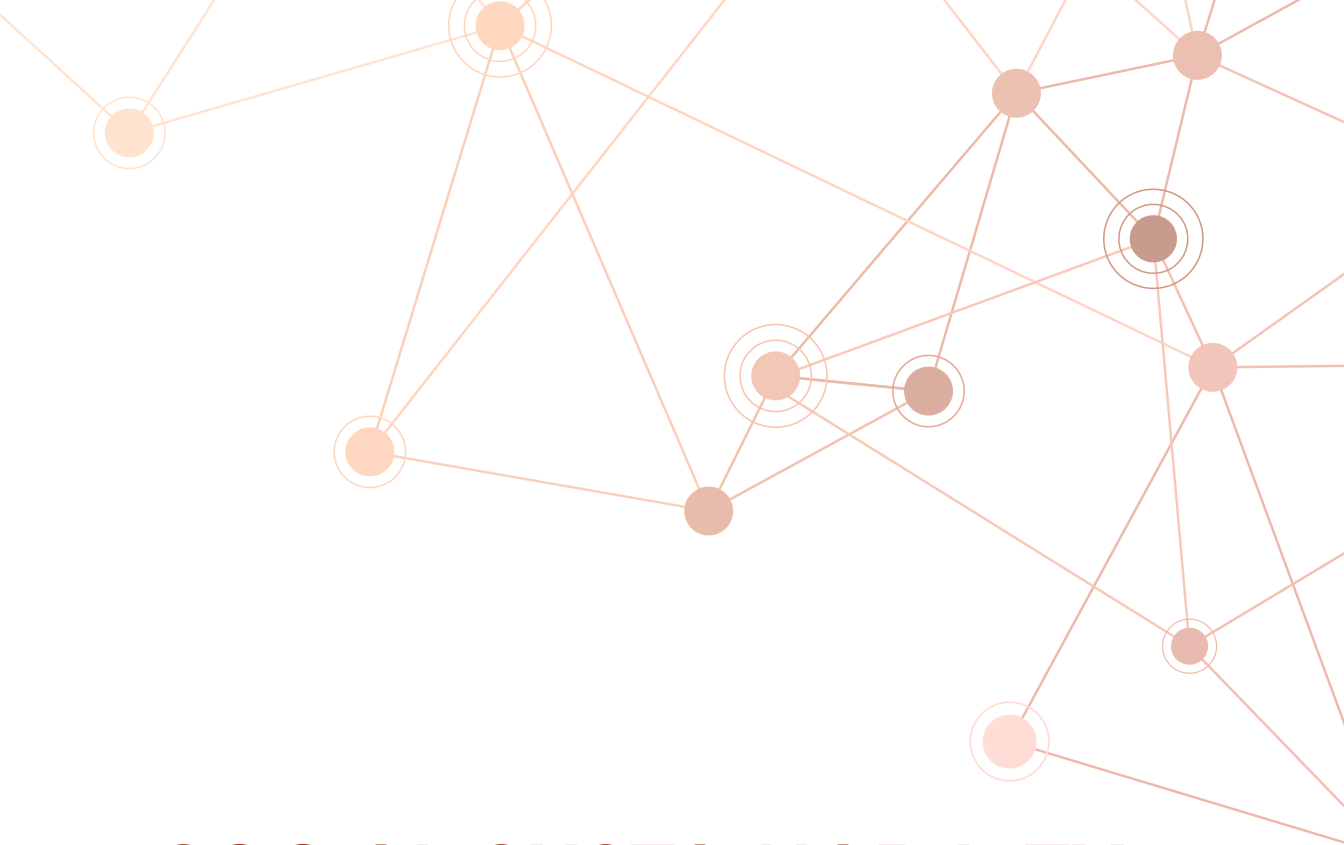




SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN DEVELOPMENT

MEETING THE CHALLENGES
OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Patrick Barron, Louise Cord, José Cuesta,
Sabina A. Espinoza, Greg Larson, and
Michael Woolcock



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NEW FRONTIERS OF SOCIAL POLICY

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Foreword

Today's global community enjoys greater access to education, health care, gainful employment, financial services, infrastructure, and basic services than its forebears. Yet, the gains remain fragile and incomplete. The recent COVID-19 pandemic dealt the biggest setback to global poverty in decades, showing how fragile progress is. Climate shocks and conflict among the world's biggest food producers have hindered a swift recovery. To achieve the ambitions laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), much more needs to be done to ensure that the gains achieved to date become sustainable—particularly for those at greatest risk of marginalization and exclusion.

For this to happen, however, progress must be consolidated and today's most pressing global challenges—including climate change, pandemics, threats to biodiversity, displacement and migration, and conflict—must be urgently addressed. Far too many countries and far too many poor people all over the world have already experienced severe “reversals of fortune” in recent years. Moreover, achieving sustainable development for all societies involves tackling complex challenges over many years in ways that are often highly contentious and ultimately disruptive. In poor and rich countries alike, the development journey always brings about difficult transitions: urbanization can erode rural communities and upend traditional ways of life; technology can render workers' hard-won skills obsolete; changing norms and values can alter socioeconomic interactions, unsettling communities; and social media can widen divides across and within societies, undermining their ability to tackle challenges collectively.

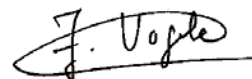
These dynamics—and many more in the story of development—illustrate the vital importance of social sustainability to meet the SDGs and build the coalitions and programs to tackle global challenges. Over the last quarter century, the concept of “sustainability” has been frequently invoked, studied, and debated in the context of economic and environmental matters—to make inclusive economic growth *sustainable*, for example, or to ensure that natural resources are used *sustainably*. While there have also been many calls for development to be

socially sustainable, there is much less consensus over what social sustainability means in theory or practice, much less how it can or should be achieved.

What is uniquely important about the social components of sustainability? How can all societies—and development, in particular—promote social sustainability? Grounded in empirical findings, this book articulates a framework to begin answering these questions—and offers key principles and practical examples to guide policy makers, implementers, and community leaders seeking constructive ways to navigate development in ways that are socially sustainable.

A key message of the book is that the people, policies, and processes driving development need to be inclusive and legitimate, enabling communities to advance while remaining (or becoming more) cohesive and resilient in the face of development's challenges. Social sustainability is undermined when development strategies and country conditions exclude large shares of the population, leave them vulnerable to exogenous shocks, and limit the voice and mechanisms people need to influence policies and programs.

Managing these and the many other difficult trade-offs that development entails requires a collective effort to better understand and promote social sustainability. Meeting the challenges of the 21st century may involve more than this effort, but it will be impossible without it.



Juergen Voegelé
Vice President, Sustainable Development
The World Bank



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Sabina A. Espinoza is a Social Development Specialist in the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Global Unit at the World Bank. She leads research and provides project support to foster the inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion or discrimination. She cowrote the World Bank's flagship report on social inclusion (*Inclusion Matters*) and is coauthor of *Inclusion Matters in Africa* (World Bank) and "Economic and Social Inclusion in Development" in *Untapped Power* (Oxford University Press). Espinoza has worked for the United Nations Global Compact and the European Parliament. In Brussels, she worked for a network of nongovernmental organizations supporting migrants' rights across Europe. Previously, she was a postgraduate teaching assistant at the School of Public Policy at University College London. Espinoza holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy, politics, and economics from the University of Oxford and a master's degree and PhD in political science from University College London.

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Michael Woolcock is Lead Social Scientist in the World Bank's Development Research Group, where he has worked since 1998; for 17 of these years, he has also taught part time at the Harvard Kennedy School. His current research focuses on strategies for enhancing state capability for implementation, on transformations in local social institutions during the development process, and on the use of mixed methods to assess the effectiveness of "complex" interventions.

In addition to more than 100 journal articles and book chapters, Woolcock is the author or coeditor of 13 books, including *Contesting Development: Participatory Projects and Local Conflict Dynamics in Indonesia*, with Patrick Barron and Rachael Diprose (Yale University Press), which was a corecipient of the 2012 best book prize by the American Sociological Association's section on international development; *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action*, with Matt Andrews and Lant Pritchett (Oxford University Press); and was colead, with Samuel Freije-Rodríguez, of the biennial *Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report 2020: Reversals of Fortune* (World Bank). Most recently, he coedited three scholarly volumes on case studies, popular culture, and the future of multilateralism and a book for broader audiences on the role of development in both intensifying and (potentially) resolving humanity's greatest challenges. An Australian national, Woolcock has a PhD in comparative historical sociology from Brown University.



Main Messages

1. Current crises—COVID-19, climate change, rising levels of conflict, and a global slowdown—are exacerbating deep-rooted inequities, with intense social repercussions ranging from polarization and declining levels of trust to social unrest.
2. Ensuring sustainable development and poverty reduction will require greater attention to *social sustainability* in addition to economic and environmental sustainability.
3. Social sustainability increases when more people feel part of the development process and believe that they and their descendants will benefit from it.
4. Communities and societies that are more socially sustainable are more willing and able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in ways perceived to be legitimate and fair so that all people may thrive over time.
5. Social sustainability has four key components: social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and *process legitimacy*—the extent to which a community or society accepts who has authority, what goals they pursue, and how policies and programs get implemented.
6. Key priorities to foster social sustainability include
 - understanding the policy arena by identifying the key stakeholders, their objectives, and prevailing norms and values;
 - fostering space in the policy arena for all to provide input and voice concerns, especially those at risk of exclusion; and
 - engaging for the long haul: change can be slow, but staying engaged, deepening relationships, and building trust typically pays off.
7. *How development occurs matters greatly*: How governments and development organizations manage social change has important implications for achieving and sustaining poverty reduction and inclusive growth.



Executive Summary

Development is a dynamic, transformative process that fundamentally changes how people live. People are the means and ends of development—the goal of which is to equip, link, and enable groups of people to create something new and different for the benefit of society. This process is often slow and nonlinear as well as inherently complex and challenging; by changing how people live, development affects social systems in often unpredictable and destabilizing ways. When sustained over time, however, it can promote cohesive, inclusive, and resilient societies in which all people can participate and thrive. However, the change process, particularly its social aspects, can be complex, challenging, and even contentious.

There is growing recognition that *how* development occurs matters greatly. How governments and development organizations navigate and manage the social dynamics of change has important implications for achieving and sustaining poverty reduction and inclusive growth.

Yet continued progress toward sustainable development is not guaranteed. More than two decades into the 21st century, a perfect storm has gathered force: the overlapping crises of COVID-19, climate change, rising levels of conflict, and a global economic slowdown are inflaming long-standing challenges and exacerbating inequality, persistent structural barriers, and deep-rooted systemic inequities. These challenges have intense social repercussions, including polarization, declining levels of trust, social tensions, and unrest, and addressing them will require social sustainability in addition to economic and environmental sustainability.

For much of the last 75 years, social sustainability has taken a backseat to growth and, more recently, the environment. Despite growing recognition of its importance, however, there is less clarity over what social sustainability is and how it can best be pursued. This book aims to advance the concept of social sustainability and sharpen the analytical foundations on which it rests. Specifically, it offers a clear definition of, a coherent conceptual framework for, and initial operational guidelines regarding social sustainability for the global development community to engage with, respond to, and use. In particular, the book explores three critical questions: What is social sustainability? Why does it matter? And how can it be operationalized?

From Aspiration to Action

Chapter 1 starts by putting social sustainability in historic context. Current efforts to articulate and enact a social development agenda began in the middle of the 20th century, when today's global institutions were established and important proclamations like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were signed. However, that era's prevailing model of economic development often saw social dynamics (for example, countries' traditional practices and cultural beliefs) primarily as obstacles to accelerating "progress" toward modernization. While attitudes eventually evolved, the social dimension of development remained largely peripheral for many years.

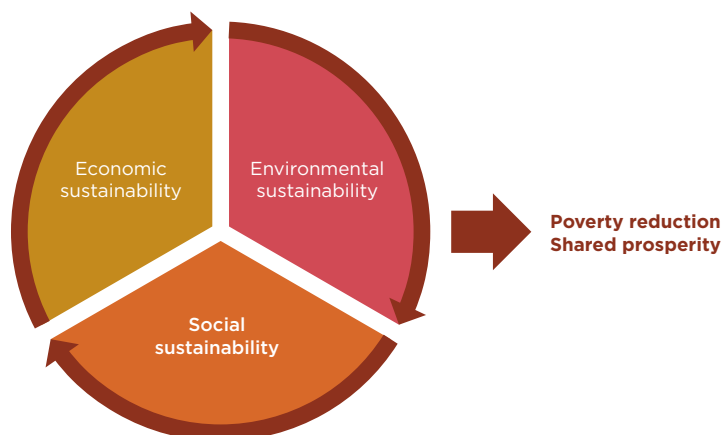
Development theorists in the 1960s began to underscore that local context and social factors influenced the success of development efforts, with particular focus on infrastructure projects. Social concerns took on a more explicit and operational focus in the 1970s and 1980s, as more targeted programs reflected growing recognition that excluded and vulnerable groups often did not benefit from development or were even undermined by the process. At the World Bank, this recognition coincided with an increased focus on women in development and efforts to manage social risks better (that is, "do no harm"), particularly in projects involving resettlement issues and indigenous peoples.

The social agenda broadened in the late 1980s and 1990s, as concerns about the impact of structural adjustment on the poor and vulnerable amplified demands to link development more explicitly with poverty reduction. A consensus emerged around putting people at the center of development. Early World Bank efforts to operationalize these principles included social funds, a growing focus on gender equality, and community-driven development, which emphasized participatory approaches and local decision making. In practice, however, these efforts remained relatively circumscribed, with the primary focus during this period still being to ensure that development projects "do no harm."

The new millennium was a turning point for social development. In 2000 the United Nations Millennium Development Goals reflected major shifts in mainstream thinking about development, moving beyond narrow monetary definitions of poverty and promoting social concepts like inclusion, voice, empowerment, equity, and gender equality. At the World Bank, years of path-breaking social development research culminated in a 2013 corporate strategy emphasizing all three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and social—as being critical for the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity (figure ES.1).¹

In the past decade, important strides have also been made to elevate and operationalize social sustainability. In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further enshrined social issues as central to development. Throughout the 2010s, the World Bank took concrete steps to embed social factors in its operations—including the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, the Strategic Framework on Citizen Engagement, and the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), which applied a comprehensive package of social standards to all investment projects. More recently, responding to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021, the Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development framework acknowledged the importance of inclusion as a strategic priority alongside resilience and growth.

While important progress has been made, much work remains to be done, and social sustainability is now at a crucial point. The world is becoming more divided, polarized, and unequal, with exclusion and vulnerability compounded by persistent shocks, discrimination, conflict, and climate change. After slowing in recent years, the pace of poverty reduction reversed in 2020 and remains threatened by economic slowdown, the lingering effects of COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine

Figure ES.1 The Triad of Sustainability

Source: World Bank.

(World Bank 2022a). Progress on global inequality also has deteriorated, and the gaps between the ultra-rich, the middle class, and the poor continue to widen—all increasingly exacerbated by climate change (Alvaredo et al. 2018; Islam and Winkel 2017; Lakner and Milanovic 2016). In the decades ahead, climate effects are expected to push hundreds of millions of people into poverty and forced migration (World Bank 2020).

Efforts to respond to these issues are increasingly challenged by rising tensions, social fragmentation, and a weakening social contract. Conflicts are becoming more common, complex, and long-lasting (World Bank 2021), and nearly half of the global poor now live in economies affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (United Nations and World Bank 2018). Evidence suggests that social unrest is rising (Barrett et al. 2020), trust in public institutions is declining globally (European Union 2021; Perry 2021; Pew Research Center 2021), and social media as well as unequal access to the digital economy are driving a wedge between communities and eroding the social fabric (Adriano 2020; World Bank 2020). More broadly, an estimated 2.3 billion people—approximately one-third of humanity—is at risk of social exclusion due to economic status, gender and gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, sexual orientation, or disability (Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa 2022).

Addressing these challenges requires socially sustainable solutions. Growth, while necessary, is not sufficient; the *social* sustainability of policies, programs, and outcomes must also be central. Although many known policies are effective at promoting these goals (for example, fiscal redistribution, low-carbon growth strategies, and human capital investments), they are unlikely to emerge on their own in sufficient scope. This book seeks to move the agenda forward, proposing new approaches and initial operational guidelines to accelerate momentum and inspire action in support of social sustainability.

What Is Social Sustainability?

Social sustainability is a more elusive concept than environmental or economic sustainability. While the latter can be measured with objective indicators like greenhouse gas emissions or debt dynamics,

measuring social sustainability is more complex. An emerging and diverse literature offers some initial principles—focused on community connections, well-being, resilience, and engagement (Dempsey et al. 2011)—but the analytical foundations of social sustainability remain underdeveloped.

Chapter 2 seeks to fill that gap. It proposes a definition of social sustainability that is grounded in the literature but aligned with global development priorities and World Bank institutional objectives:

Social sustainability increases when more people feel part of the development process and believe that they and their descendants will benefit from it.

Communities and societies that are more socially sustainable are more willing and able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in ways perceived to be legitimate and fair so that all people may thrive over time.

This definition highlights four critical components of social sustainability: social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and “process legitimacy.” A cohesive society has high levels of trust, enabling it to work together to overcome challenges. An inclusive society is one where *all* people can thrive. A resilient society can withstand shocks without significant losses to the well-being of current and future generations. Process legitimacy—a relatively new concept—is about *how* policies and programs are designed and implemented, ensuring that they are accepted as fair and credible by all key stakeholders. The four components are in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, more specifically, with the human rights principles of nondiscrimination, inclusion, rule of law, dignity, participation, accountability, transparency, and empowerment.

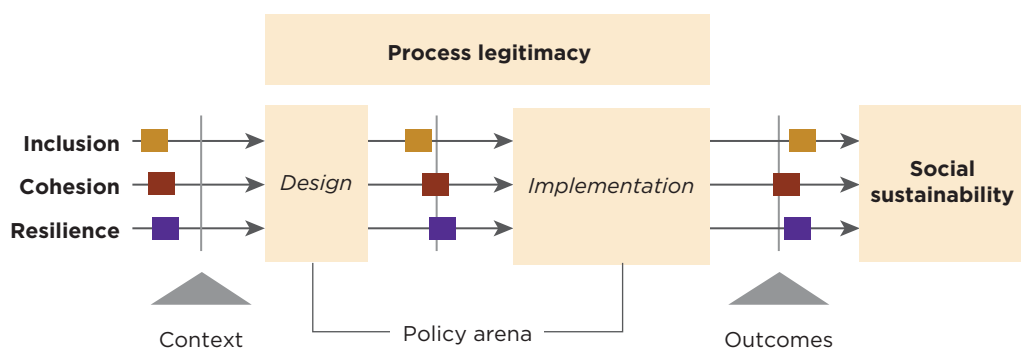
Figure ES.2 presents a conceptual framework for these four components. It illustrates that the baseline levels of inclusion, cohesion, and resilience in a given community or society are affected by *how* programs and policies are designed and implemented and how, over time, efforts to strengthen these components can enhance social sustainability.

In spite of the framework’s simplicity, the interactions it portrays are, in practice, highly complex, nonlinear, and context-dependent, reflecting the rich dynamics at play in all communities and societies. The framework functions within a conceptual space known as the “policy arena”: the institutions and forums where public resources are allocated and decisions are made among individuals, government, and stakeholder groups through debate, negotiation, and compromise, with ample potential for disagreement, tensions, or even conflict (World Bank 2017). Expanding access to the policy arena, especially for marginal and vulnerable groups as well as sharing information and building in feedback loops and other social accountability measures are important for resolving tensions. A key contention of this book is that where process legitimacy exists, the policies and programs designed and implemented in the policy arena will promote greater inclusion, cohesion, and resilience.

Social sustainability and its components are important objectives in and of themselves, but they are also important drivers of development. Chapter 2 considers each component in turn.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a sense of shared purpose, trust, and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state for a common good.

Figure ES.2 Conceptual Framework of Social Sustainability

Source: World Bank.

Social cohesion allows people to work together and respond to challenges, while avoiding conflict, crafting solutions, and forging sustainable compromises (Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022). Different forms of cohesion matter at different levels. Cohesion between individuals in a community is *bonding* cohesion,² while cohesion across groups is *bridging* cohesion—the “horizontal” forms of cohesion. “Vertical” relations between citizens and people or institutions in power, which help to establish and protect the social compact, are *linking* cohesion.

Cohesion is increasingly seen as both a means and an end for development and as important for a range of outcomes, including peace, trust, and prosperity (OECD 2011). While particularly vital for addressing fragility, conflict, and violence, cohesion offers broad development benefits; it facilitates beneficial change processes and enhances resilience for many types of crises (Aldrich 2012; Gates 2002; Migdal 2001; Staniland 2014; Townshend et al. 2015). Weak cohesion, by contrast, is linked with social discontent, political instability, and social tensions (Alesina and Perotti 1996; Esteban and Ray 2011).

Inclusion

Inclusive societies are those where everyone has access to basic services and markets as well as to political, social, and cultural spaces in order to participate in society with agency and live with dignity.

Many individuals and groups face constraints to socioeconomic participation beyond poverty and inequality. Exclusion and discrimination can be due to gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), or other drivers and are sustained through formal and informal norms, behaviors, laws, and institutions. The costs are often significant both for individuals, including less education, lower lifetime earnings, and worse health outcomes (Buehren, Gonzalez, and Copley 2019; Lamichhane and Sawada 2013; Male and Wodon 2017; Turner 2013; Wodon and de la Brière 2018; World Bank 2014), and for societies overall, including lost human capital and economic output.

By enabling all members of society to thrive, inclusion has large development benefits, ranging from reducing conflict to bolstering productivity. Inclusive socioeconomic participation promotes

more efficient human capital accumulation (Rauch 1991) and more equitable financial access, which often leads to better outcomes in terms of income growth, poverty reduction, and entrepreneurship (Freire et al. 2020; World Bank 2013b, 2020). Addressing SOGI exclusion alone would increase global output by an estimated 1 percent (Badgett 2020), while achieving gender parity in labor markets would generate global economic benefits of an estimated US\$28 trillion over a decade (Madgavkar, Ellingrud, and Krishnan 2016).

Resilience

Resilient societies are those where everyone, including poor and marginalized groups, are safe and can withstand shocks and protect the integrity of their culture.

Resilience is the ability, capacity, and flexibility to prepare for, cope with, recover from, and adapt to shocks over time. Risk reduction and mitigation are preparation measures that aim to lower the probability that shocks will occur or to mitigate their negative impacts if they do (Obrist 2010; World Bank 2001, 2013a). Coping measures, by contrast, aim to relieve the impact of shocks after they occur without resorting to unsustainable strategies like reducing consumption, taking children out of school, resorting to illegal activities, or exhausting finite resources (Garschagen, Renaud, and Birkmann 2011; Tawodzera 2012; World Bank 2001, 2013a). *Transformative* resilience—less common and more challenging—is society’s broader ability to strengthen, transform, or create new institutions that better prepare citizens to weather major shocks in the future (Béné et al. 2012; Keck and Saktapolrak 2013; Lorenz 2013; Smith and Frankenberger 2018; Voss 2008), as has been attempted amid the COVID-19 epidemic and the climate crisis (Moshy, Bryceson, and Mwaipopo 2015; Mozumder et al. 2018; Solórzano 2016).

Resilience is particularly important for poor and marginalized groups, who are more frequently exposed to shocks, lose a greater share of their wealth when hit, and typically have less external support (Hallegatte et al. 2017). Resilience has strong links to cohesion and inclusion: building and maintaining social relations and network structures enhance resilience, while exclusion and discrimination leave people more vulnerable. Resilience also matters for economic and environmental sustainability; when shocks occur, resilience can determine the difference between swift recovery and prolonged crisis.

Process Legitimacy

Cohesion, inclusion, and resilience are the core components of social sustainability, but a fourth component—which this book calls process legitimacy—is a critical driver for achieving social sustainability in practice.

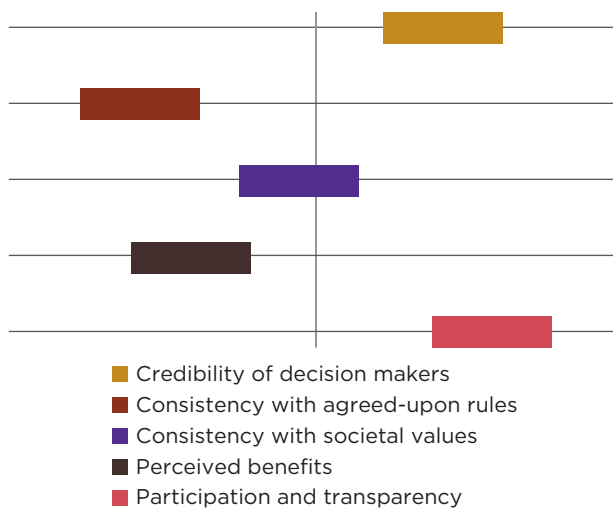
Process legitimacy is the extent to which a community or society accepts who has authority, what goals are formulated, and how policies and programs get implemented. It also encompasses the approaches for reconciling disagreements or tensions, especially among those who stand to bear the greatest cost.

Process legitimacy concerns the “how” of policy making, program design, and implementation and the extent to which these components are consistent with a given context. When successful, process legitimacy ensures that who has *authority*, what policy and program *goals* are pursued, and how those policies and programs get *implemented* are broadly accepted by all and that disagreements or tensions are accommodated, especially among those who may “lose out” as a result. Process legitimacy concerns what happens in the “policy arena”—the space for collective public decision making where groups interact and bargain, resulting in agreements that lead to change.³

Process legitimacy has five key sources or drivers (figure ES.3). First, public decision-making authority often derives from *explicit mandates* (for example, elections, designations, or technical expertise). Second, all communities and societies have *agreed-upon rules* and approaches (for example, legal precedents, professional standards, or traditions and customs) that lend legitimacy to policies, programs, and authority figures. Third, *shared principles* or beliefs about what and how things should be done (for example, religious and ideological convictions or widely accepted conventions like international law) serve a similar function. Fourth, when key stakeholders believe that they are better off (for example, due to rising incomes or greater security), *perceived benefits* can imbue legitimacy in ways that some may regard as dubious or morally fraught. Fifth, legitimacy is often derived via *participation and transparency* (for example, dialogue, engagement, and feedback between authorities and key stakeholders, coupled with open and transparent decision making).

