) and education (22.2%). Again, social innovation initiatives typically aimed to ameliorate the problems this group faced, rather than to empower them. The Whizz-Kidz, a charity in the UK, coordinates with multiple actors, providing pro-bono support across the different stages of the wheel chair acquisition process. Similarly, LIFEtool GmbH (Austria) is dedicated to supporting people with physical handicaps, learning disabilities or other impairments through computer technology that scans and translates eye movements into icon-based, spoken or written forms of communication. Similarly, JAKOM is an assistive technology developed in Croatia, which aims to improve the communication abilities of autistic persons with communicational impairments. In certain cases, serving people with disabilities was merely an aspect of the practice field recognized by initiatives. The SEKEM foundation, for instance, was said to operate, among other programs, a school that catered specifically to disadvantaged social groups, including individuals with disabilities. We found no examples which explored mutual benefit or an asset based approach.

DISCUSSION

Many of the examined cases offered useful strategies for ameliorating social problems which have been left unresolved by governments and conventional economic markets. While there was some evidence that initiatives were successful on a small scale, there was only limited evidence of scalability. There was also little evidence of initiatives tackling structural and systemic barriers to inclusion. Most of the discussions on women, migrants and persons with disabilities, with few noted exceptions,

revolve around their marginalization and exclusion, with very little focus on how these groups can serve as assets for their communities. We posit that existing indices of diversity and inclusivity could inform future efforts to systematically evaluate the impact of social innovation initiatives. In addition, we believe there is room to critically assess the potential shape of initiatives that target broader systemic barriers currently hampering social inclusion, rather than addressing their manifestations in a piecemeal fashion.

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