Reducing Public Service Inequities for Disadvantaged Populations in the Global South

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Abstract

Social inequalities are intensifying globally and failure to address the drivers of social exclusion, even during periods of rapid economic growth, has led to widening divisions between rich and poor and between diverse ethnic, religious and other social groups, which are linked to civil unrest, conflict and humanitarian crisis. Social relations as embedded in the formal institutions of society are a mechanism through which social exclusion operates. The role of public service systems such as healthcare, education and local government in reducing exclusion is, therefore, key - participation in institutional governance by disadvantaged groups is considered an essential element of social inclusion at city level. Addressing these challenges requires negotiation of political and social contexts, particularly as competition for work and resources is a key driver of social conflict. We have conducted seven pilot projects exploring public service inequities and how to reduce these, involving co-production work with a wide range of stakeholders in Asian and African contexts. These projects have identified how public service inequities are created and maintained through, for example, unfair resource allocation, poor quality or non-existent data and the absence of excluded groups in decision-making that affects their lives. Studies have also explored the potential for sustainable interventions at institution, policy and societal levels that could target the multiple drivers of exclusion for disadvantaged populations in diverse contexts. Key factors for the development of such interventions are equitable involvement of excluded communities, stakeholder capacity building and the development of equity-focused data systems and policies.