In the best-case scenario, the authority is deemed legitimate, its goals are accepted, and implementation is seen as fair, beneficial, and culturally resonant, with high levels of participation and transparency. In the worst-case scenario, illegitimate authority seeks goals that few accept

Figure ES.3 Drivers of Process Legitimacy



Source: World Bank.

Note: The five drivers of process legitimacy are related and can reinforce one another; they also can function independently of one another. They are dynamic and change over time.

through strategies regarded as unfair and nontransparent, with little to no engagement with affected populations. The more “typical” scenarios, however, are mixed and highly dynamic, where some members and groups disagree (to varying extents that change over time).

Process legitimacy shapes how stakeholders experience the development process and the extent to which they accept its outcomes. Often, development itself alters the types and sources of process legitimacy, influencing who has authority, what goals they pursue, how policies and programs get implemented, and the rules, norms, values, and principles on which their legitimacy rests. In practice, such changes can be complex, contentious, and challenging to navigate. The development process can often help to resolve disagreements over these issues, but it can also intensify them. Enhancing participation and transparency, particularly by bringing new groups (especially vulnerable and marginal groups) into the policy arena, often plays a crucial role in forging broad acceptance, especially around policies and programs that are not fully consistent with agreed-upon rules or shared principles. Moreover, such efforts are typically most effective when the process is seen as endogenously driven. Several types of interventions offer evidence on the positive effects of process legitimacy. Efforts to strengthen social accountability, for instance, have various benefits for socially sustainable development (for example, see Mubarak et al. 2020).

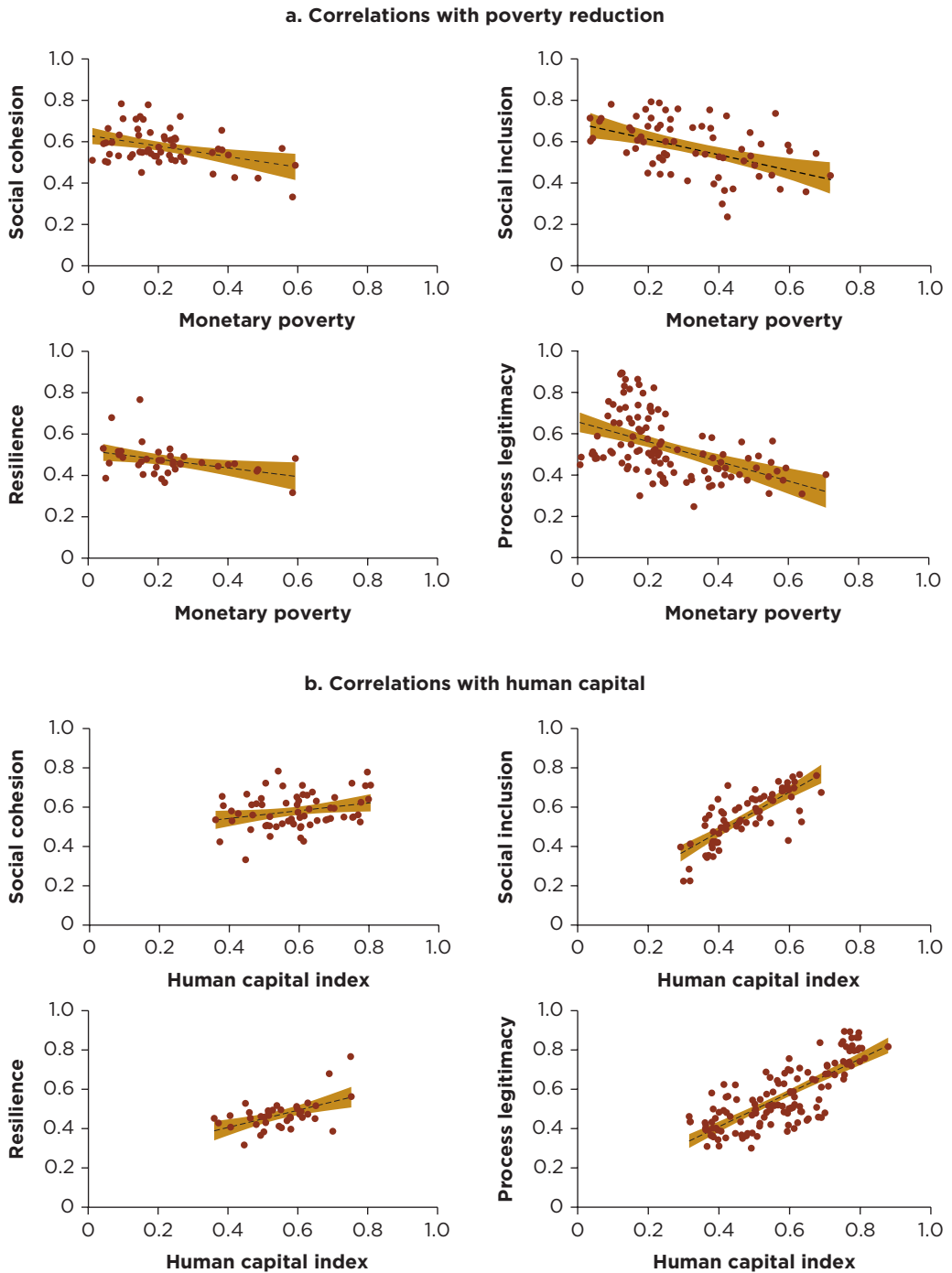
Links to Poverty, Inequality, and Human Capital

Social sustainability and its key components have both intrinsic and instrumental value: while they have unique innate value in much the same way as peace, freedom, or sovereignty have inherent value, they also have instrumental value for supporting poverty reduction and inclusive growth. To this end, the book documents recent progress toward an empirical understanding of social sustainability. This understanding includes a small but growing body of micro-level evidence as well as the World Bank’s new Social Sustainability Global Database (SSGD), which finds that inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy are all correlated with poverty reduction, human capital, human development, and inequality at the macro level.

The SSGD constructs indexes for each component, using 71 indicators for 236 countries and territories from 2016 to 2020. The inclusion index focuses on access to basic services and markets and political participation; the cohesion index includes measures of trust; the resilience index compiles sources of income, savings, and financial access indicators; and the process legitimacy index combines measures for rule of law, access to justice, and government effectiveness.⁴

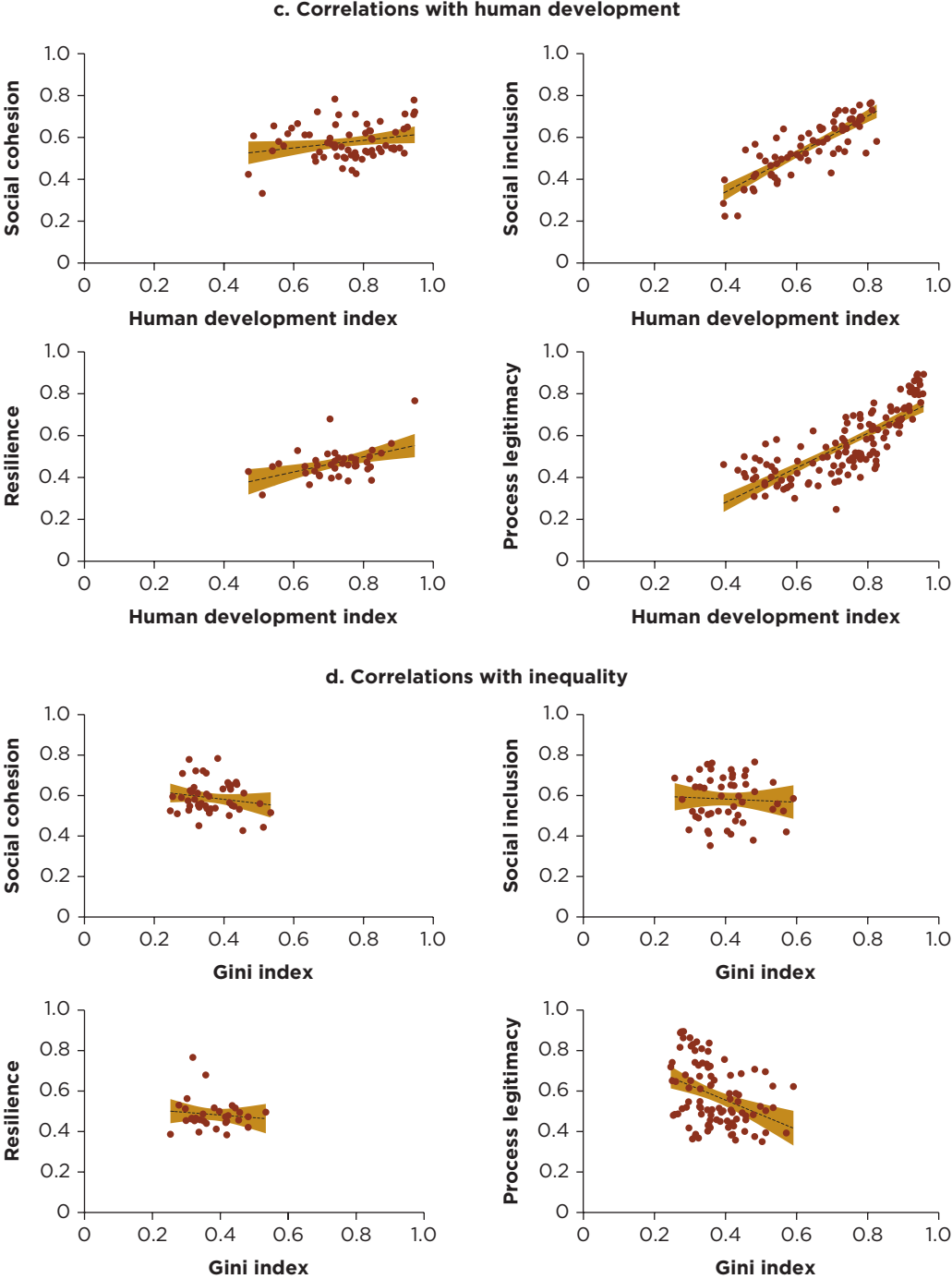
Cross-country SSGD analysis finds that inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy are all correlated with poverty reduction, human capital, human development, and inequality (figure ES.4). Several of these correlations are strong—namely, inclusion and process legitimacy with poverty reduction and human capital as well as process legitimacy with inequality—but some are weaker. This variation likely reflects data shortcomings and measurement challenges (including the need to refine SSGD indicators) as well as the inherent difficulty of unpacking complex social relationships that are often affected by long-standing structural factors. A key finding of this book is that more efforts are needed to measure, analyze, and understand the role and impact of social sustainability and its components. Beyond data considerations, a weak correlation also implies that progress

Figure ES.4 Correlations between the Four Components of Social Sustainability and Development Outcomes



(continued)

Figure ES.4 Continued



Source: World Bank 2022b.
Note: The figure shows the following: all components of social sustainability are correlated with poverty reduction (panel a); all components are correlated with human capital (panel b); all components are correlated with human development, but some more so than others (panel c); and most components are slightly correlated with inequality, except process legitimacy (panel d).

on the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity can be achieved in a way that is not socially sustainable (even though that progress might well be short-lived). Ultimately, social sustainability matters by itself, intrinsically, for its ability to deliver development and not exclusively for its instrumental value in contributing to poverty reduction or economic growth.

Interlinkages

While they function independently of one another, the core components of social sustainability can be mutually reinforcing: the presence of all four components offers a virtuous circle, which, in turn, helps to drive poverty reduction and shared prosperity. In reality, however, the components often work at cross purposes. Some of the least inclusive societies, for example, are also the most resilient, and they may appear to be cohesive only because minority groups are suppressed or marginalized. Likewise, resilience often entails significant trade-offs: highly resilient communities can be too tolerant of adversity, for instance, and efforts to enhance inclusion can generate resentment from groups who fear losing out. Such instances can undermine social sustainability, leading to heightened tensions or conflict.

Moreover, there may be consequential trade-offs between social sustainability and the other two pillars of sustainability. Lack of economic or environmental sustainability can stoke social tensions and exacerbate other social challenges, while the presence of economic or environmental sustainability can enable and support social sustainability—and vice versa. Without cohesion, for example, societies may find it difficult to agree on policies to promote economic or environmental sustainability, and those policies will be less effective when certain groups are excluded or vulnerable. Often, the trade-offs can move in both directions. For instance, failure to address climate change may undermine resilience and worsen exclusion by affecting certain groups more than others, but policies to address climate change (such as higher taxes, subsidy removals, and coal exits) can often trigger social unrest.

Communities and societies would ideally pursue social sustainability while managing these trade-offs. Indeed, process legitimacy helps to ensure that such tensions are meaningfully accommodated, especially among those who stand to bear the greatest costs from a given policy or program. In practice, however, stakeholders and policy makers may choose or prioritize one component or dimension over the others. Likewise, development actors hoping to support social sustainability often face competing priorities, budget constraints, and limited time frames, complicating efforts to translate aspirations into action. Figure 2.9 in chapter 2 presents three stylized scenarios of how societies experience such trade-offs. The book contends that efforts to achieve poverty reduction and shared prosperity or the SDGs are best enhanced when all three dimensions of sustainability are present.

Closing the Implementation Gap

Chapter 3 discusses key insights from development practice on what works to foster and support social sustainability, including examples of interventions that have proven effective at supporting cohesion, inclusion, and resilience and key priorities for promoting process legitimacy.

The chapter begins by acknowledging five common operational challenges around social sustainability. First, *progress is often nonlinear and time-consuming*, particularly regarding efforts to promote deep social change, where achievements are often followed by setbacks. Moreover, *the factors that drive or impede social sustainability are nonuniform and context-dependent*, varying across countries and communities. Likewise, *the obstacles are often complex, multidimensional, and entrenched*, involving deep-rooted social norms, structural barriers, or elite resistance, so solutions must work across sectors to address constraints where they exist. Similarly, *progress may involve normative changes, which can be difficult to generate* and occasionally are contentious or even destabilizing, aggravating deep-rooted social tensions. Finally, *the context is always evolving*, as new challenges arise and norms, values, behaviors, and practices change. Social sustainability will thus always remain aspirational and continue to inspire progress.

Despite these challenges, many approaches have proven to be effective, and recent decades have generated a wealth of experience on which policies and programs can enhance social sustainability:

- *Cohesion.* Local and community platforms, cash transfers and livelihood support programs, social accountability mechanisms, and other interventions can improve trust, bolster group dynamics, and help to resolve or reduce conflict in contexts both with and without fragility, conflict, and violence.
- *Inclusion.* Legal reforms, targeted benefit programs, efforts to bring groups at risk of exclusion into the policy arena, and affirmative action or quotas for groups that historically faced discrimination have all shown promise at expanding access to markets and services and fostering voice and agency for excluded groups.
- *Resilience.* Efforts to improve peoples' livelihoods, reduce their risk exposure, strengthen access to information and services, invest in climate change adaptation, and promote agency and self-organizing capacity building can be particularly effective at strengthening resilience.

Cutting across these examples, enhancing process legitimacy is also critical. A useful starting point is recognizing that development efforts have the potential to be socially disruptive and that supporting process legitimacy involves proactively addressing stakeholder concerns or grievances.⁵ More broadly, process legitimacy (and socially sustainable development in general) is supported when development actors embrace three high-level and overarching priorities:

1. *Understand the policy arena.* Promoting social sustainability starts by identifying key stakeholders, their objectives, the prevailing norms and values, and other political or policy realities—for example, existing power structures, incentive systems, or vested interests (Fritz, Levy, and Ort 2014). In some cases, shortcomings can be addressed; in others, it may be better to avoid direct investment and find alternative ways to engage.
2. *Work with all key stakeholders.* Socially sustainable development fosters space in the policy arena for all key stakeholders to provide input and voice concerns, especially vulnerable groups, those at risk of exclusion, and those who may lose out from a given policy or program. Engagement also creates opportunities for real-time feedback loops, emergent learning, and efforts to promote positive norms and behaviors through iterative and participatory efforts (Appiah 2010).

3. *Engage for the long haul.* Social change tends to happen slowly, and windows of opportunity are often difficult to anticipate. But staying engaged, investing in relationships, and building trust typically pay off (Green 2016, especially ch. 1). This slow process can pose challenges for development actors, who often face pressures to deliver results in shorter time frames amid incentives for growth, efficiency, and measured effectiveness, but it enhances the social sustainability of their efforts.

This book is not meant to be the final word on social sustainability. Rather, it seeks to promote discussion and research, to refocus the development agenda on this critical concept, and to highlight the ambitious agenda ahead. By articulating the key components of social sustainability, identifying interventions that work to promote them, and highlighting the evidence of their links to key development outcomes, it provides a foundation for understanding the concept and identifies opportunities to strengthen the analytical framing and evidence base for it. There is much work to be done, particularly regarding efforts to measure social sustainability and its core components, to capture trends over time, and to understand their links to key development outcomes. Such efforts could help to motivate policy makers, development institutions, and other stakeholders to adopt and implement policies to foster and support social sustainability.

To address the challenges of the 21st century, including climate change, conflict, the need for sustainable growth, inequality, and erosion of the social fabric, it is critical to elevate social sustainability as a key pillar of development and an equal partner with economic and environmental sustainability. In practice, this effort means drawing greater attention to the concept and deepening the collective commitment to cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and process legitimacy. Above all, it means elevating social sustainability as a local, national, corporate, and global priority and committing time, resources, and collective energy to pursuing it.

Notes

1. Economic sustainability refers to fiscal and debt sustainability.
2. The terms bonding, bridging, and linking social cohesion are drawn from Woolcock and Narayan's work on social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2000).
3. The concept of the policy arena was first developed by the *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (World Bank 2017).
4. Annex 2A includes a full list of each index's indicators and details on their construction.
5. In this sense, the World Bank's ESF, and instruments like it, is a key tool for process legitimacy.

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Abbreviations

CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework
CLD	community and local development
CMC	community management committee
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	civil society organization
ESF	Environmental and Social Framework
FLLoCA	Financing Locally Led Climate Action
GDP	gross domestic product
GRID	Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development
ID	identification
KDP	Kecamatan Development Program
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SDCE	Strengthening Democracy and Civic Engagement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGI	sexual orientation and gender identity
SSGD	Social Sustainability Global Database
SSI	Social Sustainability and Inclusion (World Bank Global Practice)
TPS	temporary protection status
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

From Aspiration to Action

Introduction

Development—by definition and by design—changes how people live. It is a dynamic, transformative process in which people are both the means and the ends, key agents, and principal actors. From infrastructure, education, and public health to markets, governance, and justice reform, the goal of all development is to equip, link, and enable groups of people to build on their strengths while creating something new and “better” from what came before. The development process is complex, challenging, nonuniform, and nonlinear, often moving two steps forward and then three steps back, before resuming forward motion again. When sustained over periods of time, however, it can promote societies that are more inclusive, cohesive, and resilient, in which all people are able to participate with dignity, fulfill their potential, and voice their needs to responsive and accountable governments. The efforts, goals, and aspirations of the World Bank and other development organizations are to support low- and middle-income countries along their journey to achieve these ends.

Compared to the long history of human civilization, this “development process”—and the priorities it represents—is a relatively new phenomenon. Through most of human history, change happened slowly, and most people relied on long-standing social systems built around family, community, clan, tribe, religion, traditions, and norms to survive, prosper, deal with challenges, allocate resources, and make sense of the world.¹ By changing how people live, development interacts with and affects these social institutions in often unpredictable and destabilizing ways. The process is inherently disruptive, encompassing both “creation” and “destruction,” as has long been recognized.² Just as the benefits of development accrue to people through improved capabilities, material well-being, and expanded choices, the changes wrought can also displace old ideas, incumbent institutions, and existing power dynamics. Even when achieving “progress” or “results,” such change can aggravate deep-rooted social tensions, create or exacerbate inequities, and heighten the risks of unrest or conflict, ultimately threatening (often suddenly) to undermine whatever development gains have been achieved.

As the world grapples with high inequality and an economic slowdown alongside the “three Cs” of conflict, climate change, and COVID-19—and as the social fabric is eroding in many countries amid fragmentation and polarization as well as persistent exclusion and vulnerability—continued progress toward sustainable development is not guaranteed. The social dimensions to these challenges are significant, and social systems must be understood and used to address them. How governments and development institutions navigate these social dynamics—how change is managed and how it interacts with existing social systems to produce better outcomes—has important implications for the sustainability of development and for the achievement of poverty reduction and inclusive growth (see, for instance, Acemoglu and Robinson 2019; Rajan 2019). Despite the emerging consensus that social sustainability is vital for achieving development and addressing global challenges, there is less clarity over what it is and how it can best be advanced.

The challenges of the 21st century present a crucial opportunity to elevate social sustainability as a key pillar of development, on par with economic and environmental sustainability. This book endeavors to establish greater clarity, affirming the centrality of social factors within the development puzzle. In particular, it has three key aims:

1. *Articulate a clear definition of social sustainability and a coherent conceptual framework.* For the purpose of this book, “social” refers broadly to the relationships between individuals and groups and the diverse characteristics that shape those relationships (norms, values, shared identity, culture, institutions),³ rather than narrower programmatic applications like “social sectors” or “social policies.” The book adopts the United Nations (UN) Brundtland Commission definition of “sustainability” as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). To clarify a principle as broad, complex, and highly context-dependent as “social sustainability,” the book offers a framework for understanding the concept (see chapter 2) as well as an intuitive two-part definition:

Social sustainability increases when more people feel part of the development process and believe that they and their descendants will benefit from it.

Communities and societies that are more socially sustainable are more willing and able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in ways perceived to be legitimate and fair so that all people may thrive over time.

2. *Demonstrate why social sustainability matters.* The book contends that social sustainability and its key components—*inclusion, resilience, social cohesion, and “process legitimacy”*—have both intrinsic and instrumental value. Their value is unique and innate in much the same way as peace, freedom, or sovereignty have inherent value. Likewise, they have important instrumental value for supporting poverty reduction and inclusive growth as well as for complementing one another. A key message is that social sustainability can be measured. The book highlights recent progress toward an empirical understanding of social sustainability, including the World Bank’s new Social Sustainability Global Database (World Bank 2022e), while underscoring the need to address data, measurement, and methodological issues. It emphasizes that social sustainability is not binary; it exists on a spectrum, and

process legitimacy—the extent to which a community or society accepts who has authority, what goals are pursued, and *how* policies and programs get implemented—is a vital ingredient for socially sustainable development.

3. *Highlight key insights from development practice on what works to foster and support social sustainability.* Building on previous experience and ongoing efforts from the World Bank and across the development sector, the book illustrates core principles and practical guidelines for how development actors can operationalize social sustainability. Specifically, the book offers suggestions for how the World Bank and the broader development community can deepen efforts to integrate social sustainability into analytics, dialogue, and financing.

The book is organized as follows. The rest of this chapter provides historical context and highlights why now is a unique moment in time to promote and pursue social sustainability. Chapter 2 proposes a definition for social sustainability, drawing on relevant academic and policy literature, and presents a conceptual framework for understanding its four components, including a summary of evidence for why they matter and their broader links to key development outcomes. Chapter 3 illustrates key principles for operationalizing social sustainability, takes stock of progress to date, and briefly lays out some entry points to strengthen social sustainability. Chapter 4 concludes.

Context

For much of the last 75 years, social sustainability has taken a backseat to a focus on economic sustainability (that is, sustainable growth) and, more recently, environmental sustainability. While social development has made important conceptual and operational strides in recent decades to elevate its profile in development discourse, in everyday practice it is still largely on the fringes. However, the world is reaching a critical point, as overlapping crises are making it harder to meet key development goals and threatening the gains already achieved. Development's current tools and approaches, while necessary and important, are insufficient for today's vexing challenges because the broad social consensus needed to respond to them effectively and legitimately is so often lacking. This moment presents a critical window of opportunity to advance the concept and cause of social sustainability.

A Brief History of Social Sustainability

Current efforts to articulate an agenda for socially sustainable development build on a long, if not always venerable, history. The architects of the post–World War II era sought to build a new world order to maintain international peace and security, provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, protect human rights, and uphold international law. The establishment of the United Nations and the World Bank in 1945 marked a new era of multilateral efforts to promote peace and prosperity—followed in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with 29 articles focused on many of the principles that would later be fundamental to social sustainability, such as inclusion, participation, accountability, and nondiscrimination. Article 22, for instance, guarantees

every person's right to take part in government, directly or through freely chosen representatives; guarantees the right of equal access to public services; and establishes the will of the people as the basis of government authority. Of course, it would take several decades for many countries to realize these principles, while others have yet to embrace them.

Even as this important declaration was signed, however, social institutions were often seen as impediments to the development process. During the initial postwar period, the actions of today's multilateral and bilateral organizations were guided in large part by that era's prevailing model of economic development: modernization theory (Latham 2011). Among its many assumptions, modernization theory posited that history largely unfolds along a single path, that human reason and resources can and should be deployed to accelerate "progress" along this path, and that a country's social dynamics are often one of the primary obstacles to attaining this acceleration. Replacing traditional practices and cultural beliefs with technological progress and focusing on democracy and the individual were seen as desirable. Indeed, in 1951, a major UN report could openly declare,

Rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed, and race have to burst; and large numbers of people who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress (United Nations 1951, 15).⁴

Fortunately, this view did not prevail. In the 1960s, experts began to recognize that local context and social factors played some role in the success of development projects, and academics and development practitioners increasingly paid attention to these dynamics. Hirschman's *Development Projects Observed*, for example, highlighted that "people matter," documenting how local culture, context, and social and economic structures affected the performance of World Bank projects, while highlighting the need for emergent learning so that projects adapt to, interact with, and even shape their context in "co-evolutionary" collaboration (Hirschman 1967). In 1963 the creation of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), dedicated to cutting-edge research on social development, marked the growing global importance of social dimensions.

During the 1970s and 1980s, increased global attention on exclusion and poverty elevated the role of social issues in development. The concept of vulnerable or excluded populations entered into political discourse, particularly in Europe, amid growing evidence that the processes of economic growth, urbanization, and development often excluded, displaced, or negatively affected certain groups and that these groups required targeted assistance.⁵ At the same time, concerns about the link between poverty and the environment also emerged, giving rise to the concept of sustainability. The UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 was the first to note the link between human development and environmental sustainability. By the late 1980s, the concept of sustainable development was further defined by the UN Brundtland Commission as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition put an explicit emphasis on the social dimensions of development and underscored that economic, environmental, and social factors are interlinked and mutually reinforcing (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

At the World Bank, concerns over exclusion and poverty also grew during this period.⁶ Starting in the 1970s under President Robert McNamara, there was an important shift toward a greater focus on poverty reduction, recognizing the role of women in development and the need to protect vulnerable groups. The Bank expanded investments in basic needs, human capital, and the provision of basic services (for example, health and education) and introduced specific efforts to mitigate the potential negative impacts of large infrastructure projects on indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups more broadly. Similarly, responding to the feminist critique of development, the Bank introduced the Women in Development Program in 1977 with the aim of improving the recognition of women's contributions to development.

In the early 1980s, these concerns were codified in Bank policies and procedures, which were designed and supported by a growing (albeit relatively small) cadre of social managers and specialists. The Bank's Operations Manual was updated to recognize the needs of indigenous peoples, and special protection measures were introduced for vulnerable groups who could be affected by resettlement or displacement as a result of Bank projects. An operational policy was introduced, calling for integrating social issues into the technical and economic analysis of projects.⁷ Without an explicit stand-alone requirement for social analysis, however, these initial approaches to social policy and inclusion remained focused on "doing no harm," with circumscribed efforts to acknowledge the contribution of women but limited opportunities for Bank staff to engage with borrower country governments on the broader social agenda (IEG 2010).⁸

Concerns that development was, in many cases, hurting the poor and vulnerable continued to grow into the early 1990s, as structural adjustment programs focused on privatization, fiscal austerity, and trade liberalization, which often led to cuts in social programs and higher prices for basic commodities.

Reflecting the growing operational relevance of the social dimensions of development, the Bank created a dedicated Social Development Unit in 1989, 15 years after hiring its first sociologist. The new unit stressed the importance of adopting a people-first agenda (Cernea 1991) and emphasized principles that later coalesced as inclusion and cohesion (Bhatnagar and Williams 1992; Serageldin and Steer 1994). It also spearheaded early institutional efforts, such as including more systematic social analysis in the Bank's project preparation and approval processes, in the process developing new lending instruments focused specifically on inclusion as well as establishing new diagnostic tools and guidebooks to understand and operationalize social issues across the Bank's portfolio (McPhail and Jacobs 2003; World Bank 1996).⁹ These efforts supported the introduction of Social Funds as well as the later community-driven development initiatives, which emphasized participation, transparency, and local empowerment to manage resources, identify priorities, and implement projects that address community-level development challenges.¹⁰

In 1991 the Bank also revised its Indigenous Peoples Policy, extending its definition of indigenous peoples to include a much wider array of people vulnerable to exclusion from the development process. In 1994 it rolled out a pioneering Information Disclosure Policy, raising the bar for transparency in development. By the late 1990s, fostered by rich internal debates—focused primarily on social capital and other key concepts of that era¹¹—an intellectual and operational foundation for the Bank's approach to the social aspects of development was beginning to emerge. However, these initial efforts did not include broader efforts to promote principles related to social sustainability,

nor did they explicitly make the link, noted by the UN Stockholm Conference, between environmental and social sustainability.¹²

These expanding efforts paralleled similar trends outside the Bank. A confluence of global factors around the turn of the 21st century led to a more explicit focus on the people-centric dimensions of development and efforts to ensure that growth was inclusive and reached the poorest and most vulnerable. This shift was partly informed by the end of the cold war and the challenges faced by many post-Soviet states transitioning to free markets, ongoing concerns that structural adjustment policies had undermined vulnerable groups, and an expanded focus on the effectiveness of development aid in achieving poverty reduction, with increased attention on debt relief and debt forgiveness initiatives.¹³ The World Summit for Social Development in 1995 was an important milestone, creating the UN Commission for Social Development and attracting high-level recognition of social development as a professional field and global priority.¹⁴

Such emphasis on an integrated approach to development, uniting the social and economic dimensions with a focus on poverty, continued to be reflected in the Bank's evolving approach. In 1999 President James Wolfensohn introduced the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), establishing a country-led process for setting development strategies that prioritized human and social development and emphasized partnerships between governments (at all levels), civil society, the private sector, and external assistance agencies. In collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and based on CDF principles, the Bank also introduced Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to strengthen the links between debt relief, development, and poverty reduction. PRSPs were not only client-owned and results-focused, but also intended to be prepared in a participatory manner that involved civil society; they represented the Bank's first explicit acknowledgment of the broad and catalytic role that civil society plays in building transparency and accountability. In 2001, reflecting the need to integrate social issues more clearly into structural reforms, the Bank developed a Poverty and Social Impact Analysis to promote more systematic ex ante analysis of the intended and unintended consequences of Bank-supported policy reforms on different social groups, particularly the poor and vulnerable (World Bank 2003a, 2005c).

At the same time, many economists grew increasingly concerned about whether the benefits of economic growth were reaching the poor, a shift in thinking that would affect the broader development paradigm. During this period, development's endgame expanded beyond growth to include nonmonetary well-being (and better access to services) as well as voice and agency. In 1999 Amartya Sen won the Nobel Prize in economics and published his seminal book *Development as Freedom*, drawing attention to the importance and intrinsic value of individual freedoms: to be free from vulnerability and danger and able to access services, influence political outcomes, and reach one's potential (Sen 1999). Reflecting this broader concept of development, the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 went beyond monetary definitions of poverty, setting ambitious new targets for fighting poverty and hunger as well as promoting inclusion, equity, and gender equality, with an enhanced focus on results and outcomes.

The Bank played an important role in this evolution. Building on years of participatory research that underscored the intrinsic importance of voice and agency for vulnerable groups in addition to poverty reduction, Deepa Narayan and coauthors published the *Voices of the Poor* trilogy in 2000 and *Moving Out of Poverty* in 2007 (Narayan 2009; Narayan, Chambers et al. 2000;

Narayan, Patel, et al. 2000; Narayan and Petesch 2002, 2007; Narayan, Pritchett, and Kapoor 2009). Likewise, a series of *World Development Reports* deepened this thinking over the last two decades, providing the conceptual foundation to integrate agency, opportunity, vulnerability, and accountability into the Bank's approach to development. Box 1.1 explores the Bank's intellectual evolution on these issues in greater detail. Wolfensohn's priority of addressing corruption was another important driver during this period, as was the Bank's 2007 Governance and Anticorruption Strategy, which enshrined the "demand for good governance" approach and focused on citizens as the ultimate stakeholders for better governance through efforts to strengthen voice, participation, and transparency (World Bank 2007). In 2005 the Bank's then–Social Development Unit adopted a sector strategy that articulated key concepts and goals to guide the Bank's work on social issues and identified three operational principles to guide its approach: inclusion, cohesion, and accountability (World Bank 2005a). In 2011 an internal review of the Social Development Strategy recommended adding a fourth operational principle, resilience, noting its critical role in reducing vulnerability. This book, with its focus on inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy, builds on and updates these critical efforts (World Bank 2011a).⁴⁵

Box 1.1

The Conceptual Foundations of Social Sustainability at the World Bank

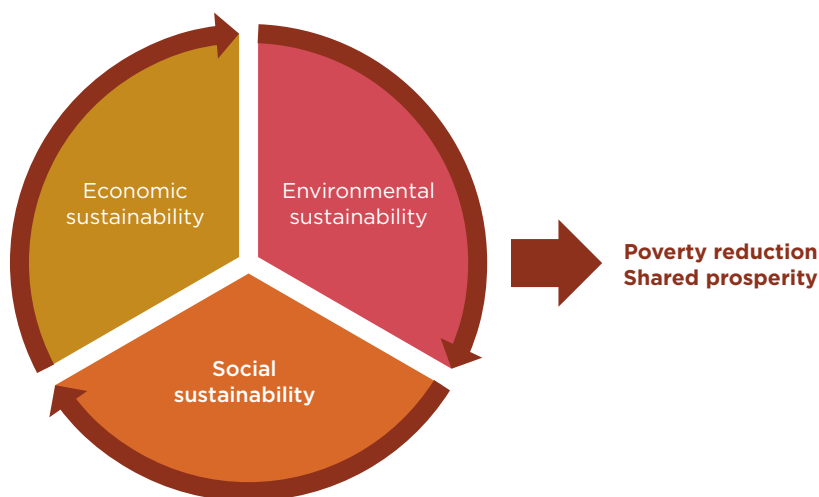
This book's proposed definition and conceptual framework for social sustainability (see chapter 2) builds on a deep foundation of prior research and strategic efforts at the World Bank. Conceptually, the book's broad views have been reflected in five seminal *World Development Reports* over the last two decades. In 2000 the *World Development Report* on poverty explored poverty's multiple dimensions, underscoring the entwined nature of opportunity, empowerment, and vulnerability (World Bank 2001; see also Narayan 2009; Narayan, Chambers, et al. 2000; Narayan and Petesch 2007; Narayan, Pritchett, and Kapoor 2009). In 2004 the *World Development Report* on public sector accountability, especially between public service providers, the state, and service users, emphasized the importance of voice and agency for promoting equal opportunities in societies (World Bank 2003b). In 2006 the *World Development Report* on equity showed how equal opportunities contribute to economic development and documented the links between more equal societies and long-term growth (World Bank 2005d). In 2011 the *World Development Report* on conflict and fragility emphasized institutional legitimacy, citizen justice, and cohesion as drivers of social instability—concepts closely linked to social sustainability (World Bank 2011b). Finally, the 2017 *World Development Report* on governance and the law highlighted the costs of power asymmetries in society—as manifested by exclusion, elite capture, and clientelism—as well as the benefits of inclusion, greater citizen engagement, and strong coalitions for positive reforms (World Bank 2017b).

The shifting paradigm was encapsulated in 2013 when the Bank’s new corporate strategy adopted the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity (defined as income growth for the bottom 40 percent of households). To achieve these goals, the strategy prioritized sustainability’s three pillars—environmental, economic, and social (figure 1.1)—so that development objectives across all three pillars are sustained “over time and across generations” (World Bank 2013, 8). The strategy defined social sustainability as a concept integrating empowerment, voice, participation, and equality of opportunities, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups, and identified it as critical for long-term development:

An inclusive society must have the institutions, structures, and processes that empower local communities, so they can hold their governments accountable. It also requires the participation of all groups in society, including traditionally marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, in decision-making processes. . . . A society that promotes equal opportunities, and is perceived by its citizens to be doing so, is more likely to be able to achieve the stability and cohesiveness needed to generate a sustainable development path (World Bank 2013, 33).

Building on this triad of economic, environmental, and social sustainability, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 enshrined social issues as central to the development challenge. For years, the UN and other multilateral institutions referred broadly to the importance of “environmental and social sustainability” but did not define, analyze, or develop social sustainability as a distinct concept or objective (United Nations 2012). The majority of the 17 SDGs, however, address the core principle of “leave no one behind” and reflect the importance of the social dimension: several underscore that development benefits should be shared equitably by all, including poverty eradication (SDG 1); elimination of hunger (SDG 2);

Figure 1.1 The Triad of Sustainability



Source: World Bank.

health and well-being (SDG 3); education (SDG 4); water and sanitation (SDG 6); affordable and clean energy (SDG 7); decent work (SDG 8); and inclusive, safe, and resilient cities and settlements (SDG 11). Notably, three SDGs focus squarely on social sustainability:

- *Reduced inequalities.* SDG 10 addresses equality of opportunity and the importance of removing discriminatory laws and promoting political, economic, and social inclusion; safe and orderly migration; fiscal and social protection programs for the poor; and income growth of the bottom 40 percent.
- *Gender equality.* SDG 5 seeks to ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities in political, economic, and public life; reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources; and sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels.
- *Peace, justice, and strong institutions.* SDG 16 calls on the international community to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

These developments have helped to incorporate social sustainability into the post-2015 development agenda (United Nations 2015). In 2016 UNRISD published an extensive study on the social aspects of sustainable development, arguing that market-based mechanisms and green economy policies can only flourish if the rights of individuals and communities are protected (UNRISD 2016). Within the UN system, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has well-developed institutions for promoting social sustainability in all its forms, including the long-running Commission for Social Development (UNDESA 2021). Many country governments have also promoted the concept or its underlying principles: for example, the European Union focuses on social cohesion, and its parliament commissioned a study of social sustainability (McGuinn et al. 2020), municipal governments in Canada have embraced social sustainability as a holistic approach to local governance (City of Maple Ridge n.d.), and China has placed renewed emphasis on “common prosperity” following a period of rising inequality.

The Bank was an important partner in shaping the post-2015 development agenda, and the institution’s trajectory toward socially sustainable development has continued to accelerate in recent years. In 2017 the Bank launched the Human Capital Project to increase investments in human development, particularly social protection programming focused on poor and vulnerable populations, followed by the human capital index to track progress and spark global momentum—efforts that deepened during the COVID-19 economic and health crises (World Bank 2020b). The Bank has also made important strides to mainstream citizen engagement across its operational portfolio and focus greater attention on transparency and accountability, including the Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement (World Bank 2014) and the *World Development Report* on governance (World Bank 2017b). This framework ensures that all projects conduct consultations with beneficiaries during project preparation, design, and implementation stages.

In 2018 the Bank adopted its Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), representing a major step forward in operationalizing the role of social issues in development. For the first time, the ESF required that social analysis be conducted on every investment project, as had been Bank

policy for environmental project analysis since the 1980s. The ESF incorporates key human rights principles, including transparency, accountability, consultation, participation, nondiscrimination, and social inclusion. Its vision statement explicitly states, “Social development and inclusion are critical for *all* of the World Bank’s development interventions” (emphasis added), and “The World Bank’s activities support the realization of human rights expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”¹⁶

The ESF boosted Bank efforts to protect disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals and groups and to ensure their access to project benefits. In particular, it introduced standards for nondiscrimination, universal access, and labor and working conditions, including child labor and forced labor as well as general occupational hazards. A specific ESF directive provides a comprehensive description of disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals and groups at risk of discrimination (World Bank 2016a), with guidance and due diligence requirements for identifying and mitigating the risks and impacts on such individuals and groups. This guidance led to an expanded focus on persons with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, and ethnic minorities. A specific standard was also introduced for indigenous peoples, going even further than prior Bank policy by defining who was indigenous and calling for consistent free, prior, and informed consent for all projects affecting indigenous peoples. Other ESF standards require borrower countries to prepare stakeholder engagement plans and establish grievance redress mechanisms for all investment projects.

Going beyond the ESF, which concentrates on the Bank’s investment operations, in 2021 the Bank introduced the overarching Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID) operational framework to influence country strategies and the institution’s global engagement. The “I” in GRID calls for investing in more inclusive and reliable health, housing, child care, education, water supply, and sanitation services to build stronger and more resilient communities and to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged communities (World Bank 2021a). Likewise, the two most recent replenishment cycles for the International Development Association, the Bank’s fund for the poorest countries, underscored the importance of integrating persons with disabilities across the Bank’s engagements as well as strengthening citizen engagement at the country level, drawing further attention to inclusion and accountability (World Bank 2020a, 2022b). In particular, 14 policy commitments in the most recent replenishment focus explicitly on inclusion, drawing on the ESF directive for disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals and groups.

The last half century has seen important progress at the Bank and across the development community to acknowledge the influence of local context on development outcomes, recognize that vulnerable groups need special protections, and advance a development paradigm that honors the intrinsic values of agency, empowerment, and nonmonetary well-being, underpinned by the principles of nondiscrimination, right to safety, and voice. However, this progress has only begun to be operationalized. The ESF is a powerful and influential framework, but with only three years of implementation, it has not yet reached its full potential to go beyond doing no harm and influence the broader social agenda. At the Bank and beyond, the reality of everyday practice has not kept pace with these sweeping aspirations, and the recognition that social factors are important has not dramatically affected the way development is done on the ground. In most development

toolkits, operational approaches, and theories of practice, the social dimension remains much less prominent than its economic or environmental counterparts. These gaps partly reflect the highly complex, context-specific barriers to social sustainability, which are driven by factors that can be difficult to identify, deeply embedded in cultural practices and norms, and costly to address, but they also highlight the urgency of reforms and efforts that are long overdue as well as the costs of further inaction.

Social sustainability has not yet traveled the full distance from aspiration to effective action; in the face of today's growing list of challenges, the old tools and approaches will not suffice on their own. While social factors have always been important to the development process, they are urgently important now.

Why Now?

As the world faces an unprecedented array of challenges, the social sustainability of development can no longer be overlooked. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, global growth and the pace of poverty reduction had slowed (Alvaredo et al. 2018; Lakner and Milanovic 2016; Schoch, Lakner, and Fleury 2020; World Bank 2016b, 2022d, 2022e). In the midst of the pandemic, extreme poverty had increased to 9.3 percent in 2020, up from 8.4 percent in 2019 (measured at 2017 purchasing power parity US dollars), increasing the number of the extremely poor from 648 million to 719 million globally (World Bank 2022c, 2022d). Likewise, while inequality between countries has been declining for decades, driven by rapid growth in large economies like China and India (see, for instance, Deaton 2013; Milanovic 2016; World Bank 2016b), it remains high, and progress may be slowing for the first time in a generation (Yonzan, Lakner, and Gerszon Mahler 2021). Moreover, recent evidence suggests that a growing share of income is going to the world's top earners, widening the gaps between the ultra-rich, the middle class, and the poor (Alvaredo et al. 2018; Lakner and Milanovic 2016). Beyond poverty and inequality, nearly one-third of the world's population is at risk of social exclusion due to economic status, gender or gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, or sexual orientation (Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa 2022). These challenges are compounded by the gnawing persistence of racism, prejudice, discrimination, and social injustice; globally, billions of people face deep-rooted structural barriers to participating equally in society (box 1.2).

In recent years, the “three Cs” of COVID-19, climate change, and rising levels of conflict have enflamed these long-standing challenges, and the current global economic slowdown threatens to make matters worse. In particular, evidence suggests that each of the three Cs is constraining efforts to address poverty, inequality, and exclusion.

- *Conflict.* The number, frequency, and duration of violent conflicts have all increased in recent decades (World Bank 2021b), including in middle-income countries, where the majority of people killed as a result of political violence and criminal homicides now reside (World Bank 2022a). Since 2007, the number of major civil wars has tripled (World Bank 2021b). Conflict directly undermines poverty reduction efforts: recent analysis estimates that the conflict in Ukraine along with the lingering effects of the pandemic will push another

70 million to 89 million people into poverty in 2022 (Gerszon Mahler et al. 2022; World Bank 2022d). Conflict is often driven by inequality and exclusion, which can create and exacerbate grievances (United Nations and World Bank 2018), as supported by an emerging literature exploring the empirical links between conflict and between-group inequality (see, for instance, Besançon 2005; Østby 2013; Stewart 2000).

Box 1.2 **Global Estimates of the Population at Risk of Exclusion**

While there are multiple estimates of global monetary and multidimensional poverty, populations at risk of social exclusion still lack a worldwide estimate, which limits the ability of national and multilateral institutions to monitor progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, honor commitments to leave no one behind, or design effective social programs.

Filling this gap, new World Bank research by Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa (2022) estimates the size of populations at risk of exclusion based on identity, circumstances, and socioeconomic conditions, including persons with disabilities; indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people; Afro-descendants; religious minorities; victims of gender-based violence; and forcibly displaced people.^a Using a macro counting measure, the researchers estimate the number and share of populations at risk of exclusion at the country level, impute information gaps based on regional or global peer averages, and avoid double-counting across group categories. Approximately 2.3 billion people, or 31 percent of the global population, are estimated to be at risk of exclusion (figure B1.2.1). This number is larger than most leading estimates of global monetary poverty, including the 9.6 percent or 722 million people living under the recently updated international poverty line of US\$2.15 (2017 purchasing power parity).

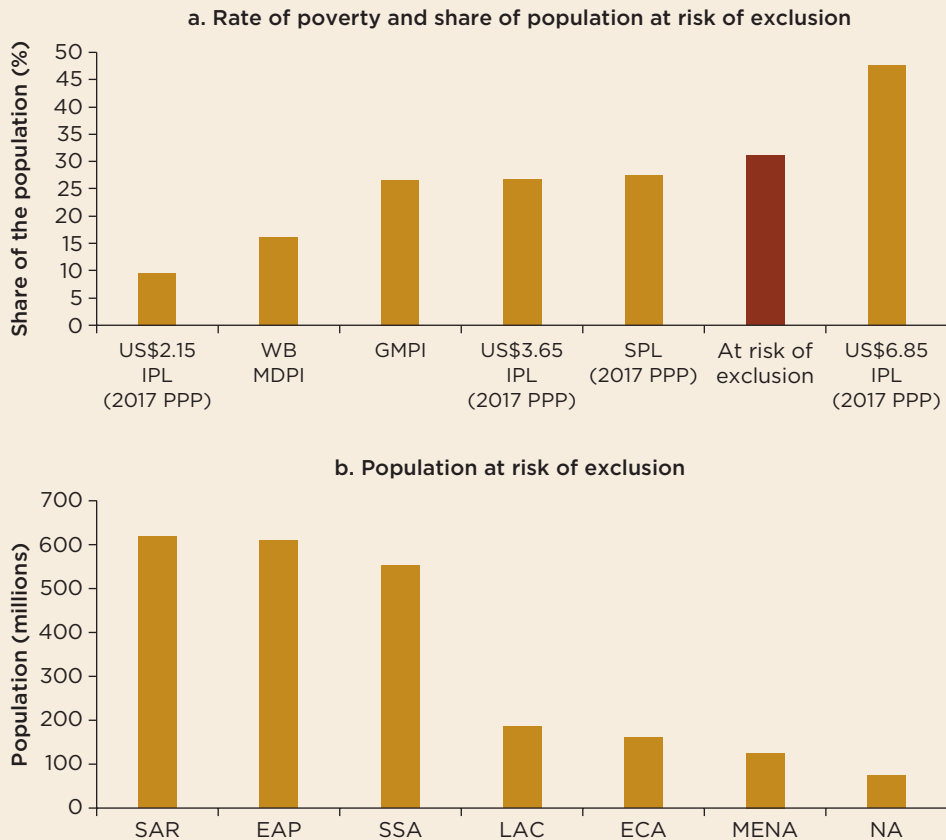
In absolute terms, the largest vulnerable populations are in the South Asia and East Asia and Pacific regions, with 1.3 billion people at risk of exclusion or 53 percent of the worldwide total (figure B1.2.1, panel b). Sub-Saharan Africa has the next largest vulnerable population (552 million people or 23 percent of the total) and the highest incidence, with 52 percent of its population at risk of exclusion, three times the rate in Europe and Central Asia (18 percent). Worldwide, the share of at-risk populations in fragile, conflict-affected, and violent situations is nearly 50 percent.

These estimates suggest that interventions to address extreme poverty need to be complemented with efforts focusing on the nonextreme poor who are at risk of exclusion. This gap reflects an estimated one-fifth of the world's population, or almost 1.5 billion people. The research also underscores the need to enhance the resilience of groups at high risk of exclusion, which are disproportionately exposed to shocks, hardships, and marginalization.

(continued)

Box 1.2 Continued

Figure B1.2.1 Global Rate of Poverty and Estimated Share and Number of the Population at Risk of Exclusion, 2017



Source: Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa 2022.

Note: Using the new 2017 purchasing power parity adjusted poverty lines, World Bank (2022c) reports global headcount rates (population) of 9.6 percent (722 million), 26.7 percent (2 billion), 48.9 percent (3.7 billion), and 27.5 percent (2.1 billion) using, respectively, the US\$2.15, US\$3.65, and US\$6.85 poverty lines and the SPL (2017 purchasing power parity). EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Eastern Europe and Central Asia; GMPI = global multidimensional poverty index; IPL = international poverty line; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MDPI = multidimensional poverty index; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; NA = North America; PPP = purchasing power parity; SAR = South Asia Region; SPL = societal poverty line; SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa.

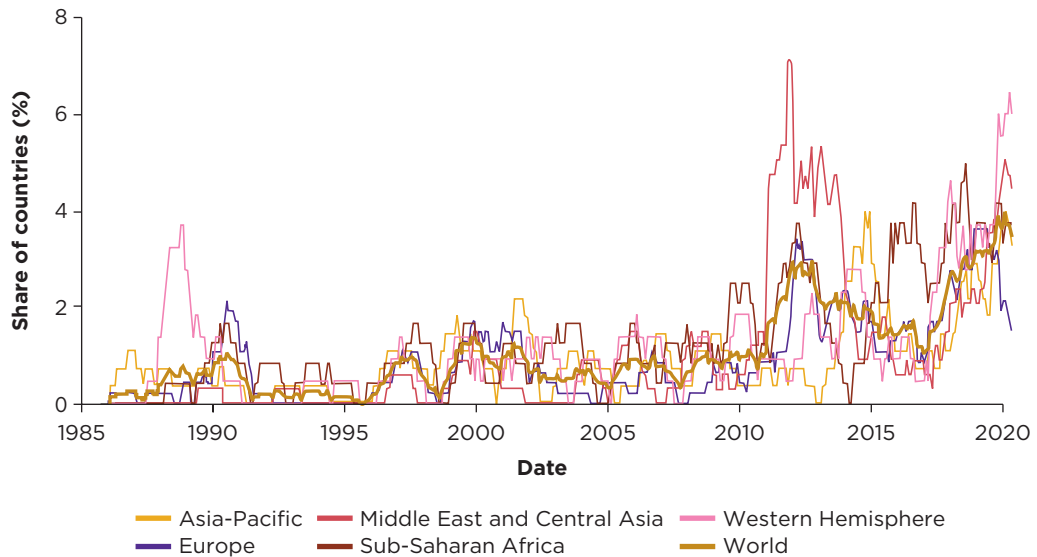
a. These categories come from the World Bank's Directive "Addressing Risks and Impacts on Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups," March 27, 2021.

- *Climate change.* Likewise, the manifestations of climate change are growing increasingly severe, further complicating efforts to address poverty and inequality. Climate effects will push as many as 132 million people into poverty by 2030 (World Bank 2020c) and force as many as 216 million people to migrate by 2050 (Clement et al. 2021). Growing evidence suggests that climate-related shocks also worsen within-country inequality, as disadvantaged groups suffer disproportionately (Islam and Winkel 2017). Meanwhile, although reforms to address climate change are critical, if too hastily implemented they can aggravate poverty, vulnerability, and inequality in the short term (for example, emissions reduction policies that increase energy and food prices) (Hallegatte et al. 2016). Similarly, if policies are not carefully designed, the costs of climate change mitigation and transition can be unequal across groups (for example, coal-mining communities).
- *COVID-19.* Finally, the pandemic has erased years of global progress on poverty reduction and shed harsh light on long-standing inequities (World Bank 2020c). The costs of COVID-19 have been borne disproportionately by the poor, marginalized, and traditionally excluded groups (Henson et al. 2020; World Bank 2020d; WHO and World Bank 2011). On average, the world's bottom 40 percent of earners have had worse income shocks (Furceri, Loungani, and Ostry 2020; Yonzan et al. 2022) and have recovered less of their prepandemic incomes, a trend that may be worsening amid rising inflation (Gerszon Mahler et al. 2022). As a result, the pandemic is expected to exacerbate inequality in both the short and long runs, especially between countries or inside low- and middle-income countries with limited fiscal programs to cushion the shocks (Yonzan et al. 2022), creating long-run generational effects on social mobility (Sánchez-Páramo et al. 2021). Learning losses may also have long-lasting impacts, especially on poorer families (Sánchez-Páramo et al. 2021).

The social effects of these challenges are growing harder to ignore. Poverty, inequality, and exclusion—exacerbated in recent years by COVID-19, conflict, and climate change—are making social sustainability all the more elusive. In particular, there is evidence that inequality is linked to higher social tensions, lower levels of trust, and diminished social cohesion as well as lower income growth (see, for instance, Bjørnskov 2008; Delhey and Dragolov 2014; Delhey and Newton 2005; Rodrik 1999; Uslaner and Brown 2003; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; World Bank 2016b). These linkages may be stronger after significant shocks: a recent review of past pandemics found that the resulting increase in inequality and decrease in economic output were associated with a significant rise in social unrest. This unrest, in turn, was associated with subsequently higher inequality and lower economic output, suggesting a vicious cycle between inequality, economic losses, and social tensions (Sedik and Xu 2020).

Other forces are also deepening social tensions, driving a wedge between groups, and undermining social cohesion. Political polarization, declining trust in public institutions, unequal access to the digital economy, and the adoption of narrower, more exclusive identities are all disrupting and dividing communities, contributing to erosion of the social fabric (World Bank 2020c).

Figure 1.2 Share of Countries with Social Unrest Events, 12-Month Moving Average, by Region, 1985–2020



Source: Barrett et al. 2020.

For example, Barrett et al. (2020) recently constructed an index of social unrest—defined as protests, riots, and other forms of civil disorder and tension as measured by media reports—and found that the global frequency of social unrest events has increased since 1985 (figure 1.2). Likewise, public opinion surveys suggest that trust in public institutions is declining around the world. In the United States, trust in government declined from 73 percent to 24 percent between 1958 and 2021 (Pew Research Center 2021); Western Europe has seen gradual but less precipitous declines (European Union 2021), and data from surveys across 62 low-, middle-, and high-income countries show that average trust in government fell by 10 percentage points between 2006 and 2019 (Perry 2021). Emerging evidence suggests that social media and other digital technologies are exacerbating these challenges (box 1.3).

These challenges are not isolated or temporary; they will not solve themselves, and the headwinds are only growing more extreme. Addressing them will require novel solutions. While important, the old tools and approaches, such as fiscal policy, investments in human capital, or improvements in labor productivity, are insufficient to face the challenges at hand and must be complemented by new approaches. To overcome today's gaps and manage future tensions, the *social* sustainability of policies, programs, and outcomes must be central to the development agenda. The current moment highlights the need to advance social sustainability as a concept and operational imperative, while sharpening the analytical foundations on which it rests.

Box 1.3 Social Media's Effects on Social Cohesion

Social media platforms connect billions of people across the planet; during COVID-19 lockdowns, they offered many people their primary channel of communication and social connection. At their dawn, these technologies were widely believed to be a force for good, but in recent years, researchers have begun to investigate their potential negative social consequences (Haidt 2022). This research suggests that social media can erode traditional social connections, divide groups into echo chambers with homogeneous views and identities, weaken empathy, and widen the perceived gaps between the haves and have-nots (Vinnakota 2017). In particular, research has revealed that social media's effect on subjective well-being—or a person's moment-to-moment feelings and satisfaction with his or her life—is more often negative (provoking social comparisons and envy) than positive (creating social capital and stimulating feelings of social connectedness) (Verduyn et al. 2017).

Emerging evidence suggests that these potential consequences are multiplying as social media grows and evolves. Social media algorithms, where the most provocative posts spread fastest and farthest, can exacerbate the negative effects, while intensifying the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. Viral dynamics can amplify previously marginal political extremes and hostile provocateurs (Hawkins et al. 2018), allowing a small number of aggressive people to attack a large set of victims (Bor and Petersen (2019). Increasingly, bots and even artificial intelligence are being used to spread disinformation and falsehoods through texts, images, and deep-fake videos. In the absence of a shared sense of truth or even reality, echo chambers and the exponential spread of information can corrode people's trust in public authorities (health officials, courts, police), institutions (government, news media, universities), and fellow citizens (Gurri 2018; Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2022). In recent years, as conspiracy theories have grown in prominence, online anger and violence have increasingly spilled over into reality in countries at all income levels.

Notes

1. Even so, there was enormous diversity in how humans organized and structured their societies. See, for instance, Galor (2022); Graeber and Wengrow (2021).
2. Both Adam Smith and his contemporary, Adam Ferguson, articulated versions of these concerns. See Hill (1997).
3. This approach draws on prior efforts to define “social” and “social development” at the World Bank. See, for instance, Davis (2004); World Bank (2005a, 2005b).
4. Cited in Escobar (1993, 1). Needless to say, views of local populations and cultures vastly more disparaging than these were expressed in earlier decades and centuries by those seeking to justify imperialism and empire.
5. These concerns moved in parallel with other developments in the social sphere, such as the emergence of environmentalism, the sustainability movement, the prioritization of human

rights, the establishment of grassroots civil society nongovernmental organizations, and the women's rights movement.

6. This section draws on more extensive efforts to trace the history and evolution of the World Bank's approach to the social dimensions of development, such as Davis (2004) and Koch-Weser and Guggenheim (2021), as well as materials and recollections provided by the World Bank Archives team and other colleagues.
7. In 1982 these concerns were converted into the first operational social policies on involuntary resettlement (OMS 2.33, later updated to OD 4.30) and indigenous peoples (OMS 2.32). In 1984 a broader statement in the operational policy for project appraisal (OMS 2.20) called for social analysis alongside economic and technical assessments.
8. In contrast, an explicit requirement was introduced for all Bank investment projects to have an environmental assessment.
9. Social assessments were encouraged to support incorporating participation and social analysis into the design and delivery of operations. *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook* provided a how-to guide to help Bank staff to support participatory approaches in economic and social development (World Bank 1996).
10. However, these instruments and diagnostic tools were deployed most prevalently in fragile and conflict-affected countries with limited institutional capabilities, with some notable exceptions.
11. This focus reflected the global and internal influence of works such as Bebbington, Guggenheim, et al. (2004); Bebbington, Woolcock, et al. (2006); Putnam (1993); and Woolcock and Narayan (2000).
12. For a retrospective analysis of implementation gaps and long-term results of five of the Bank's most innovative social development loans of the 1990s, see Fox (2020).
13. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative were created by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other multilateral, bilateral, and commercial creditors in 1996 and 2005, respectively, to ensure that the poorest countries in the world were not overwhelmed by unmanageable or unsustainable debt burdens.
14. Drawing on the work of the World Bank and others, the summit adopted 10 commitments around a people-first approach to development, including equitable access to health and education; gender equality; protection of human rights; eradication of extreme poverty; increased attention to social issues in structural reform programs; more resources and international collaboration around social issues; and recognition of the need for an integrated approach to social development across legal, economic, social, cultural, and political contexts.
15. The book is also consistent with the Bank's framework establishing the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Global Practice in 2020, which focused on inclusion, resilience, and empowerment. While empowerment in that strategy referred to citizen engagement, social accountability, and women's agency, the framework presented here integrates empowerment under inclusion (ensuring access to political and social spaces) as well as process legitimacy (ensuring that all stakeholders, especially vulnerable groups, can meaningfully contribute input and feedback into the design and implementation of policies and programs). Building on and updating these previous strategies, the book offers a more detailed vision of social sustainability and how it can be enhanced.

16. World Bank (2017a). The vision statement further states, “Through the projects it finances, and in a manner consistent with its Articles of Agreement, the World Bank seeks to avoid adverse impacts and will continue to support its member countries as they strive to progressively achieve their human rights commitments.”

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What Is Social Sustainability?

Overview and Literature Review

By its nature, social sustainability is a more elusive and complex concept than environmental or economic sustainability. When rain forests are burned down and replaced with monocrop agriculture, it is clear what has been lost; when hyperinflation wipes out entire generations of wealth, the costs of economic mismanagement are obvious and calculable. It is less clear what sustainability looks like when people and their communities are at stake: when severe inequality leads to social unrest, when marginalized groups are excluded from development planning, or when infrastructure projects destroy the communities of rural indigenous peoples, forcing them to move to cities. The vignettes in box 2.1 illustrate the nature of social sustainability and the distinctive types of challenges that failing to address it can pose for advancing inclusive development.

As noted in the previous chapter, the social dimension of development has often served as the overlooked third pillar of sustainability—an elusive goal reflecting complex sociocultural factors that are difficult to analyze empirically and fraught with normative concepts. In recent years, however, a gradual shift in perspective has elevated the importance of social factors, seeing them not just as secondary complements but as integral to the development process itself—important in their own right and inextricably linked to broader development goals. Academics and practitioners alike are increasingly seeing the three pillars of sustainability as interdependent: a lack of economic or environmental sustainability can stoke social tensions and exacerbate other social challenges, just as the presence of economic or environmental sustainability can enable and support social sustainability—and vice versa (Becker, Jahn, and Stiess 1999; Purvis, Mao, and Robinson 2019; World Bank 2013c).

Box 2.1 Vignettes to Illustrate Social Sustainability

The following four vignettes explore three interrelated questions: What does socially sustainable development mean? Why does it matter? And why is it often so challenging to achieve in practice? Each vignette highlights and connects to the key features and components of social sustainability, as defined and described later in this chapter.

- A new government in a lower-middle-income country in Latin America with a long history of conflict, corruption, social exclusion, and civil unrest achieves important reforms that result in large donor programs followed by a few years of solid economic growth, poverty reduction, and political stability. Suddenly, a series of corruption scandals leads to friction between the largest group (to which most political elites have traditionally belonged) and more marginalized groups, which have historically lacked representation in government. Isolated incidents of violence lead to protests that consume the capital, with clashes between protesters from the marginalized groups and heavy-handed police from the dominant group. Efforts at national dialogue fail, the protests spread, and the government doubles down—activating paramilitary police, blocking streets in large cities, harassing opposition members, and intimidating the media and civil society. Assistance from development organizations is put on hold, and the economy contracts, with millions pushed into poverty and a protracted political crisis that takes years to resolve.
- In an historic election, a young presidential candidate in a lower-income African country unseats the incumbent (who had been in power for decades) by appealing to the rural vote and campaigning on a commitment to improve living conditions for poor citizens in rural areas. Once in office, he launches a US\$900 million rural investment program focused on transport, water, agriculture, and health infrastructure. Concerned that working through the national and regional bureaucracy would be too slow, the president's office recruits a large multinational company to deliver projects directly and quickly to communities according to a central plan, with all procurement done through large international bids. While the program delivers quick results, the process does not prioritize coordination with line ministries, subnational governments, or local communities and fails to budget for the costs of long-term maintenance. Moreover, the centrally planned projects do not fully align with the priorities and needs of many communities, raising questions about the sustainability of these important investments.
- Outside the capital in a South Pacific middle-income country, a village chief reflects on the changes brought by “development”—a word that has no direct counterpart in his local language but that carries tremendous power in his fast-growing, fast-changing country. On the one hand, as chair of the prestigious regional development board, he is proud to show off progress in his district—two

(continued)

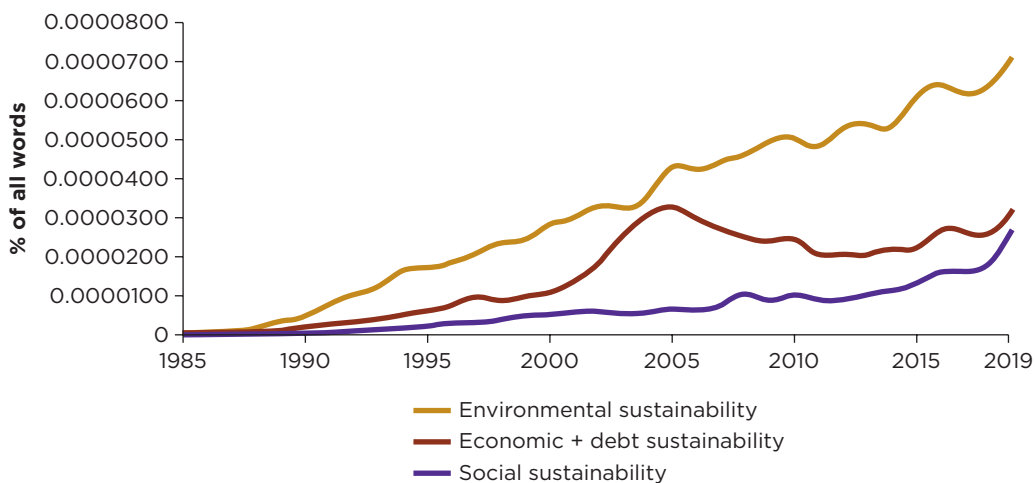
Box 2.1 Continued

primary schools, a high school, and a hospital, where his two wives gave birth to five daughters (unlike their poorer neighbors, who give birth at home). On the other hand, since he (like most village elders) is illiterate, his educated daughters treat him as simple or even foolish. The village's youth no longer respect the elders' pronouncements, religious traditions, or local court customs and complain that women are not allowed on the village council. He dreads the day when his daughters announce that they want a "better life" and leave the village for good to "make something of themselves," in the process raising children who do not speak his language, know nothing of their heritage, and will not care for him in his sunset years. He often has to reassure anxious donors of his commitment to gender equity, but many on the village council do not believe in it; personally, he still longs for a son. He feels blessed to have experienced the benefits of "development" but often mourns what is being lost.

- After resettling in the United States as a child refugee from a poor Central Asian country, getting a master's in business administration, and becoming wealthy at a tech company, a young man returns home to give back to his community. Having learned about the country's untapped agricultural potential, he decides to establish an agribusiness company that distributes hybrid seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming equipment and connects small-scale farms to domestic and regional export markets. The venture initially meets with resistance from individual farmers, who prefer traditional agricultural methods and resent the young new arrival, who speaks with a thick accent and does not practice the local religion devoutly. When local chiefs and regional administrators hear of the venture, they resent that their approval was not sought and insist on overseeing a new series of negotiations, in the process taking a cut of the proceeds. A few livestock die after eating fertilizer, which leads to village-level court cases across the region. When trying to set up export arrangements in neighboring countries, the entrepreneur has few connections, does not understand local business norms, and gets bogged down jumping through bureaucratic hoops and paying bribes. After three years of failed starts, he returns to the United States.

These shifting perspectives are reflected in the growing importance of social sustainability and its key features over time. Figure 2.1, for example, shows the growth in prevalence of the three pillars of sustainability between 1985 and 2019, as measured by their appearance across millions of English-language books digitized in the Google Books database (Michel et al. 2011). The prevalence of "environmental sustainability" in the database steadily increases starting in the late 1980s, and by 2019 the term is more prevalent than the other two pillars combined. "Economic sustainability" peaks in prevalence in the early 2000s—paired here with "debt sustainability," which spikes in prevalence after the debt crises of the 1980s and

Figure 2.1 Appearance of Key Types of “Sustainability” in Published English Books, 1985–2019



Source: Analysis using Google Ngram Viewer.

1990s—and only begins to rise again starting in the early 2010s. While “social sustainability” is still the least prevalent pillar in the Google Books database, its prevalence has accelerated in recent years, and by 2019 it has nearly caught up with economic sustainability.

As the concept has become more prevalent in recent decades, a limited but growing academic literature on social sustainability has emerged. Previously, the broader literature on sustainability often treated the social pillar as secondary to (see, for instance, Daly 1996; Kunz 2006; Locke and Dearden 2005; Partridge 2005; Vifell and Soneryd 2012) or subsumed within (Sachs 1999) environmental and economic sustainability, but a more contemporary view is that no pillar can be understood in isolation and that all three must be considered relationally. The social sustainability literature spans multiple academic and professional disciplines, with diverse applications, definitions, and connotations across the public and private sectors and the global, national, and local levels (see, for instance, Åhman 2013; Boström 2012; Boyer et al. 2016; Colantonio 2007, 2009; Eizenberg and Jabareen 2017; Griessler and Littig 2005; James et al. 2013; Koning 2001; McKenzie 2004; Sachs 1999). As a result, social sustainability emerges from the literature as a highly dynamic concept—neither absolute nor constant, but subject to change, context, and scale (Murphy 2012; Vallance, Perkins, and Dixon 2011). Nonetheless, at a high level, a certain set of broad, recurring themes emerge.

The social sustainability literature is united by an emphasis on connected communities, well-being for all, durability or resilience over time, and meaningful participation and engagement (Dempsey et al. 2011). Connected communities manifest in the literature with a frequent focus on social capital, social cohesion, and themes of identity and sense of place (Cuthill 2010; Dempsey et al. 2011; Eizenberg and Jabareen 2017; Fiszbein, Kanbur, and Yemtsov 2014; Glasson and Wood 2009; Griessler and Littig 2005; Lehtonen 2004; Schlosberg 2007; Siisiäinen 2003; Weingaertner and Moberg 2014; for a recent literature review, see Ballet, Bazin, and Mahieu 2020). Well-being for all is articulated as both

a positive value (basic needs, capabilities, quality of life, equality of opportunity) and an absence of discriminatory practices (racism, xenophobia, ageism) that hinder individuals' meaningful participation in economic, social, and political life (Pierson 2002; Ratcliffe 2000). Durability and resilience focus on the stability and security of communities over time. Some literature characterizes these principles as safety, resembling but going further than resilience by emphasizing reduced vulnerability *before* shocks occur (Adger 2000). Meaningful participation and engagement reinforce the importance of connected and cohesive communities, underscoring the value of a strong social contract.

These core strands combine in the literature to describe the arrangements that enable individuals, groups, and societies to exist together in harmony through time. Given the intertemporal and future focus of social sustainability, the literature frequently connects current generations to future ones and links historical events and processes—such as chronic injustice or inclusion—with present and future considerations. Some scholars consider social sustainability to be about the process itself of moving toward a just society for current and future generations (Castillo et al. 2007; Partridge 2005). At the local level, social sustainability is conceived as a process for creating sustainable and thriving places that promote well-being, as defined by the people who live and work there (Woodcraft et al. 2011). Sustainable communities constitute a setting for long-term human activity and interaction that is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable in the broad sense of the term (including all three pillars), thus delivering democratic, diverse, and connected communities (Bramley and Power 2009). From this perspective, sustainability in communities is associated with social capital and social cohesion, as concepts that encompass social networks, norms of reciprocity, and features of social organization at that scale.

This book groups and refines these aspects of the literature to put forward a definition of social sustainability and a conceptual framework centered on four key components: social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and “process legitimacy”—a relatively new concept that focuses on *how* policies and programs are designed and implemented.

Definitions and Conceptual Framework

As noted in chapter 1, this book uses the United Nations Brundtland Commission definition of sustainability and refers to “social” in its broadest sense: the relationships between individuals and groups and the diverse characteristics that shape those relationships—norms, values, shared identity, culture, and institutions (for early World Bank efforts to define “social” and “social development,” see Davis 2004; World Bank 2005a, 2005b). As such, the book is concerned not just with the “social sectors” of development (health, education, social protection, other development efforts to improve people’s welfare) or “social policies” (progressive taxation, safety nets, universal health care, other policies to address social challenges), but with how development interacts with, influences, and is influenced by a broad set of social factors and how those dynamics can support improved welfare overall.

The following definition and conceptual framework for social sustainability are grounded in the existing academic literature—both the recent literature on social sustainability and the comparatively wider literature on its constituent elements—but are also aligned with the World Bank’s

institutional objectives, strategic priorities, and operational frameworks, while seeking broader relevance across the development community:

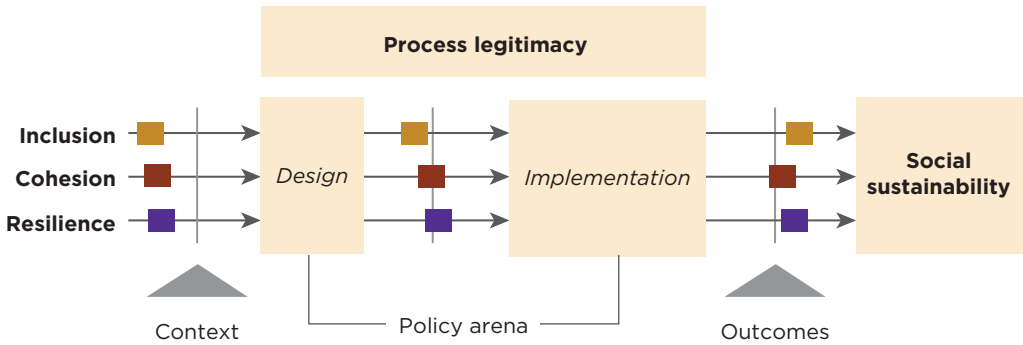
Social sustainability increases when more people feel part of the development process and believe that they and their descendants will benefit from it.

Communities and societies that are more socially sustainable are more willing and able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in ways perceived to be legitimate and fair so that all people may thrive over time.

This definition emphasizes the aspirational nature of social sustainability: it is not a binary concept but exists on a spectrum, meant to inspire continued efforts and progress toward ever greater levels of social sustainability. Indeed, no community or society has ever achieved social sustainability absolutely and permanently. The definition, its constituent elements, and the conceptual framework are also parsimonious and intuitive by design, intended to demonstrate clearly the core components and relationships that support social sustainability. This book does not attempt to model all of the factors and dynamics that engender or constrain social sustainability or its components. Given the quantity and complexity of the issues involved (culture, norms, values, beliefs, identity) and how dramatically these issues can vary across contexts, designing such a model would be extremely complicated—if even possible—although recent efforts in the economics literature have made important initial attempts.¹ Nonetheless, while the definition emphasizes subjectivity (how people feel, what they believe), the book is also concerned with concrete, measurable objectives, such as the World Bank’s new Social Sustainability Global Database (SSGD).

Unpacking the definition reveals four critical dimensions or components of social sustainability. First, it highlights *social cohesion*, linked to a sense of shared purpose and trust, which allows communities and groups to work together toward a common good and respond to challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and natural disasters in a way that avoids conflict and war and drives real solutions and sustainable compromises. Second, it underscores *inclusion*, defined as access to markets and services as well as political, social, and cultural spaces for all individuals and groups, which allows all members of society to thrive. Third, it prioritizes *resilience*, including the ability, capacity, and flexibility to avoid conflicts (including interpersonal violence) and to withstand, bounce back from, or absorb the impacts of exogenous shocks over time. Fourth, it emphasizes *outcomes* but also the *processes* by which policies or programs are designed and implemented—the “what” of development but also the “how”—highlighting the need for *process legitimacy* within the context of existing norms and values, such that the decisions made and carried out are considered fair, credible, and acceptable by all members and groups.²

Figure 2.2 presents a conceptual framework for the four components of social sustainability and their interlinking dynamics. The left side of the framework illustrates that a given community or society (that is, “context”) has baseline levels of inclusion, cohesion, and resilience. The middle part shows that how decisions are made and implemented (that is, “process legitimacy”) can result in policies and programs that promote (or not) inclusion, cohesion, and resilience. As such, the effects of these policies and programs (that is, “outcomes”) can influence (positively or negatively) future levels of social sustainability, as indicated by the right side of the framework. In other words, socially sustainable development occurs when inclusion, cohesion, and resilience are enhanced gradually over time. In the hypothetical example presented in figure 2.2, the context

Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework of Social Sustainability

Source: World Bank.

has low baseline levels of social sustainability, but the programs and policies (and how they are designed and implemented) improve all three components.

Conceptually, the framework functions within the “policy arena,” a concept developed by the 2017 *World Development Report* on governance and the law (World Bank 2017). Policy arena refers to the hypothetical forums in a given community, country, region, or global body where resources are allocated, goals are set, and decisions are made. The policy arena involves interactions between individuals, government, and stakeholder groups, often with varying degrees of power and influence and typically involving debate, negotiation, and compromise, with the potential for disagreement, tensions, or even conflict (World Bank 2017). In the framework, the design and implementation of policies and programs (and whether this process embodies inclusion, cohesion, and resilience) reflect decisions made in the policy arena. The book contends that if there is process legitimacy in a policy arena—if goals are set and decisions are made in ways that are considered fair, credible, and acceptable by all members and groups in a given context—then the resulting policies and programs that get designed and implemented will enhance inclusion, cohesion, and resilience over time. In other words, inclusion, cohesion, and resilience interact and combine through process legitimacy to produce social sustainability—a broad quality that is greater than the sum of its parts and that supports and reinforces its own constituent elements.

In spite of the framework’s simplicity, the interactions between its various components are, in practice, highly complex, nonlinear, and contextual, reflecting the rich dynamics at play in any given community or society at any given time. Moreover, the components operate across all levels of society, from the individual and household levels to the national and regional or transnational levels. Social sustainability and its components are important objectives in and of themselves—they are each, on their own, constituent elements of the ends of development—while also being important means or drivers. They underscore that development is not only about economic growth, although growth is very important; it is also about the social elements of life, which matter very much to people. These elements can, in turn, support broader sustainable development goals, including growth, poverty reduction, and shared prosperity. Box 2.2 highlights recent World Bank efforts to assess these links empirically, after which each component and its contributions to development are explored in turn.

Box 2.2 Social Sustainability Global Database

To advance the empirical understanding of social sustainability, its core components, and their links to key developmental outcomes, a global database was constructed with composite indexes for social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and process legitimacy. The Social Sustainability Global Database (SSGD) comprises 71 indicators across 236 countries and territories, accounting for 98.7 percent of the global population and covering the period 2016–20.^a The cohesion index, for example, includes indicators measuring trust at the community level and between citizens and national institutions. The inclusion index draws on variables measuring overall access to basic services and markets as well as female political participation. The resilience index is a composite of indicators examining access to assets, financial markets, and savings as well as the extent to which people have multiple sources of income. Finally, the process legitimacy index tracks indicators measuring the rule of law, access to justice, and government effectiveness. Annex 2A provides a full list of the indicators for each index and details on their construction. Indicators were chosen based on three criteria: they must (a) be unidimensional variables, (b) measure outcomes rather than inputs, and (c) reflect objective data or data directly from vulnerable groups.

The SSGD can be used to create country-level profiles and benchmarks between countries. Figure B2.2.1, panel a, for example, shows a profile of Chile using four indicators of social cohesion, illustrating that Chile's levels of interpersonal trust, confidence in government, confidence in police, and tolerance for minorities are on par with regional averages in Latin America and the Caribbean but systematically lag global averages. Figure B2.2.1, panel b, benchmarks the performance of Sub-Saharan African countries on a single indicator of inclusion: the gap between men's access to a bank account compared to women's, showing that Tunisia has the largest gap (more than 20 percentage points), while Madagascar and Namibia have almost no gap.

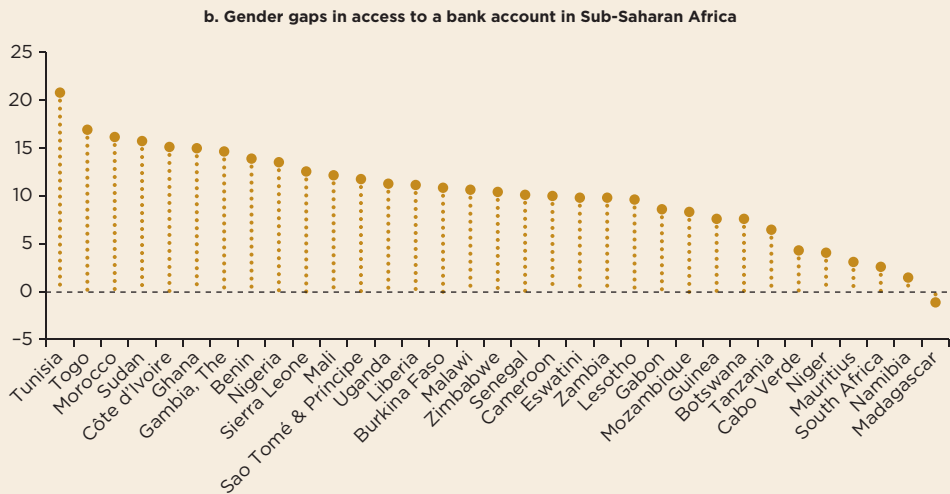
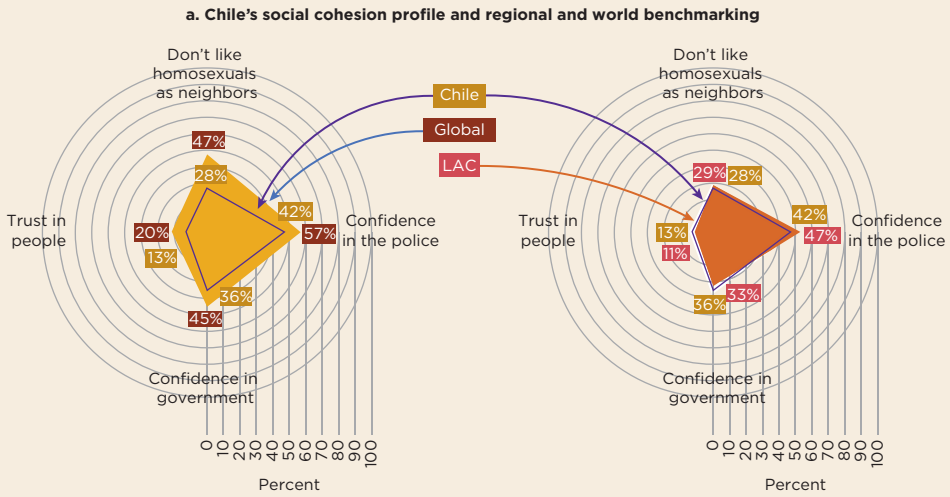
The database can also be used to conduct simple analytics. The scatterplot in figure B2.2.2 reflects cross-country analysis showing that process legitimacy is broadly correlated with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita but that broad dispersion exists within income levels, suggesting that other factors matter for process legitimacy. For instance, exposure to conflict could play a role; B2.2.2 shows that relatively stable countries like Ghana and Senegal are stronger on process legitimacy than countries with recent civil conflicts, such as Sierra Leone (a poorer country) or even Lebanon and the Philippines, which both have higher per capita GDP than Ghana or Senegal, while Cambodia, which underwent a genocide in the late 1970s, is weakest on process legitimacy.

More work is needed to address measurement challenges, data limitations, and methodological issues (as discussed later in this chapter and the next). Nonetheless, this research represents an important step forward in the empirical understanding

(continued)

Box 2.2
Continued

Figure B2.2.1 Indicators of Social Cohesion and Inclusion



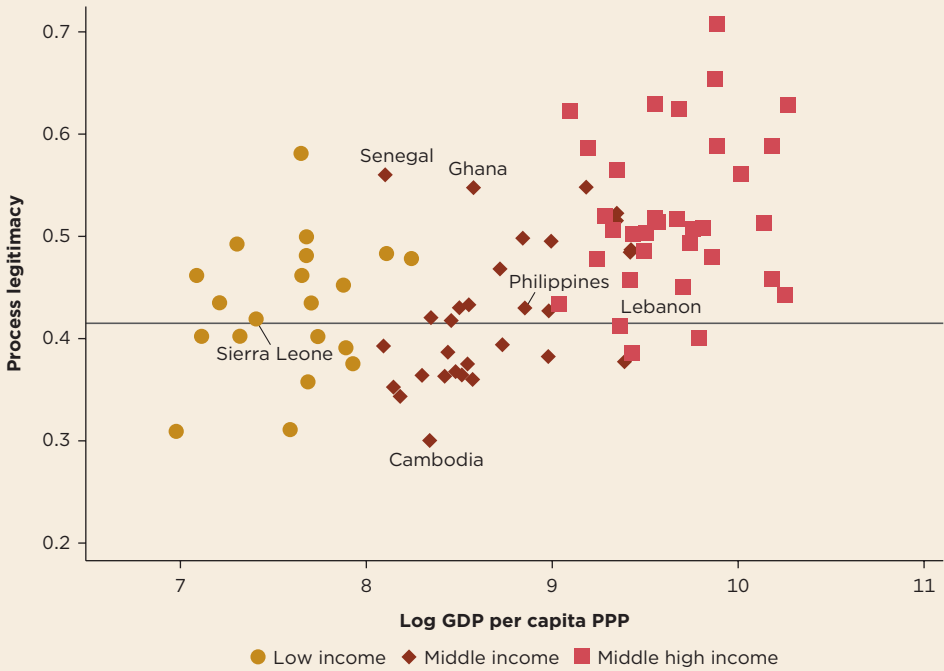
Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.
 Note: On panel b, a positive number indicates that men's ownership of a bank account exceeds that of women.
 LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean.

of social sustainability. For the SSGD, along with its codebook and a dashboard, see World Bank (2022b, 2022c). A companion article to this book documents the construction of the database and some of its applications (Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022).

(continued)

Box 2.2
Continued

Figure B2.2.2 Understanding Countries' Income Levels and Process Legitimacy



Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.
Note: GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity.

a. Data sources include harmonized living standards and income and expenditure household surveys from the World Bank's Global Monitoring Database; regional databases such as the Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer, and Latinobarometer; and global databases such as the World Values Survey, World Development Indicators, the Varieties of Democracy Project, Worldwide Governance Indicators, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, and the World Justice Project.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a sense of shared purpose, trust, and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state for a common good.

Social cohesion cultivates communities that allow people to trust each other and cooperate on behalf of a common purpose, establishing the basic social foundations for peace and prosperity (Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022; Larsen 2013). This relationship is true for every

society—rich or poor, peaceful or conflict-affected, regardless of norms, politics, or system of government. Different forms of cohesion matter at different levels and according to which groups are working together. Cohesion between individuals in a community—which is necessary to set shared priorities, undertake collective action, and manage local disputes—is referred to as *bonding* cohesion.³ Cohesion (and conflict management, when necessary) across different groups—whether between villages and regions or between broader identity collectives, such as political or religious groups—is referred to as *bridging* cohesion. Bonding and bridging are both “horizontal” forms of cohesion, but “vertical” relations between citizens and institutions in power are also critical for peaceful development to flourish and are referred to as *linking* cohesion (Loewe, Zing, and Houdret 2021). Linking cohesion is an important input for establishing and protecting a strong social contract, as it influences the citizen-state bargaining process, the resulting political settlement, and the ultimate social outcomes (Coutier et al. 2021).

While the concept of social cohesion has garnered increased attention in recent years, its roots⁴ date back to French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who in the late 19th century defined it as interdependence between individuals characterized by strong social bonds and the absence of latent social conflict (Durkheim 1897). Since then, a vast literature has conceived of it in various ways: as an intragroup characteristic dependent on size, intimacy, social organization, rewards, and the roles of reciprocity and trust (Lewin 1946; Lott and Lott 1966); as an ongoing process, offering mechanisms to resolve conflict (Beauvais and Jenson 2002; Maxwell 1996); and as a society’s capacity to ensure the well-being of its members, avoid marginalization, and minimize disparities (OECD 2011). Recent theoretical developments have considered societywide issues related to cohesion, while others have focused on local dynamics. The literature stresses different facets of cohesion: trust, shared identities, pressures to conform, and other mechanisms through which norms are enforced. Nonetheless, a consensus is emerging that cohesion is associated with greater capacity for effective collective action—with high levels of trust, openness toward “outgroups,” and a shared perception that public institutions are legitimate.

More recently, amid rising inequality and social tensions around the world, scholars and practitioners are increasingly focused on the role that cohesion plays in development—as both a means and an end, important for strengthening the social contract, avoiding conflict, and promoting prosperity, but also in its own right (OECD 2011). As mentioned in chapter 1, an extensive literature has shown links between inequality and diminished cohesion. Building and bolstering cohesion are considered particularly vital for addressing fragility, conflict, and violence: relationships in which groups have an incentive to cooperate (or at least coexist) without violence form the basis for effective institutions and pathways toward sustainable peace (Marc et al. 2012). In 2011 the Bank’s 2011 *World Development Report* on conflict, security, and development underscored that violence weakens cohesion within and between communities, that building cohesion is both a bulwark against violence and a requisite for postconflict development, and that breakdowns in cohesion can increase vulnerability to criminal networks and gangs (World Bank 2011). Likewise, a 2018 joint United Nations–World Bank study put cohesion at the center of efforts to prevent violence and solidify peace (United Nations and World Bank 2018), and the Bank’s *Fragility, Conflict, and*

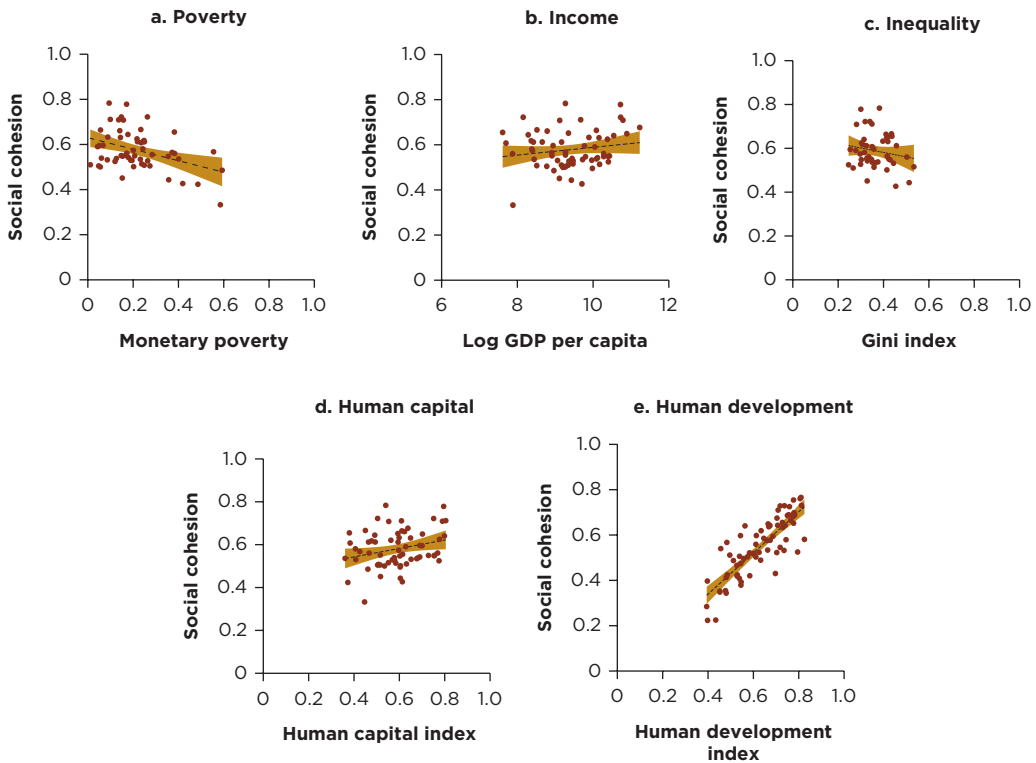
Violence Strategy in 2020 emphasized cohesion as both a means to preventing and building back from conflict and as a valuable end in itself (World Bank 2020).⁵

There is compelling evidence that cohesion has positive impacts on development, particularly in contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence. Evidence suggests that cohesion may play a significant role in preventing conflict and averting its costs and that, in times of crisis, the strength of cohesion matters (Norton and de Haan 2012; see also OECD 2011). Conflict destroys trust, fosters intergroup divisions, weakens the social contract, and increases the probability of criminality and future conflict, whereas cohesive societies are less susceptible to the influence of armed or criminal groups (Besley and Reynal-Querol 2014; Cassar, Grosjean, and Whitt 2013; Dell and Querubin 2017; Fearon and Laitin 2012; Rohner 2018; Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti 2013).⁶ Cohesion also offers broad development benefits, facilitating beneficial change processes and enhancing resilience for many types of crises (Aldrich 2012; Gates 2002; Migdal 2001; Staniland 2014; Townshend et al. 2015). During COVID-19, for example, people in regions of Europe that have high levels of trust were more likely than people in low-trust regions to limit their mobility in response to public pandemic prevention measures (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020). Low levels of cohesion, by contrast, are linked with social discontent, political instability, and social tensions such as strikes, demonstrations, riots, and unrest (Alesina and Perotti 1996; Esteban and Ray 2011). While cohesion is generally a positive feature, it can also be associated with negative consequences should it lead to the exclusion of certain groups (such as ethnic minorities or those with a different sexual orientation) or when it is used to build support for violent action toward a particular group (Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022).

Emerging rigorous evidence from randomized control trials, meta-analyses, and systematic reviews also shows the potential impacts of efforts to strengthen cohesion. For example, an impact evaluation of a community and local development (CLD) program in the Kyrgyz Republic found that it increased the community's sense of unity, cooperation, and perceptions of local governance and educational services, with weaker but still positive effects on addressing entrenched perceptions, changing attitudes, and building trust (Esenaliev et al. 2018). Likewise, a systematic review of peace-building interventions aimed at promoting cohesion in low- and middle-income countries experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence (intergroup dialogues, workshop-based peace education) found positive effects on trust, sense of belonging, willingness to participate and help, and acceptance of diversity, although the effects were small (Sonnenfeld et al. 2021). The findings suggest that such interventions alone may be insufficient unless broader challenges and structural or contextual barriers to cohesion are addressed.

The scatterplots in figure 2.3 show the results of SSGD analysis for the cohesion index, which includes indicators that measure trust, confidence, and participation in government and violence (see box 2.2 and annex 2A). The analysis suggests that cohesion is associated with lower poverty levels, higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, lower inequality, stronger human capital accumulation, and greater human development.⁷ The strength of these correlations suggests that, in particular, more cohesive societies have lower poverty and are more likely to deliver learning and health outcomes.

Figure 2.3 Association between Social Cohesion and Poverty, Income, Inequality, Human Capital, and Human Development



Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.
Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Inclusion

Inclusive societies are those where everyone has access to basic services and markets as well as to political, social, and cultural spaces in order to participate in society with agency and live with dignity.

Historically, the term “social inclusion” was motivated by the observation that some groups in society face constraints to socioeconomic participation.⁸ Over the past decade, however, the concept has increasingly been adapted to the context of development. During the early 2010s, the Millennium Development Goals drew to a close amid recognition that development investments had not addressed some of the deepest pockets of poverty and had produced unequal benefits across and within countries. In 2013 the World Bank report *Inclusion Matters* defined inclusion as “the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society,” emphasizing that exclusion goes beyond poverty or even inequality (World Bank 2013b, 4). As noted in chapter 1,

the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals encapsulated the core motivation of inclusion in their rallying cry to “leave no one behind.” Since 2020, inclusion has gained traction as part of a call for “inclusive recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The exclusion of groups or individuals from society can take many forms and be driven by many factors, such as gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity. Exclusion is sustained through a range of formal and informal norms, behaviors, and institutions. For instance, laws can stipulate a lower status for some groups or afford fewer rights to certain members of society, such as laws that restrict women’s participation in labor markets or land rights that constrain ownership by women or people of certain ethnic groups. Likewise, informal norms and behaviors can relegate some groups to inferior status, such as stereotypes of persons with a disability or a different sexual orientation, which can limit their access to and benefits from education, health care, or other services.

Exclusion can have significant costs, which have been estimated in various ways. At the individual level, the most commonly used measures of exclusion are wages, lifetime earnings, education, and employment outcomes (Buehren, Gonzalez, and Copley 2019; Lamichhane and Sawada 2013; Male and Wodon 2017; Turner 2013; Wodon and de la Brière 2018; World Bank 2014). Lower earnings or employment outcomes can be driven by human capital endowments, which may be due to prior disadvantage in education but also to discrimination in hiring or in the workplace (Buckup 2009; Lamichhane and Sawada 2013; Morgon Banks and Polack 2015). Discrimination, which typically perpetuates patterns of exclusion, can also have immediate negative impacts on physical and mental health of those affected, creating costs for individuals and society at-large (Lereya et al. 2015).

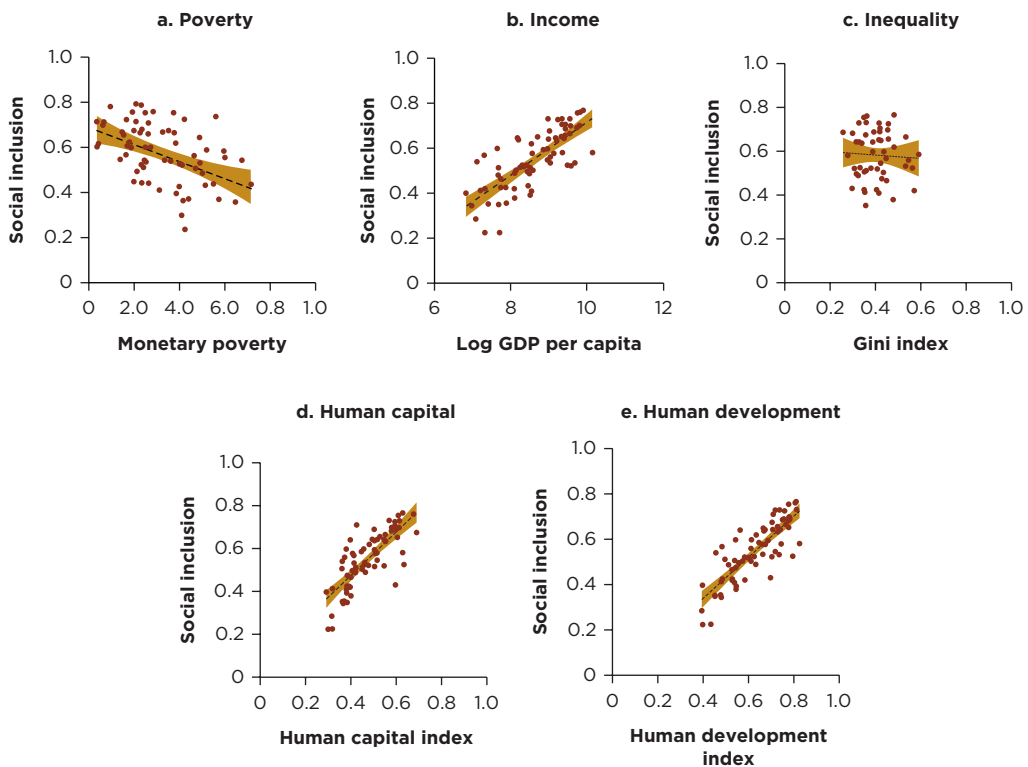
At the national level, the economic costs of exclusion can be calculated in terms of lost GDP and human capital wealth. Actual or perceived exclusion can lead to individuals opting out of education, health care, or labor markets, with costs to individuals and the economy (Burns 2012; World Bank 2013b, 2018a). For countries that rank in the bottom half of gender inequality, the economic costs of gender gaps in the labor force are equivalent to around one-third of GDP (Ostry et al. 2018). Closely related to studies that seek to quantify the costs of exclusion are studies on inequality of opportunity driven by differences at birth, such as gender, ethnicity, or parental background. Evidence suggests that inequality of opportunity is particularly detrimental to growth (Brunori, Ferreira, and Peragine 2013; Ferreira et al. 2013; Marrero and Rodriguez 2013). In the most extreme cases, exclusion can result in accumulated grievances that undermine social cohesion and lead to conflict (United Nations and World Bank 2018). Exclusionary policies and behaviors have also been identified as important causal factors in a relapse of violence (Call 2012).

Conversely, promoting inclusion can generate significant development benefits. One study, for example, attributed 25 percent of the productivity increases in the United States between 1960 and 2010 to improved allocation of talent in the labor market, largely due to the reduction of discrimination against women and Black people (Hsieh et al. 2013). Likewise, the potential economic benefit from achieving gender parity in labor markets worldwide is estimated to be as much as US\$28 trillion over a decade (Madgavkar, Ellingrud, and Krishnan 2016), while eliminating exclusion based on sexual orientation or transgender identity could increase global output

by as much as 1 percent (Badgett 2020). Such benefits accrue most notably to the excluded individuals and groups, but they also help society as a whole. Inclusion is often accompanied by better outcomes in terms of income, poverty reduction, and human capital endowments (Freire et al. 2020; World Bank 2013b, 2020). More equal access to basic services and markets as well as political, social, and cultural spaces can lead to more efficient human capital accumulation, thriving entrepreneurship (Rauch 1991), and better access to credit and insurance products—all boosting productivity (World Bank 2006). Countries that implement policies to foster the participation and political engagement of excluded groups have been shown to experience less conflict (Min et al. 2017; see also Fearon 2010; Fearon and Laitin 2012; United Nations and World Bank 2018).

The scatterplots in figure 2.4 show the results of SSGD analysis for the inclusion index, which consists of indicators that measure labor force participation, financial inclusion, access to public services, and gender equality (see box 2.1 and annex 2A; World Bank 2022b, 2022c). The analysis suggests that inclusion is strongly associated with lower poverty levels, higher GDP per capita, stronger human capital accumulation, and greater human development. It is also linked with inequality, although the association is weaker.²

Figure 2.4 Association between Social Inclusion and Poverty, Income, Inequality, Human Capital, and Human Development



Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.

Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Rigorous evidence has also shown the positive impacts of inclusion. For example, a series of impact evaluations in Indonesia found that a community block grant program targeting excluded geographic regions had large, sustained, and positive effects on health and education outcomes (World Bank 2018b). Likewise, another Indonesian program to improve the economic and social integration of at-risk youth—by establishing livelihood alternatives to illegal logging—was found to improve economic and environmental outcomes while also increasing participation in community groups and offering subjective benefits in terms of well-being, life satisfaction, and attitudes toward the potential benefits of environmental reforms (Paler et al. 2015). These results align with a review of Bank-financed CLD projects analyzed in impact evaluations, academic studies, project audit reports, monitoring reports, and publicly available internal evaluations building on previous similar studies (Wong 2022; previous studies include Casey 2018; Mansuri and Rao 2013; Wong and Guggenheim 2018). The review found that CLD projects can boost health, education, and economic welfare outcomes, but that their most consistent positive impacts are in delivering basic services (access, use, quality), reaching previously excluded groups (lagging regions, conflict-affected areas, vulnerable households), and increasing participation and voice (including among vulnerable groups) in the village development process.

Resilience

Resilient societies are those where everyone, including poor and marginalized groups, are safe and can withstand shocks and protect the integrity of their culture.

Resilience is a broad concept with applications across several domains in the sciences and social sciences, including engineering, ecology, psychology, disaster response, and sustainable development. In its most general sense, resilience is a system's capacity to persist amid shocks, adapt to future challenges, and transform in ways that enhance its functioning (Keck and Sakdapolrak 2013). In the social sphere, resilience is determined by the capacities of an individual, household, community, or entire society to prepare for and cope with shocks (Bowen et al. 2020; Folke 2016). Shocks can be categorized as either idiosyncratic (specific to individuals or households, such as a job loss or health crisis) or systemic (affecting large groups of people, such as food shortages, natural disasters, or violent conflict) (World Bank 2013a). They can be external (trade shocks) or internal (disease) as well as rapid (natural disasters), gradually worsening (soil degradation), or continuous (poverty, child labor, gender-based violence). More resilient households, communities, and societies are able to recover faster, regaining their well-being and wealth more efficiently after a shock or crisis. This definition builds on prior work (Chambers and Conway 1991) emphasizing that one's livelihood is sustainable when one can cope and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance one's capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation.

While resilience is important for all people, it is particularly critical for poor and marginalized groups—who are exposed to hazards more often, lose more as a share of their wealth when hit, and have fewer support systems (Hallegatte et al. 2017). Resilience at one level of a community or society does not necessarily improve resilience at another, and vulnerabilities are often distributed unequally (Cannon 2008; Glavovic, Scheyvens, and Overton 2003). Depending on social norms,

for instance, women, youth, and the elderly might be more exposed or less resilient to various risks (Ajibade, McBean, and Bezner-Kern 2013; Barrett et al. 2021; Jordan 2015, 2019). For billions of poor and marginalized people around the world, lack of or weak resilience can have grave consequences when trouble strikes.

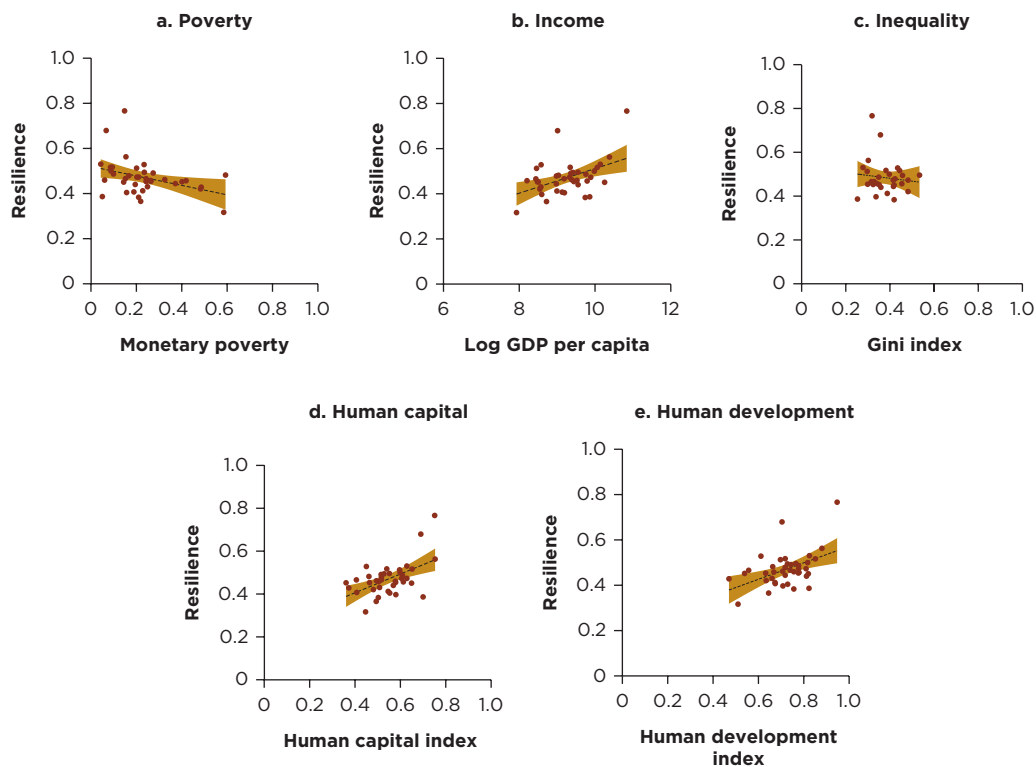
To manage risks, people rely on formal and informal strategies that can be divided into three key types of resilience. *Risk reduction and mitigation* are preparation measures that aim to lower the probability that shocks will occur or to mitigate their negative impacts if they do (Obrist 2010; World Bank 2001, 2013a). Such measures can be at the individual or household level (digging wells, diversifying assets, getting vaccinated), the community level (local informal flood infrastructure, community insurance schemes, village public health campaigns), and the national, transnational, or global level (building dams, establishing social safety nets, undertaking large-scale vaccination efforts). Sound economic and environmental policies, education and training, and other measures can also reduce a wide variety of risks (World Bank 2001, 2013a). The resilience literature often emphasizes the importance of safety (lower vulnerability *before* shocks occur) as a foundational principle related to reducing and mitigating risk (Adger 2000).

Coping measures, by contrast, aim to relieve the impact of shocks after they occur. At the individual or household level, such measures can include drawing down savings, selling assets, borrowing, or calling on support networks (friends and family, community insurance schemes, formal support and insurance mechanisms). Government efforts can support coping efforts, including through direct transfers and other social safety net programs (workfare, unemployment insurance). When such efforts are inadequate, however, individuals and households may be forced to adopt unsustainable coping measures (reducing consumption, taking children out of school, resorting to illegal activities) that can have long-term costs and consequences (Garschagen, Renaud, and Birkmann 2011; Tawodzera 2012; World Bank 2001, 2013a). Societies as a whole can also practice unsustainable coping mechanisms (exhausting finite natural resources).

Finally, *transformative* strategies—the most difficult and rare type (Moshy, Bryceson, and Mwaipopo 2015; Mozumder et al. 2018; Solórzano 2016)—reflect efforts by society to strengthen, reform, or create new institutions that improve citizens' welfare and better prepare society to weather future crises (Béné et al. 2012; Keck and Sakdapolrak 2013; Smith and Frankenberger 2018; Voss 2008). To prepare for and mitigate the shock of seasonal flooding, for example, a government might establish national and local agencies dedicated to flood preparedness and response, with adequate budgets as well as partnerships with the private sector to transform the country's capacities for managing, mitigating, and coping with risk. In a similar vein, the threat of climate change is ushering in revolutions in public transportation, green technologies, and clean energy. Risks of gender-based violence or child labor can generate important investments in legal, institutional, and normative efforts to reduce incentives for the harm to transpire.

The scatterplots in figure 2.5 show the results of SSGD analysis for the resilience index, which includes indicators that measure household assets, savings, food security, and vulnerability to the effects of climate change (see box 2.2 and annex 2A; World Bank 2022b, 2022c). The analysis suggests that resilience is associated with lower poverty levels, higher GDP per capita, stronger human capital accumulation, and greater human development. It is also linked with inequality,

Figure 2.5 Association between Resilience and Poverty, Income, Inequality, Human Capital, and Human Development



Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.
 Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

although the association is weaker—partly due to insufficient data, in terms of both the number of variables in the index and country coverage. More work is needed to improve the measurement and collection of data on social resilience.¹⁰

A range of development interventions seek to bolster resilience, and recent rigorous evidence has shown the positive impacts of these efforts. For example, a meta-analysis of 129 impact evaluations assessing the effects of group-based livelihoods programs, such as community-based microfinance schemes, self-help groups, or savings and producer groups, often based on gender, economic, social, cultural, or ethnic affinity, found that they provided much-needed safety nets and led to reduced vulnerability in contexts of extreme deprivation and adverse events like conflict or climate shocks. Participants in group-based livelihoods programs were 26 percent more likely to have income-generating activities beyond farming, providing them with an important livelihood buffer to weather challenges (Barooah et al. 2020). Moreover, the meta-analysis found that group-based livelihoods programs systematically improved social cohesion in the form of greater access to entitlements and intra- and intergroup relationships, among several other positive development outcomes.

Other evidence also suggests that resilience has strong links to social cohesion and inclusion and that the three may be mutually reinforcing. Building and maintaining social relations and network structures are critical for resilience (Adger 2000; Bodin, Crona, and Ernstson 2006; Peiling and High 2005; Traerup 2012). For example, a study of natural disaster response across four countries found that communities with robust social networks were better able to coordinate recovery and minimize long-term consequences (Aldrich 2012). In contrast, a study of Chicago's 1995 heat wave found that various forms of social breakdown, including the physical and social isolation of senior citizens, contributed to high fatality rates (Klinenberg 2002). Similar studies have assessed resilience amid climate change and broader development efforts, especially focusing on vulnerable communities (for example, Ashwill, Flora, and Flora 2011; Mearns and Norton 2010; World Bank 2013a). Institutions and power relations, including cultural capital in the form of gender, kinship, or ethnic ties, also influence social resilience (Adger 2000; Obrist 2010).

Process Legitimacy

The framework presented here establishes cohesion, inclusion, and resilience as the core elements of social sustainability and as important development outcomes in and of themselves. However, the extent to which these elements produce social sustainability entails a transformative process that is more than the sum of its parts—just as schools, teachers, and textbooks do not generate learning on their own, and hospitals, doctors, and medicines do not enhance public health on their own. From a social sustainability perspective, a fourth element—process legitimacy—is a critical driver of this transformation.

Process legitimacy is about the “how” of policy making, program design, and implementation and the extent to which these elements are consistent with a given context.¹¹ Communities and societies at-large decide whether policies and programs are deemed legitimate, illegitimate, or somewhere in between, based on their own sense of and standards for fairness and credibility. While relevant for any policy or program in any given context, process legitimacy is particularly important for socially sustainable development. This book contends that efforts to support cohesion, inclusion, and resilience are more likely to be successful if they reflect process legitimacy:

Process legitimacy is the extent to which a community or society accepts who has authority, what goals are formulated, and how policies and programs get implemented. It also encompasses the approaches for reconciling disagreements or tensions, especially among those who stand to bear the greatest cost.

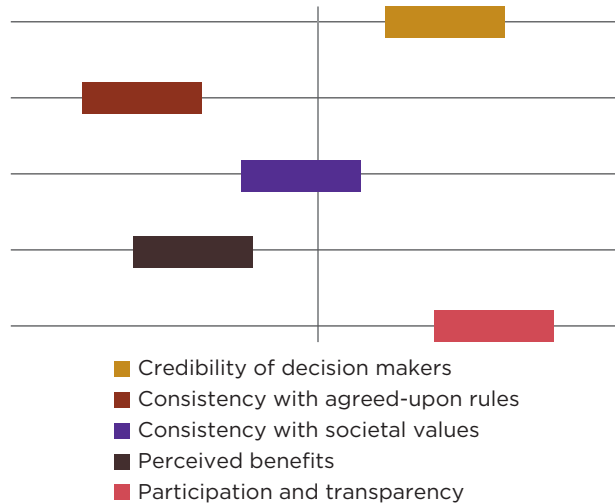
Process legitimacy occurs when decisions are perceived as fair and credible by all; it is not a binary variable, but rather exists on a scale—decision-making processes may be perceived as more or less legitimate. Process legitimacy is strong when people believe that decisions are taken by credible and recognized authority figures in ways that align with their values and reflect agreed rules or processes for decision making. In addition, process legitimacy can be enhanced when decision making is transparent and participatory and when the perceived benefits for the affected population are significant. When there is disagreement, process legitimacy ensures that extensive good-faith efforts are made to engage with and ultimately accommodate the tensions

between groups. This engagement is especially important for those who stand to bear the greatest costs as a result of the decisions made, goals selected, or procedures enacted (for instance, all those who may lose as a result of higher fuel prices or carbon taxes).

Process legitimacy can be derived in various ways, depending on the context and ultimately determined by the given community or society. The sources of process legitimacy are multiple, diverse, and often overlapping. In particular, five common drivers lend process legitimacy to an authority, its goals, and the ways those goals are implemented:⁴²

- *Credibility of decision makers.* The power to make decisions, set policies, and implement programs gains legitimacy when it stems from an accepted source (an election, formal or informal designation, technical expertise).
- *Consistency with agreed-upon rules.* The rules followed to make and implement decisions gain legitimacy when they reflect established methods or approaches that a community or society agrees to be acceptable and credible (legal precedents, professional standards, procedural guidelines, informal traditions or customs).
- *Consistency with societal values.* The beliefs or moral convictions about what and how things should be done (religious, philosophical, and ideological convictions or widely respected but nonbinding rules, such as international laws regarding war crimes or human rights).
- *Perceived benefits for the affected population.* The acceptance and legitimacy achieved for specific policies and programs—although regarded by some as dubious or morally fraught—by convincing key stakeholders that they are (or will soon be) better off (their incomes are rising or their security is being protected). In this sense, the ends come to justify (legitimize) the means.
- *Participation and transparency.* Dialogue, engagement, feedback, and partnership between authority figures and members of a given community or society—coupled with open and transparent decision making. Such participation can generate legitimacy, especially when there are disagreements or tensions.

As illustrated in figure 2.6, the five drivers of process legitimacy are related and can reinforce one another; they also can function independently of one another. Process legitimacy is stronger when an authority has credibility, when the community or society accepts the chosen goals and their implementation as reflecting agreed-upon rules and societal values or offering perceived benefits, and when the levels of participation and transparency are high. In contrast, process legitimacy is weaker when an authority derives power through force, when its goals are rejected by the affected population and do not reflect shared principles, and when it implements policies and programs in ways that are not in line with prevailing cultural practices and rules. Figure 2.7 illustrates various possible scenarios, depending on whether particular drivers of process legitimacy are present or absent. By far the most “typical” scenarios are mixed, with varying degrees of difference between members and groups about what counts as a basis for exerting authority, what counts as a reasonable policy or program goal, and what counts as fair implementation procedures for achieving it.

Figure 2.6 Drivers of Process Legitimacy

Source: World Bank.

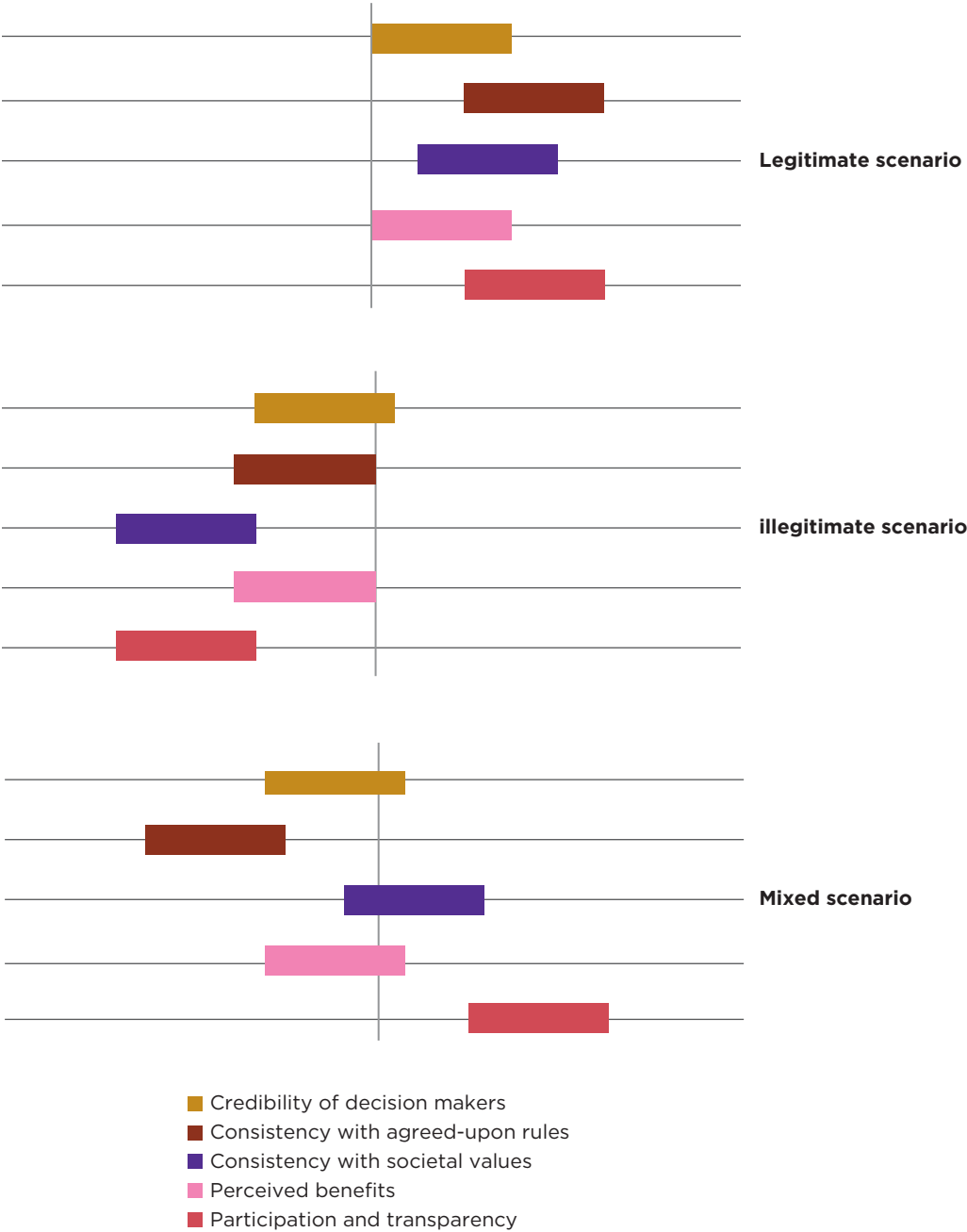
Note: The five drivers of process legitimacy are related and can reinforce one another; they also can function independently of one another. They are dynamic and change over time.

The Policy Arena: Where Process Legitimacy Is Forged

The drivers of process legitimacy are fluid and dynamic; they change over time (for better and worse) and depend on where policies and programs are formulated and implemented (parliaments, executive offices, the military, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local and community associations). Thus, a useful way of framing process legitimacy is that it concerns what happens in the policy arena—the space for collective decision making, where different groups interact and bargain over issues within the public domain, resulting in agreements that can lead to change. The legitimacy of the policy arena is critical, and it ultimately depends on all parties accepting the authority of the decision-making body, the policy goals it chooses to pursue, and the procedures it enacts for pursuing them.

The consequences of failing to achieve process legitimacy are often obvious: when the conditions of fairness and credibility are not met, outrage may follow. More often, process legitimacy is compromised in less obvious ways: when certain groups lack access to the policy arena due to high levels of inequality, when corruption or clientelism puts decision-making authority up for sale to the highest bidder, or even when well-meaning external actors create short-term incentives for policy reforms that do not reflect a transparent engagement in the policy arena. In all such cases, the social sustainability of the change process can be jeopardized and social tensions may emerge. In recent years, process legitimacy has become more challenging as the policy arena has become more fragmented, driven in part by political and cultural polarization and technologies like social media. These dynamics often undermine the credibility of information shared, and dialogue often

Figure 2.7 Process Legitimacy—Illustrative Scenarios



Source: World Bank.

happens between like-minded individuals in parallel but noncommunicative forums, making it difficult to build and sustain broad consensus around the legitimacy of policy-making and implementation processes.

Process Legitimacy in the Development Context

Development presents myriad challenges where the presence or absence of process legitimacy is decisive, as it shapes how stakeholders experience social change and the extent to which they accept the outcomes it generates—ultimately affecting whether the change process is socially sustainable or destabilizing. Policies to upgrade slums, for instance, are common and technically straightforward, but *how* they are implemented matters greatly. A government can arrive with bulldozers and forcibly displace residents by invoking eminent domain laws, or it can undertake extensive community consultations and implement a fairly negotiated and transparently communicated resettlement process. From the perspective of social sustainability, the latter approach—while still disruptive for the residents—is more likely to be perceived as legitimate.¹³ Likewise, social norms and values often determine the dynamics of process legitimacy in development; indigenous peoples who believe that their ancestors reside within their bodies might reject a national polio vaccination decree, for example, not because they reject the government’s authority or its goal, but because they believe that piercing their skin (an unavoidable aspect of implementing the vaccination program) is a violation of their venerated ancestors. In such cases, process legitimacy ensures that such beliefs are taken into account and accommodated.

Moreover, the development process often influences who has authority, what policy or program goals they pursue, and how those policies and programs get implemented.¹⁴ Such large changes can *alter the drivers of process legitimacy* in a given context. Specifically, development often shifts the balance of power, affecting established rules, norms, values, and principles while introducing new ones. Depending on the context, it may also introduce entirely “new ways of doing things.” Concerns and tensions may arise particularly over policies and programs that alter the social dimensions of development—precisely because identities, relationships, expectations, aspirations, and rules themselves are often disruptively changed. For example, gender equality, educational pedagogy, policies concerning the inclusion of traditionally disadvantaged groups, and many other aspects of contemporary development interventions may or may not accord with what is considered legitimate by national governments, let alone particular communities within and across borders. Such concerns and tensions may even erode social cohesion over time, as illustrated by the vignette in box 2.1 about incumbents (traditional leaders, religious authorities)¹⁵ whose interests or values are challenged by newly empowered groups (youth, women).

In practice, managing these changes can be complex and contentious. Furthermore, the development process itself can either intensify or help to resolve the disagreements that arise over these issues, creating significant challenges for process legitimacy. Given the high likelihood of ongoing contention about issues of process legitimacy, establishing robust and shared overarching mechanisms (or “meta-rules”)¹⁶ by which differences can be reconciled or resolved is often important. Similarly, enhancing participation and transparency—particularly by bringing into the policy arena

new groups who have tended to have less access and divergent viewpoints—often plays a crucial role in forging broad acceptance. This role is especially relevant for policies and programs that are not fully consistent with existing agreed-upon rules or shared principles; such efforts are typically most effective when the process is seen as endogenously driven. *How* tensions are resolved in the policy arena is critical for broader efforts to build legitimacy around development and the changes it brings about (intentionally or unintentionally).

For all of these reasons, process legitimacy is a critical element for promoting cohesion, inclusion, and resilience. Practicing socially sustainable development is about navigating, negotiating, and resolving these complex trade-offs in the policy arena. Routinely, however, the trade-offs cannot be anticipated in advance and are highly challenging to address when they materialize. There is also no single blueprint for promoting process legitimacy: the necessary rules, standards, norms, and procedures for managing these trade-offs are often absent, inadequate, contradictory, or compromised, thereby becoming part of the development challenge.

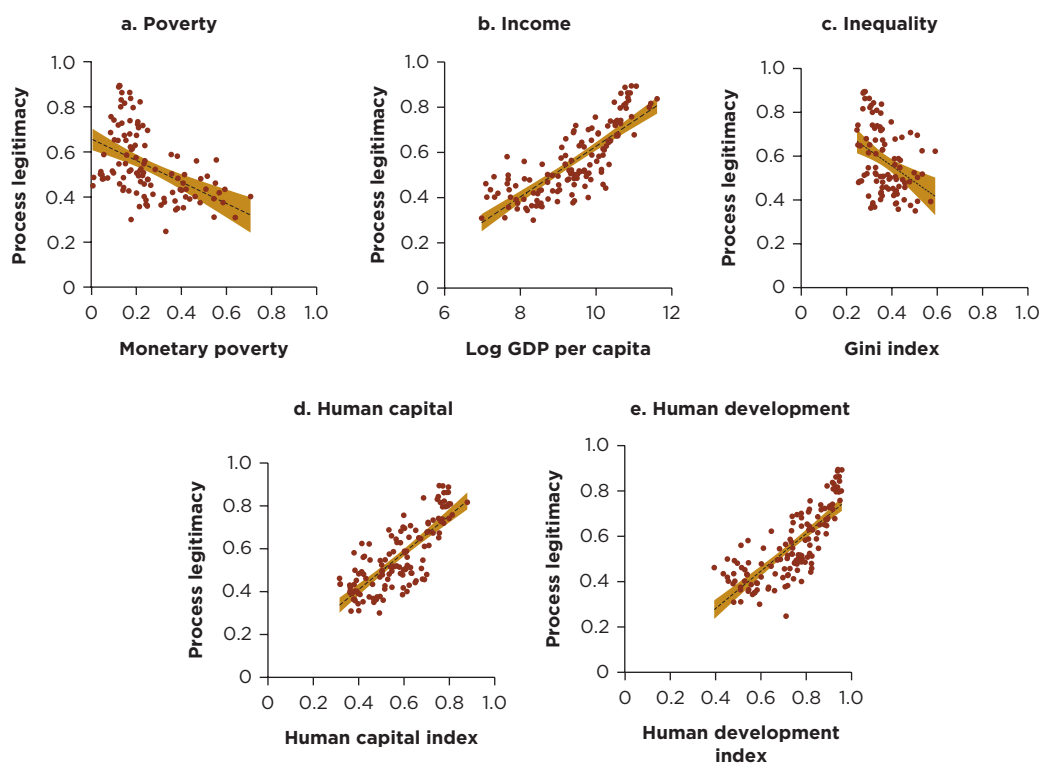
In light of these challenges and complexities, chapter 3 offers specific principles about effective approaches for promoting process legitimacy.

Evidence

Several types of interventions offer evidence on the positive effects of process legitimacy. Interventions that seek to strengthen social accountability, for example, have been shown to have several benefits for socially sustainable development. In Cambodia, an impact evaluation of a program designed to increase the government's capacity to implement social accountability approaches in rural regions, including the development of citizen-state feedback mechanisms, found that it empowered citizens to provide comments to community service providers on the quality of critical public services, ultimately strengthening transparency in access to information, increasing the use of health centers, and improving school facilities (Mubarak et al. 2020). In the Philippines, an economic support program reduced the number of conflict-related incidents and weakened the influence of insurgents (Crost, Felter, and Johnston 2016). In Afghanistan, the participatory and transparent community-driven approach helped to minimize conflict and tensions throughout the program, as community leaders were able to ensure that households were included that may otherwise not have been. In Colombia, an economic support program was found to have positive effects on the demobilization of combatants (Pena, Urrego, and Villa 2017; for additional references, see Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022).

The scatterplots in figure 2.8 show the results of SSGD analysis for the process legitimacy index, which includes indicators measuring the rule of law, control of corruption, accountability, and justice systems (see box 2.2 and annex 2A; World Bank 2022b, 2022c). The analysis suggests that process legitimacy is associated with lower poverty levels, higher GDP per capita, lower inequality, stronger human capital accumulation, and greater human development.¹⁷ The strength of these correlations, particularly with lower inequality and improved human development outcomes, is noteworthy and suggests that process legitimacy plays a critical role in the development process. These “big picture” empirical findings complement the more granular vignettes presented in box 2.3.

Figure 2.8 Association between Process Legitimacy and Poverty, Income, Inequality, Human Capital, and Human Development



Sources: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022; World Bank 2022b.
 Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Box 2.3

Four Vignettes on the Importance of Process Legitimacy in Development

The importance of process legitimacy for ensuring that development is socially sustainable plays out across all levels of society. This box considers four vignettes drawn from an array of complex cases spanning development challenges at different levels—from the global to the local. Versions of such cases are a common reality in all sectors of development.

Global Challenges: Openness, Democracy, and Sovereignty

It is increasingly understood that the sizable gains from global integration, while bringing the benefits of growth, can come at a cost, often to the most vulnerable groups (for example, those with low skills in vulnerable industries), and can lead to the decline of certain economic sectors and deep tensions in affected communities (see, for example,

(continued)

Box 2.3 Continued

Stiglitz 2007)—often resulting in protests, unrest, and political upheaval. Assessing these trade-offs, Dani Rodrik declared that democracy, sovereignty, and openness cannot be pursued simultaneously; globalization can accommodate only two of the three (Rodrik 2011). In other words, if countries wish to be open and democratic, they must cede a large portion of their sovereignty (as have members of the European Union, for example). Process legitimacy is critical: countries can only sustain these tensions if their citizens—especially those who lose from globalization—regard the policy-making process (and any redress offered) as legitimate. How compromise is reached, and on what basis, matters. The intensity of these trade-offs will vary, but countries with small populations or economies reliant on a few low-skill industries will be particularly affected (on policy strategies for responding to these challenges, see, among others, Catão and Obstfeld 2019).

National Challenges: Enabling and Constraining Central Banks

Most countries have several powerful institutions overseen not by elected public officials (who are accountable to citizens) but by political or professional appointees. A prominent example is the central bank, whose remit is vital to maintaining the nation's economic health and, by extension, shaping the fortunes of the incumbent political party. Legitimacy is paramount: central bankers must make hard decisions that prioritize the national interests over those of the party or leader that appointed them and can face pressure (including financial incentives or blackmail) *not* to do their job. Paul Tucker argues that specific forms of accountability, such as transparency and “360-degree monitoring,” and central banks’ willingness to be bound by these standards, are key to their credibility; such measures help to ensure that their actions are squarely “in the territory of legitimacy” (Tucker 2018, 422).

Local Challenges: Managing Peatlands in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Were it ever to dry up, a large peatlands ecosystem in rural Democratic Republic of Congo could release a “carbon bomb” equivalent to 10 years of US car emissions; as such, climate scientists insist that the peatlands must be protected (Maclean 2022). But how, by whom, and on what basis? Enduring tensions exist between two villages over which of them is the peatlands’ rightful custodian, each invoking different historical maps and memories; the government system for granting logging rights is deeply compromised, and villagers see the peatlands as the sacred resting place of their ancestors, have little comprehension of what carbon is and does, and see little reason to forgo lucrative income in order to address climate change, to which they have contributed almost nothing. Process legitimacy is required to reconcile these competing claims and interests, but the tensions run deep, and few sources of authority are credible in the eyes of all stakeholders. For now, it seems that a single scientist has achieved broad legitimacy, based on his combination of linguistic, scientific, and cultural knowledge.

(continued)

Box 2.3 Continued

Personal Challenges: Reconciling Social Norms and Reproductive Health

While it is denounced as a violation of human and women's rights and a major cause of serious health problems (Efferson et al. 2015), female genital cutting is also a long-established and "sacred" rite-of-passage ritual for young women in certain countries. Various approaches have been deployed to reconcile women's rights with local traditions and found wanting (McChesney 2015 documents six failed strategies), but the programs that seem to bring about lasting change "are community led, aim to change social norms in the whole community, and empower women" (McChesney 2015, 3) as well as work with traditional community leaders (who are often male). One effective approach involves taking the time to understand communities well enough to identify women of high status who have quietly refrained from adopting female genital cutting (or from insisting that their daughters do so), enabling them to be role models, mentors (Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin 2010), and influential "positive deviants" who legitimize the change process for others. (Box 3.7 in chapter 3 expands on this vignette to illustrate one example of how process legitimacy is operationalized.)

Strengthening the Empirical Foundations of Social Sustainability

As noted in chapter 1, social sustainability and its core components have both intrinsic and instrumental value; while their value is unique and innate, they also support key development outcomes. However, efforts to understand these links empirically are still nascent. There is a small but growing body of micro-level evidence, as the examples in this chapter have highlighted. More broadly, the SSGD, described in box 2.2 and the scatterplots offer new macro-level evidence that higher levels of social sustainability are associated with poverty reduction, per capita income growth, lower inequality, human capital accumulation, and human development.

Several of the SSGD correlations are strong—notably, the links of inclusion and process legitimacy with poverty reduction and human capital and the association of process legitimacy with less inequality. Indeed, process legitimacy is among the most strongly correlated indexes, underscoring the importance of factors like the rule of law, fairness, justice, and government effectiveness for the broader development agenda. Nonetheless, some of the correlations are weaker.¹⁸ This weakness likely reflects data shortcomings and measurement challenges, including the need to refine the SSGD indicators and the composition of its indexes.¹⁹ There are also broader methodological issues. For instance, the SSGD correlations are based on static cross-country data over a relatively short time horizon. This approach is not ideally suited for unpacking the complex relationships between social factors and economic or environmental

outcomes, which often exhibit a high degree of endogeneity, can shift quickly due to short-term country-specific events, and often reflect long-standing structural conditions. Long-term country-specific time-series data (as well as continued improvements in the core data) would improve analytical tools like the SSGD. Likewise, additional causal analyses—leveraging impact evaluations as well as experimental and quasi-experimental analyses—would help to confirm the correlations presented here.

The relatively weak correlations of social inclusion and resilience with inequality may also underscore that some of the many ways to make progress on the twin goals are more socially sustainable than others. For instance, some countries do well in terms of poverty reduction or inequality but do less well on one or several dimensions of social sustainability. This finding does not suggest, however, that social sustainability does not matter; as noted, the components of social sustainability are also important for their intrinsic value and contribution to human dignity and respect for basic human rights. Likewise, progress on the twin goals can be short-lived and is subject to reversals (including reversals driven by the lack of social sustainability). In other words, solutions that seem to deliver poverty reduction without social sustainability in a given time period may themselves not be sustainable in the long run. For example, poverty and inequality in contexts of migration can be reduced by providing cash transfers to refugees; however, failure to support host communities (who may be just as poor) or to involve them in the decision-making process may undermine the gains achieved and exacerbate social tensions.²⁰

Overall, the large number of positive correlations in the SSGD suggests that inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy are mutually reinforcing: in other words, social sustainability will generally be strongest when all of its components are present, offering a virtuous circle that helps to drive poverty reduction and shared prosperity. In reality, of course, the components often work at cross purposes. Some of the least inclusive societies, for example, are also the most resilient and may appear cohesive only because minority groups are suppressed or marginalized. Likewise, there are often significant trade-offs: highly resilient communities can be too tolerant of adversity, while efforts to enhance inclusion can generate resentment from groups who fear losing out. Such instances can undermine social sustainability, leading to heightened tensions or conflict.

At the broadest level (and beyond the scope of SSGD analysis), the three pillars of sustainability are also mutually reinforcing but subject to consequential trade-offs. Lack of economic or environmental sustainability can exacerbate social challenges, while sustainable growth can enable and support social sustainability—and vice versa. Without cohesion, for example, societies may find it difficult to agree on policies to promote economic or environmental sustainability; such policies will be less effective if parts of the population are excluded or vulnerable. Often, the trade-offs can move both ways: failure to address climate change, for instance, can undermine resilience and worsen exclusion, but policies to address climate change (higher taxes, subsidy removals, coal exits) can often trigger social unrest. The overall sustainability of a given community or society can fall into any number of potential scenarios (figure 2.9 presents only three possible scenarios).

Figure 2.9 Sustainability Triad: Potential Scenarios

Source: World Bank.

Ideally, communities and societies would pursue all four components of social sustainability (cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and process legitimacy) and the full triad of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) simultaneously. In practice, however, stakeholders and policy makers often choose or are forced to prioritize particular components or certain dimensions over others. This process—of balancing trade-offs and making difficult choices—unfolds within the policy arena amid the reality of competing priorities, budget constraints, and limited time frames. Process legitimacy is thus very useful—by ensuring that tensions between stakeholders are meaningfully accommodated, especially among groups that stand to lose from a given decision or trade-off.

Of course, as noted in chapter 1, the status quo for most of the last 75 years has been to prioritize economic and (more recently) environmental sustainability over social sustainability, and the increased recognition that social factors are important has not dramatically affected the way development is done on the ground. To motivate policy makers and development organizations to take social sustainability more seriously, strengthening its empirical foundations is critical, but so too is developing practical experience and operational expertise. Chapter 3 explores how to operationalize social sustainability, despite the many challenges and obstacles.

Annex 2A Empirical Annex

Table 2A.1 Variables Used in Social Sustainability Indexes

Variable	Country observations	Source
<i>Social inclusion</i>		
Labor force participation rate (0-1)	113	GMD
Share of population with a bank account (0-1)	105	Regional barometers, FINDEX Database
Share of households without access to adequate sanitation (0-1)	137	GMD
Share of households with access to electricity (0-1)	104	GMD
Secondary enrollment rate (0-1)	114	GMD
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (0-1)	190	World Development Indicators
Social inclusion index (0-1)	73	
<i>Resilience</i>		
Index of average assets in household (normalized 0-1) ^a	101	GMD
Share of population that saves some money (0-1)	85	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
1 minus the share of population that has gone without enough food to eat in the past year (0-1)	110	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
Share of households with several sources of income (0-1)	113	GMD
Share of population that considers moving because of climate change reasons (0-1)	113	Gallup
Resilience index (0-1)	40	
<i>Social cohesion</i>		
Share of population that says most people can be trusted (0-1)	86	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
Share of population that says they have confidence in the government (0-1)	112	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
Share of population that says they have confidence in the police (0-1)	113	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
Share of population that voted in the last national election (0-1)	106	Regional barometers and World Values Survey
Share of population that are active members of organizations (0-1)	78	World Values Survey
Index of fatalities from violence (normalized 0-1) ^b	206	ACLED
Index of homicides (normalized 0-1) ^c	90	World Development Indicators
Social cohesion index (0-1)	68	

(continued)

Table 2A.1 Continued

Variable	Country observations	Source
<i>Process legitimacy</i>		
Rule of law (normalized 0-1)	209	World Governance Indicators
Control of corruption (normalized 0-1)	209	World Governance Indicators
Government powers are effectively limited by the judiciary (score 0-1)	139	World Justice Project
Equal treatment and absence of discrimination in the legal system (score 0-1)	139	World Justice Project
People can access and afford civil justice (score 0-1)	139	World Justice Project
Government regulations are applied and enforced without improper influence (score 0-1)	139	World Justice Project
The right of life and security to the person is effectively guaranteed (score 0-1)	139	World Justice Project
Process legitimacy index (0-1)	139	

Source: World Bank 2022b.

Note: ACLED = Armed Conflict Location and Event Data; GMD = Global Monitoring Database.

a. Average = set of assets, including computer, cell phone, radio, television, washing machine, sewing machine, car, fridge, and motorcycle, that are owned by a household in the country, normalized between 0 to 1 (1 = having all assets considered).

b. Index = number of fatalities due to violence in a country. The indicator is normalized across all countries in the sample using $\frac{\text{var} - \text{var}_{\min}}{\text{var}_{\max} - \text{var}_{\min}}$.

c. Index = number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in a country normalized across all countries in the sample using $\frac{\text{var} - \text{var}_{\min}}{\text{var}_{\max} - \text{var}_{\min}}$.

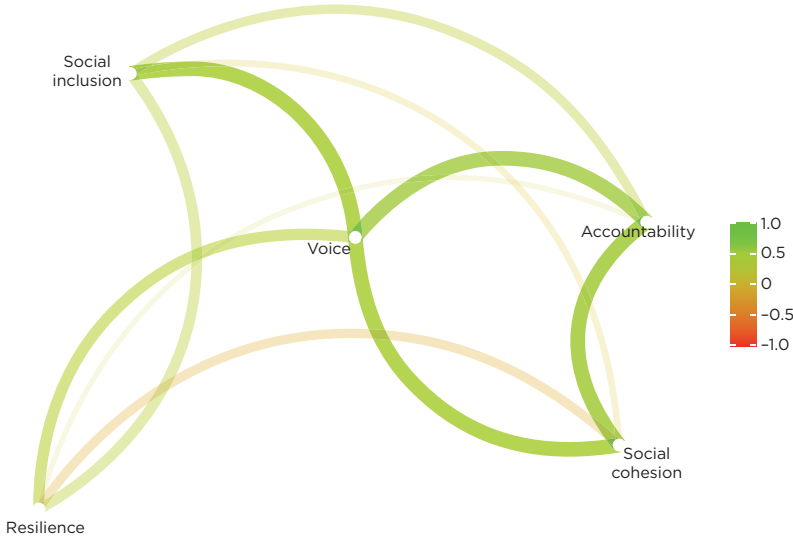
Those indicators are aggregated across each of the four social sustainability components through the following index:

$$SS_j = \sum_i (w s)_i \tag{2A.1}$$

where, for the *j*th social sustainability component (*j* = 1, 2, 3, 4)—that is, social cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy in each region—each *i*th social sustainability indicator, *s*, used to define the respective component is weighted by a factor, *w*. Following the most parsimonious definition, *w* = 1/*i*—that is, each index equally weights its indicators. In practice, the index for each component of social sustainability is defined at the national level.

Robustness checks were conducted to see the sensitivity of results to the number of indicators used in each component, alternative choices of indicators across indexes, and nonlinear functional forms for the index (figure 2A.1 and table 2A.2). Key findings regarding the direction and strength of correlations did not change after these changes. See Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa (2022) for a detailed discussion of those robustness checks.

Figure 2A.1 Pairwise Correlations between Social Sustainability Components



Source: Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022.

Table 2A.2 Correlations among the Components of Social Sustainability

	Social inclusion	Resilience	Social cohesion	Process legitimacy
Social inclusion	1.000			
Resilience	-0.088	1.000		
Social cohesion	-0.042	0.391	1.000	
Process legitimacy	0.393	0.493	0.353	1.000

Source: World Bank 2022b.

Annex 2B Social Sustainability and Developmental Outcome Correlations, Controlling for Income

This annex reports the estimates of simple linear regressions linking each component of social sustainability with the various developmental outcomes analyzed in this chapter, except for GDP per capita, which now becomes a control variable. Table 2B.1 compares the results from unconditional regressions, regressions conditioning for log per capita GDP, and, finally, regressions conditioning for income-level group dummies. As explained in the main text, controlling for either log per capita GDP or income-level category of countries included in the regressions does not alter the direction—that is, the sign—of the unconditional correlations (those graphed in the scatterplots). However, the strength—size of the coefficient—of those relationships tends to decrease and, in a few cases, stops being statistically significant. This finding indicates that income level partially mediates the relationship between social sustainability and other development outcomes, which is why coefficients change in magnitude. Table 2B.1 reports the coefficients, standard deviation, and statistical significance of all the estimates of the regressions.

Table 2B.1 Unconditional and Conditional Regressions of Social Sustainability and Developmental Outcomes

Social Cohesion												
Variables	[1] SC index	[2] SC index	[3] SC index	[4] SC index	[5] SC index	[6] SC index	[7] SC index	[8] SC index	[9] SC index	[10] SC index	[11] SC index	[12] SC index
Poverty NPL last 5 years	-0.256*** [0.080]	.0.242** [0.091]	-0.252*** [0.086]									
Gini past 5 years				-0.204 [0.170]	-0.198 [0.177]	-0.115 [0.18]						
Human capital index							0.196** [0.090]	0.129 [0.175]	0.218 [0.143]			
Human development index										0.181** [0.088]	-0.002 [0.299]	0.331 [0.179]
Log per capita GDP		-0.004 [0.014]			0.002 [0.014]			0.002 [0.023]			0.017 [0.039]	
High income												
Low income			0.0101 [0.0561]			0.0264 [0.0606]			0.0213 [0.0722]			0.074 [0.086]
Lower middle income			-0.0144 [0.03]			-0.0126 [0.0293]			0.00724 [0.0394]			0.034 [0.048]
Upper middle income			-0.0291 [0.0305]			-0.05 [0.0308]			-0.03 [0.0335]			-0.024 [0.033]
Constant	0.630*** [0.020]	0.661*** [0.143]	0.644*** [0.0271]	0.663*** [0.063]	0.642*** [0.160]	0.650*** [0.0636]	0.464*** [0.054]	0.483*** [0.143]	0.458*** [0.105]	0.441*** [0.067]	0.417** [0.173]	0.321** [0.160]
Observations	58	57	58	48	48	48	65	62	65	66	63	66
R-squared	0.157	0.128	0.176	0.030	0.031	0.108	0.071	0.157	0.11	0.062	0.030	0.1297

(continued)

Table 2B.1 Continued

Social inclusion												
Variables	[1] SI index	[2] SI index	[3] SI index	[4] SI index	[5] SI index	[6] SI index	[7] SI index	[8] SI index	[9] SI index	[10] SI index	[11] SI index	[12] SI index
Poverty NPL last 5 years	-0.377*** [0.089]	0.002 [0.081]	-0.14 [0.0833]									
Gini last 5 years				-0.078 [0.203]	-0.022 [0.142]	-0.0137 [0.173]						
Human capital index							1.014*** [0.099]	0.583*** [0.148]	0.752*** [0.129]			
Human development index										0.908*** [0.072]	1.084*** [0.211]	1.042*** [0.143]
Log per capita GDP		0.124*** [0.016]			[0.106]*** [0.015]			0.064*** [0.017]			-0.027 [0.030]	
High income												
Low income			-			-0.185*** [0.0433]			-			0.05 [0.0469]
Lower middle income			0.125*** [0.0321]			-0.0994*** [0.0298]			0.0544* [0.0286]			0.031 [0.026]
Upper middle income			0.219***			-			0.105***			-
Constant	0.671*** [0.032]	-0.516*** [0.153]	0.469*** [0.0452]	0.614*** [0.083]	-0.340** [0.144]	0.715*** [0.0745]	0.068 [0.048]	-0.281*** [0.104]	0.134** [0.0506]	-0.024 [0.046]	0.094 [0.140]	-0.134 [0.109]
Observations	69	69	69	51	51	51	70	70	70	72	72	72
R-squared	0.212	0.592	0.487	0.003	0.524	0.311	0.606	0.673	0.654	0.696	0.699	0.702

(continued)

Table 2B.1 Continued

Resilience												
Variables	[1] RE index	[2] RE index	[3] RE index	[4] RE index	[5] RE index	[6] RE index	[7] RE index	[8] RE index	[9] RE index	[10] RE index	[11] RE index	[12] RE index
Poverty NPI last 5 years	-0.210** [0.086]	-0.108 [0.103]	-0.155* [0.0886]									
Gini past 5 years				-0.131 [0.208]	-0.140 [0.197]	-0.095 [0.186]						
Human capital index							0.436*** [0.115]	0.362* [0.183]	0.419*** [0.148]			
Human development index										0.364*** [0.111]	0.289 [0.321]	0.492** [0.184]
Log per capita GDP		0.041* [0.021]			0.042** [0.020]			0.017 [0.025]			0.017 [0.045]	
High income												
Low income			-0.101 [0.0823]			-			-0.0256 [0.0851]			0.04 [0.102]
Lower middle income			-0.101** [0.0398]			0.104** [0.0387]			0.044 [0.0451]			-0.016 [0.053]
Upper middle income			-0.118*** [0.0386]			-0.123*** [0.0397]			-0.0794* [0.0395]			-0.076* [0.04]
Constant	0.520*** [0.023]	0.114 [0.208]	0.605*** [0.0354]	0.534*** [0.079]	0.147 [0.200]	0.621*** [0.0761]	0.231*** [0.064]	0.110 [0.172]	0.298*** [0.107]	0.208** [0.081]	0.101 [0.219]	0.157 [0.163]
Observations	38	37	38	31	31	30	39	38	38	40	39	39
R-squared	0.141	0.223	0.33	0.013	0.146	0.29	0.280	0.290	0.407	0.220	0.230	0.391

(continued)

Table 2B.1 Continued

Process legitimacy												
Variables	[1] PL index	[2] PL index	[3] PL index	[4] PL index	[5] PL index	[6] PL index	[7] PL index	[8] PL index	[9] PL index	[10] PL index	[11] PL index	[12] PL index
Poverty NPL past 5 years	-0.475*** [0.083]	0.137* [0.079]	-0.122* [0.0618]									
Gini last 5 years				-0.728*** [0.185]	-0.129 [0.139]	0.053 [0.119]						
Human capital index							0.863*** [0.060]	0.316** [0.136]	0.026*** [0.0984]			
Human development index										0.826*** [0.056]	0.318 [0.221]	0.443*** [0.113]
Log per capita GDP		0.121*** [0.011]			0.111*** [0.011]			0.076* ** [0.017]			0.070** [0.030]	
High income												
Low income			-0.285*** [0.0309]			-0.298*** [0.0324]			-0.23*** [0.041]			-0.1398*** [0.0511]
Lower middle income			-0.305*** [0.0206]			-0.315*** [0.0228]			-0.252*** [0.0299]			-0.197*** [0.033]
Upper middle income			-0.214*** [0.0200]			-0.216*** [0.0228]			-0.163*** [0.0235]			-0.146*** [0.0219]
Constant	0.658*** [0.024]	-0.613*** [0.116]	0.770*** [0.0172]	0.847*** [0.070]	-0.445*** [0.132]	0.731*** [0.0403]	0.064* [0.036]	0.332*** [0.096]	0.556*** [0.0733]	0.049 [0.042]	0.330** [0.129]	0.348*** [0.101]
Observations	115	114	114	95	94	95	133	131	133	136	133	135
R-squared	0.225	0.631	0.75	0.142	0.613	0.744	0.611	0.656	0.758	0.618	0.644	0.767

Source: World Bank.

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. NPL = national poverty lines; PL = process legitimacy; RE = resilience; SC = social cohesion; SI = social inclusion.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Notes

1. Nunn (2022), for example, adapts conceptual frameworks from evolutionary anthropology to provide a theoretically guided discussion of the dynamics surrounding culture and tradition in society, modeling the costs and benefits of different beliefs, values, and worldviews over time. Nunn's model illustrates how decision making that relies on tradition can be an effective strategy in certain contexts—namely, stable environments where the knowledge and skills obtained by earlier generations are still relevant and useful in the present day—but may not be as beneficial when the world changes and the new environment presents challenges that require new knowledge and skills (or even policies) to overcome.
2. As noted in the brief history of social sustainability, these four components align with and further develop the operational principles in the World Bank's 2005 Social Development Strategy and its 2011 Mid-Term Review, which stated, "Development is socially sustainable when it promotes inclusive, cohesive, resilient, and accountable institutions."
3. The terms bonding, bridging, and linking are drawn from Woolcock and Narayan's work on social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Whereas social capital can refer to an individual or a community and generally refers to the extent of one's own communities or social networks, social cohesion is measured at the intra- or intercommunity and society levels and refers to trust. See also Olawole, Lichtenheld, and Sheely (2022).
4. This brief summary of the literature is adapted from Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint (2022).
5. Recognizing the importance of cohesion, in May 2020 the World Bank established a Global Solutions Group on Social Cohesion and Resilience, which works on these issues in contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence and beyond.
6. By contrast, several authors have found that conflict might also be associated with higher political participation, more local collective action, and stronger intragroup trust (see Bauer et al. 2016; Bellows and Miguel 2009; Blattman 2009; Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii 2014).
7. These and other figures using the SSGD show correlations rather than, necessarily, causal relationships. Nonetheless, the findings hold when controlling for income level—using either countries' log per capita GDP or income-level categories. Results are presented in annex 2B. Coefficients of these conditional regressions also indicate that the correlations between cohesion and some developmental outcomes stop being significant, as in the case of human capital and human development. This finding suggests that income level partly mediates the relationship between social sustainability and some developmental outcomes.
8. In France in the 1970s, for instance, then-Secretary of State for Social Action Rene Lenoir was one of the first to use the term "social exclusion" for persons with disabilities, single parents, drug addicts, "delinquents," and the elderly, who, he argued, all needed active state help to be able to participate in society. See Paugam (1993).
9. Controlling for the country's level of income—either through the income-level category or the per capita GDP of the country—does not change the sign of these correlations, although it typically reduces their strength (the coefficient between social inclusion and poverty stops being significant). This finding indicates that income mediates how social inclusion and poverty relate to each other. See annex 2B.

10. Both the sign and the strength of these correlations remain after controlling for income level, confirming that it is not only and not mainly income that mediates between resilience and other developmental outcomes. The only exception is the correlation with poverty, which, after controlling for income, stops being statistically significant. See annex 2B.
11. The concept of process legitimacy has deep roots in prior World Bank efforts. The concept of process legitimacy was first explicitly used in the 2017 *World Development Report* on governance and the law. It is closely related to the Bank's work on empowerment and accountability, including the bottom-up "demand for good governance" approach. The 2005 Social Development Strategy, for example, emphasized cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and accountability as the key pillars of social development, while the 2020 framework launching the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Global Practice emphasized inclusion, resilience, and empowerment. See the brief history of social sustainability in chapter 1.
12. This view extends the definition of legitimacy from classical social theory, which was understood to be secured via three primary sources: tradition (inheritance, custom), legal or rational procedures (elections, professional merit), and routinized charisma (a compelling orator and associated social movement, for example, Martin Luther King Jr.). This three-part framework was expressed most influentially by Max Weber (1864–1920). Contemporary work, especially by Tom Tyler (1990), has demonstrated that the legitimacy of decisions by authority figures is enhanced to the extent that such decisions, and the basis on which they are reached, comport with prevailing moral norms.
13. However, the very act of opening up such wrenching decisions to broad community input has the potential to raise unrealistic expectations and cause costly debilitating delays—for example, the efforts to rebuild a section of lower Manhattan after Hurricane Sandy remain unrealized nearly a decade later (see Kimmelman 2021).
14. As noted, development changes how people live, including peoples' identities, expectations, and established ways of managing resources and relations—a process that is often deeply disruptive (and sometimes overtly destructive) to the local ways of doing things. This dynamic—pursuing goals through a process of deep change—can be considered a form of "creative destruction," in the Schumpeterian sense. See Aghion, Antonin, and Bunel (2020).
15. See Berry (2015, 1) on the sociopolitical dynamics, in Rwanda, shaping the paradoxical effects on women of political empowerment, rising education levels, and labor force participation, wherein "efforts to remedy women's subordination may actually end up reinforcing it."
16. See Barron, Smith, and Woolcock (2004) for an application of the idea of meta-rules to understanding local dispute resolution procedures in rural Indonesia.
17. As with the other SSGD indexes, these findings remain after controlling for country income level or per capita GDP. The size of the correlations typically diminishes after controlling for income. See annex 2B.
18. Also, the associations among components of social sustainability are complex and intricate, as reported by their pairwise correlations. See annex 2A.
19. For example, the indicators for the inclusion index measure access rates overall, rather than only access rates for vulnerable groups. Likewise, some indicators relate to multiple components of social sustainability; access to political and civic spaces is an indicator for the inclusion index,

but it could fit in the process legitimacy index as well; similar issues exist for the social cohesion and resilience indexes. See Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari (2022).

20. The need to support both host and refugee communities is a key conclusion of World Bank (2022a), which presents 26 country case studies.

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Closing the Implementation Gap

Introduction

The previous chapters made the case for why, to respond to the most urgent crises of the moment and meet the challenges of the 21st century, development needs to embrace social sustainability as a core objective. Building on this background and the book's definition, conceptual framework, and empirical evidence, this chapter discusses key areas for development cooperation to enhance its impact on social sustainability. A wealth of experience has been accumulated on how to design and implement successful projects, programs, and policies to support social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and process legitimacy, translating aspirations for social sustainability into action. Yet there is a need to integrate social sustainability more systematically and consistently across all areas of development.

This chapter begins by outlining five common operational challenges that need to be factored into programming for social sustainability. It then provides an overview of interventions, from World Bank experience as well as that of other development organizations, that have proven effective at fostering cohesion, inclusion, and resilience. While not comprehensive, the examples highlight some of the most effective and innovative efforts to date, with the understanding and expectation that new insights will emerge in the years to come. The chapter closes by drawing out three high-level, overarching priorities for supporting process legitimacy, in order to ensure that efforts to promote social sustainability work within the context of existing norms and values and are considered fair, credible, and acceptable by all members and groups in a society.

Challenges in Operationalizing Social Sustainability

Progress toward social sustainability can be fostered, and this chapter provides some insights on how to advance it. However, five common challenges must be taken into account in efforts to promote and support inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy.

Progress is often nonlinear and time-consuming. The change process can be contentious and sometimes violent, with achievements often followed by setbacks. This dynamic is discussed in depth in the academic literature, for example, on racial justice in the United States¹ and on advances in women's labor market participation globally.² In particular, policies and projects that target deeper change, such as behavioral or normative transformation, take longer to show measurable results. As such, the time horizon for social change is often longer than the typical project horizon for development practitioners and other change makers. Moreover, while the four key components of social sustainability often mutually reinforce each other (that is, inclusion can promote trust and cohesion, which together can foster resilience—all supported by process legitimacy and further enhancing it in turn), they do not always move together. Societies often make progress on one dimension (or certain aspects of a dimension), while failing on others. A country might improve access to education for people with disabilities, for instance, but experience greater interethnic conflict or have high levels of resilience to climate shocks alongside high levels of exclusion.

The factors that drive or impede social sustainability are nonuniform and context-dependent. Inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy are shaped by local context and vary across countries and communities. Depending on the specific stressors experienced by a community and its particular needs, efforts to bolster resilience will need to take a different focus. While strengthening social protection systems may help communities to cope with recurring income shocks, improving early warning systems and providing better information may be more critical for communities facing the threat of natural disasters. Likewise, fostering cohesion can involve programs to increase trust in the police, strengthen interethnic connections in schools, or promote nonviolent conflict resolution between communities; in other situations, cohesion may best be supported as part of programs with broader objectives such as improving livelihood opportunities or access to public services (Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022).

The obstacles are often complex, multidimensional, and entrenched. Social sustainability is first and foremost about people, and the obstacles to it cut across many areas of people's lives. Therefore, solutions must be multidimensional and work across sectors to foster new opportunities by lifting constraints where they exist. Job schemes to promote women's inclusion in labor markets, for example, may only work if women also have access to quality child care, water, and electricity (to free their time to engage in income-generating activities), if gender norms are conducive, and if they have agency to take up employment (Barca 2019; Barros et al. 2011; Berlinski and Galiani 2007; Buvinic and O'Donnell 2019). Likewise, making buildings physically accessible may improve access to education for some children with disabilities, but others will continue to be left out unless teachers know how to teach children with different learning needs and learning materials are accessible (Alasuutari et al. 2020). In the most vexing cases, obstacles are so entrenched that much broader issues will need to be tackled (structural inequality, elite resistance, vested interests) before any social sustainability efforts can thrive.

Progress may involve normative changes, which can be difficult to generate. Deeply embedded social and cultural norms, values, and behaviors can also impede social sustainability and undermine the effectiveness of policies and programs to enhance it. While a core aspect of process legitimacy is working within existing contexts, promoting positive norms is important and can sometimes require influencing or counteracting negative ones. Such efforts are challenging, however, and can

be unpredictable and potentially destabilizing—often aggravating deep-rooted social tensions and increasing the risks of unrest or conflict.

The context is always evolving. As certain goal posts for social sustainability are reached, new challenges arise, partly due to the nature of the issues associated with social sustainability. Resilience, almost by definition, is about coping with the unforeseen; the complex and diverse impacts of climate change, for instance, are still being understood and can be highly unpredictable.³ For cohesion, while several models exist to forecast social tensions and violent conflict, it is impossible to predict their onset, location, intensity, and timing accurately (on the challenges of predicting violent conflict, see United Nations and World Bank 2018, 241). For inclusion, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are now well-recognized aspects of inclusivity in a growing number of countries, but were not widely acknowledged until recent decades and are not (yet) recognized in other countries. Likewise, new technologies create new ways of interacting and doing things; the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, suddenly made digital inclusion in education a mainstream challenge where it had previously been a frontier issue. As such, social sustainability will, in part, always remain aspirational and continue to inspire progress as societal values, behaviors, and norms change and societies evolve (box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Social Inclusion in Uruguay

The case of Uruguay illustrates the aspirational nature of social sustainability and its key components. In a region where inequality is common, the country has made significant progress on inclusion; it stands out for its robust middle class, near absence of extreme poverty, high levels of job formality, and near universal access to basic services. Over the past two decades, poverty in Uruguay has declined by roughly 75 percent, and the country has low levels of corruption as well as social spending that is on par with levels in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

These achievements have been supported by a strong social compact and a long history of inclusive legislation. During the first decades of the 20th century, Uruguay enacted far-reaching labor reforms, becoming the first country in the world to adopt an eight-hour workday. The government universalized access to primary education and health care, legalized divorce, and offered strong unemployment benefits. In 2007 Uruguay was the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex civil unions.

Important gaps remain, however. Stigmatization and disadvantages in education and health are still linked to gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, and geographic location. Female-headed households, for example, are still twice as likely to be poor as households headed by males. Likewise, despite Uruguay's affirmative

(continued)

Box 3.1 Continued

action policies, Afro-descendants are still 2.5 times more likely to live in poverty than the national average. Uruguay's experience provides two lessons. First, investment and policies aimed at social inclusion pay off, making societies more equitable and resilient to shocks in the long run. Second, gaps in income, well-being, and access to opportunities among social groups are persistent, often driven by complex and long-standing structural barriers and norms. Even a regional leader in social inclusion such as Uruguay cannot afford to be complacent.

What Has Worked to Promote Cohesion, Inclusion, and Resilience?

Cohesion, inclusion, and resilience are broad concepts that encompass a wide range of relationships, social groups, and dimensions of socioeconomic life. This section provides examples of successful and innovative projects, programs, and policies that have been implemented effectively to propel progress. Many of the interventions discussed here cut across multiple or all three dimensions; as noted, the key components of social sustainability can often be mutually reinforcing.

Fostering Cohesion—What Works?

As described in chapter 2, cohesion encompasses relations between people in a given community (bonding cohesion), across different communities (bridging cohesion), and between people and state structures (linking cohesion). Consequently, the kinds of interventions used to foster cohesion span a broad range. At a high level, efforts to strengthen cohesion often have overarching goals to reduce violence (or the potential for violence), repair inter- or intragroup dynamics, improve perceptions of and trust in government, and strengthen local institutions. Such efforts have been achieved with measurable success in contexts both with and without fragility, conflict, and violence. The most effective interventions can be grouped into three broad categories: the establishment and strengthening of local and community platforms, efforts that integrate economic support with mechanisms for collaboration, and efforts that integrate social accountability mechanisms.

Local and community platforms comprise a broad array of efforts; when intentionally designed and implemented with a view to fostering cooperative behaviors, they have successfully contributed to strengthening cohesion (Barron 2011). In particular, local and community platforms can help to build cohesion between different ethnic or religious groups (box 3.2), including between host and migrant communities, and can strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms (box 3.3).

Box 3.2 **Strengthening Community Bonds: Insights from Indonesia**

In 1998 the government of Indonesia launched the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP), a large national effort to train facilitators to elicit active participation from community members at the village level, a demographic whose voice had long been marginalized. Initially targeting the poorest subdistricts, KDP covered a quarter of the country's 70,000 villages; over a 15-year period, it was expanded to reach almost half of all Indonesian villages.

An in-depth study of both KDP and comparison villages suggests that the program and its collective decision-making processes had positive effects on inter-group relations (World Bank 2018c). In one of the provinces studied, 39 percent of respondents reported improved relations between religious groups (compared to an average of 15 percent in comparison sites). The longer KDP had been in place in a village, the larger these effects became. Furthermore, the program also appears to have democratized debates within villages, increasing the participation of marginalized groups.^a

a. The share of respondents reporting that marginalized groups were coming to village meetings was 50 percent higher in KDP villages than in comparison villages. This share reached 75 percent in villages where KDP had been in place for at least four years. See Barron, Diprose, and Woolcock (2011).

Box 3.3 **Strengthening Cohesion and Resilience in Nigeria**

Nigeria's population has quadrupled in the last 50 years, while climate change and environmental degradation have led to increased competition over natural resources. Two current World Bank projects (the Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes Project and the Livestock Productivity and Resilience Support Project) explicitly combine elements that aim to foster cohesion with technical efforts to improve the resilience of agricultural livelihoods.

The projects seek to improve sustainable natural resource use (for example, by implementing remote-sensing technologies to assess the status of water and feed and by facilitating the dissemination of this information to key users). At the same time, the projects aim to increase local capacity for conflict resolution. This effort involves establishing and training local committees for conflict prevention and resolution within and between communities. These committees aim to build on existing institutions and mechanisms. To promote process legitimacy, they map stakeholders, identify sources of conflict, and consider ideas to address them.

In Colombia, for instance, a rural program was found to be highly effective at improving cooperation within communities, with increased cooperative behavior observed in both program beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries alike (D'Exelle, Coleman, and Lopez 2018). In postconflict Liberia, a community-focused program requiring men and women to address collective action challenges together improved levels of cooperation.⁴ In North Central Nigeria, training local leaders in interest-based mediation improved their ability to resolve disputes and significantly reduced the share of community members who recently experienced a violent incident, which improved participants' overall sense of security (Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2022). In Israel, randomly assigning Jewish patients to Arab doctors in medical clinics facilitated intergroup contact and improved majority-group perceptions of minorities (Weiss 2020). In Türkiye, an early childhood program preparing Turkish and Syrian children for primary school led to the formation of interethnic friendships, improved the Turkish language skills of Syrian children, and reduced primary school absenteeism for Syrian children (Boucher et al. 2021).

Efforts that integrate economic support with mechanisms for collaboration have also shown promise at fostering cohesion. On their own, cash transfer or livelihood support programs—even when successful at providing targeted economic support—can generate feelings of unfairly excluding nonbeneficiaries, often increasing tensions within communities (Pavanello et al. 2016). When such efforts explicitly integrate mechanisms for encouraging collaboration, however, they have been shown to foster bonding (within communities) as well as bridging (between communities) and linking (citizen-state relations) types of cohesion.

In Malawi, for example, combining cash transfers with training and participation in a savings group was found to improve cohesion among participants more than providing cash transfers on their own, according to a study that attributed the impacts to the fact that participation in the savings group improved within-community relations (Burchi and Roscioli 2021). Economic and livelihood support interventions have also been shown to improve bridging cohesion through intergroup contact and collaboration.⁵ In Jordan, a vocational training program was targeted toward both Jordanians and Syrian refugees, encouraging contact between the groups. An evaluation found that persons enrolled in the program showed less in-group favoritism as a result of the interactions, with greater trust in others and less bias toward other nationalities (Mercy Corps and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands 2020).

Integrating social accountability mechanisms can also support cohesion. When paired with economic support programs—for example, training beneficiaries or civil society organizations to monitor funds—social accountability can improve linking cohesion at the level of citizen-state relations (linking) (Fox 2015). Likewise, mechanisms to enhance the transparent provision of information can improve trust in governments when combined with adequate service delivery.

In Uganda, training the beneficiaries of a community program to report misuse of funds led to improved monitoring, project quality, and trust in the central government (Fiala and Premand 2018). Likewise, during the 2014–15 Ebola epidemic, the government of Liberia's door-to-door canvassing campaign to encourage voluntary compliance with disease containment policies was effective at improving safety-related behaviors, generating support for public health policies, and increasing trust in the government (Blair et al. 2021). In Pakistan, a government agency used social media during the COVID-19 pandemic to communicate with citizens, increasing trust and

creating positive perceptions of the government's management of the crisis (Mansoor 2021). Also in Pakistan, providing accurate information about shorter delays in state courts increased citizens' support for the state and reported likelihood of using the courts, as measured in lab games. Moreover, this intervention led to less support for nonstate actors (Acemoglu et al. 2020).

Fostering Inclusion—What Works?

Inclusion involves expanding access to markets (labor, land, financial markets) and services (health, education, social protection services) as well as fostering the voice and agency of groups at risk of exclusion. The types of interventions that support inclusion are as diverse and multifarious as the types of exclusion they seek to address, including efforts to address the exclusion of indigenous peoples from land markets, tackle gender gaps in labor markets, improve education for persons with disabilities, ensure that refugees can access quality health care, and promote the voice of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people, to only name a few (Das and Espinoza 2020; World Bank 2013). Some of the most effective interventions for supporting inclusion fall into six categories: legal reform, affirmative action or quotas, efforts to target particular groups, efforts to involve groups at risk of exclusion in the design of policies and programs, efforts to foster the voice and agency of formerly excluded groups, and normative change.

Legal reform can be a powerful driver of inclusion. Laws and institutions provide the framework for all areas of social life. They can affect whether individuals and groups can access and benefit from education, health care, social protection, and other basic services; they set the rules for individuals to participate in labor markets; and they determine who can inherit or own land, who is considered a citizen, and who gets a say in political decision-making processes. Legal reforms can have far-reaching impacts. For instance, changes in property law that give formerly excluded groups title to land or the right to inherit can be effective beyond land ownership and have been shown to improve labor market participation and livelihoods. In Rwanda, for example, land reforms had significant positive impacts on women's access to land markets as well as their rights to mortgage or lease land. Perceived rights for women to be registered as a claimant (alone or jointly) on parcels owned by married couples, for instance, increased from only 33 percent in the baseline to about 94 percent after land tenure was regularized (Ali, Deininger, and Goldstein 2011; Ali et al. 2015). In Ethiopia, reforms in family law⁶ significantly strengthened women's bargaining position within the household and increased the rates of women working outside the home, with women's participation in work outside the home 24 percent higher in reforming areas than in nonreforming areas (Ali, Deininger, and Goldstein 2011; Ali et al. 2015; Das and Espinoza 2020; Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2013).

Affirmative action or quotas for groups who have historically faced discrimination or exclusive social norms, while sometimes politically controversial, can be effective at addressing entrenched group-based disparities in several countries (Das and Espinoza 2020; Langer, Stewart, and Schroyens 2016). For example, a recent reform in Colombia provides Venezuelan migrants with temporary protection status, providing formal access to the labor market (box 3.4). In Vietnam, community and local development programs have increased the participation of women and ethnic minorities by including participatory mechanisms in their project designs, such as mandates for gender parity in community councils (Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2013; World Bank 2019b).

Box 3.4 Strengthening the Integration of Migrants in Colombia

The government of Colombia approved temporary protection status (TPS) for Venezuelan migrants in 2021 as part of a broader shift in the government's approach to the migration crisis from emergency response to a longer-term strategy supporting the integration and inclusion of Venezuelan migrants in Colombian society (World Bank 2021).

By permitting Venezuelan migrants to stay and work in Colombia for up to 10 years, the TPS facilitates access to basic services and the labor market. The government also created a Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (Registro Único de Migrantes Venezolanos) to facilitate the identification, socioeconomic characterization, and targeting of migrants eligible for education, health care, emergency shelter and disaster response, and social protection programs. In addition to the TPS, the government is implementing further policies to facilitate the access of Venezuelan migrants to critical services, including COVID-19 vaccines, housing subsidies, and financial services.

To foster cohesion between migrants and Colombians and build public support for these efforts, the government implemented a broad communications and social media campaign to promote positive and fact-based reporting on the benefits of migration and to counter negative stereotyping of migrants.

Ensuring that universal access programs (health or education) reach groups at particular risk of exclusion is another way to foster their inclusion (World Bank 2019a). Some groups face additional barriers to accessing quality services or benefiting from programs that are intended to increase overall service provision. To ensure that children with disabilities can access and benefit from quality educational opportunities, for example, they may need targeted support to address discriminatory enrollment practices, insufficiently trained teachers, or school infrastructure and services that are not universally accessible (safety procedures, play areas, hygiene and sanitation, laboratories, extracurricular activities, educational materials).² Likewise, children from ethnic minority backgrounds may need language instruction to benefit from education, while children and youth who belong to sexual and gender minorities may face discrimination from teachers or fellow students, causing them to drop out from education early. Infrastructure can play an important role in facilitating inclusion; ensuring that roads reach remote areas, for example, can help lagging regions to have better access to schools, health centers, or markets.

Efforts to involve groups at risk of exclusion in the design of policies and programs can also foster inclusion across different types of interventions. Traditionally excluded groups can help to diagnose and develop solutions to overcome barriers (box 3.5). In health programs, for instance, they can be involved in the surveillance of the availability and quality of health services, or service providers may be given incentives to reach and stay in remote areas (Das et al. 2017). This aspect of inclusion also pertains to process legitimacy, which is discussed in more detail below.

Box 3.5 Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria

During preparation of the World Bank's Nigeria Digital Identification for Development Project, persons with disabilities were involved in extensive stakeholder consultations to ensure that their perspectives were taken into account and that the resulting project would be inclusive. Targeted consultations highlighted systemic, long-entrenched barriers to accessing a means of identification (ID) for Nigerians with disabilities, including the inaccessibility of enrollment centers, high indirect costs for completing complex procedures, and difficulties obtaining accessible transport. In addition, frontline staff responsible for processing IDs are often not trained in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, while stigma and misconceptions often dominate how services are provided.

Recommendations from these stakeholder consultations shaped differentiated measures in the design of the project, including (a) using civil society organizations such as disabled peoples' organizations to facilitate outreach to persons with disabilities and (b) ensuring exceptional data capture and processing requirements for any persons unable to provide the required biometrics (such as iris scans due to visual disabilities or fingerprints due to physical disabilities).^a

a. Insights also informed a global guidance note on creating disability-inclusive ID systems with proposed actions for a comprehensive approach to overcoming barriers to ID enrollment and use for persons with disabilities (World Bank 2020).

Fostering the voice and agency of formerly excluded groups can tackle a key barrier to inclusion. In the area of gender and gender-based violence, for example, empowerment programs providing cross-sectoral assistance can effectively promote the voice and agency of women. The Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Program combines access to quality reproductive, child, and maternal health services while working with religious leaders, legislators, and health workers to change norms regarding child marriage, family planning, and gender-based violence (Das and Espinoza 2020, 130).

Normative change is often a critical component of efforts to strengthen inclusion, as norms typically play a role in sustaining exclusion over time. Some interventions have successfully triggered normative changes. Legal reform, in addition to the benefits mentioned above, can often lead to changing norms, particularly in contexts where institutions enjoy high levels of trust and the changes are relatively small or gradual (Banerjee, La Ferrara, and Orozco-Olvera 2019a; Bicchieri 2016; Bicchieri and Mercier 2014; Gauri, Rahman, and Sen 2019). Media-based solutions, like progressive soap operas or nudging information campaigns (Banerjee, La Ferrara, and Orozco-Olvera 2019a, 2019b), have also achieved measurable changes in social norms, as have deliberation efforts (that is, allowing individuals to discuss taboos openly). Likewise, iterative and participatory engagement with communities can be a powerful driver of normative change, which is most sustainable when it is consistent with the community's broader values and vision for improved well-being (box 3.6).

Box 3.6**Stopping Female Genital Cutting and Other Harmful Practices by Building on Community Values and Leaders**

Tostan is a local nongovernmental organization in Senegal committed to supporting communities to define and enhance their own well-being. It partners at the community level on inclusive approaches to critical development challenges. The following describes its work to end female genital cutting and other harmful practices.

In many remote, rural African communities, people carry out their daily lives in accordance with a system of inherited beliefs and social rules that define relationships, interactions, and power structures. Many of these beliefs and rules are the result of wisdom and traditions handed down through the centuries to help communities to function in their resource-poor contexts. Others, however, are drivers of marginalization, exclusion, and poverty. Justified by inherited beliefs, they condone and perpetuate gender discrimination and its many forms of violence and inhibit the growth of individual and community aspirations for better lives.

After Tostan arrives in a community and explains its approach, the community agrees to establish a community management committee (CMC) composed of at least 50 percent women. The community also selects a group of adults and a group of youths to follow the program's classes in the local language. A facilitator begins by encouraging participants to discuss and define their vision of well-being. The groups then embark on an exploration of human rights and responsibilities, connecting these ideas to their own deeply held inherited values and enabling the emergence of a shared commitment to dignity and respect for all. Information on health and reproductive health, hygiene, sanitation, and child development is also shared and discussed. The participatory and respectful methodology fosters questioning of some existing practices that prevent the fulfillment of human rights, especially among women and children, such as the lack of participation of women and youth in decisions affecting them as well as female genital cutting, child marriage, and the use of violence to discipline children. Participants, who also acquire skills in problem solving, discuss and identify what they need to do in order to abandon these practices. They share the results of this process with other community members and work with CMC leadership to participate in social mobilization activities. When such efforts are successful, the community reaches a point whereby the harmful practices are no longer considered acceptable, and most agree to abandon them.

The Tostan model is premised on the notion that social norms change from within. Rather than being imposed from the outside, the changes build on and interweave with previous and concurrent community-led efforts to improve well-being and are consistent with the community's broader vision of improved well-being. As a result, they are more likely to be sustained.

For an additional example of how the Tostan approach supports social sustainability, see box 3.11.

Fostering Resilience—What Works?

Several approaches have been shown to strengthen all three forms of resilience—coping, adaptive, and transformative. Interventions to strengthen resilience seek to ensure that communities not merely cope with shocks but also overcome adversity without resorting to unsustainable strategies,⁸ that they anticipate and reduce risk, and that they strengthen or create new institutions to prepare for future adversity. Three categories of resilience efforts have proven to be particularly effective: improving people's livelihoods, reducing their risk exposure, and promoting agency and self-organizing capacity building, including through better access to information.

Improving people's livelihoods through investments in cash transfers, education, and health care can directly enhance resilience (Barrett and Conostas 2014). Financial inclusion efforts (access to finance, digital finance, financial education) have also been found to be effective at improving the immediate capacities of individuals and groups to cope with shocks (Moore et al. 2019). In Kenya, for example, the widely used mobile-based money transfer service M-PESA has dramatically reduced the cost of sending money across long distances, increased households' ability to weather negative income shocks (such as those from illness or agricultural losses), and enhanced the availability of income support from social networks during shocks (Suri and Jack 2016). After a disaster, access to credit can help with recovery and reconstruction (Hallegatte et al. 2017).

Reducing risk exposure has also been found to bolster resilience through a diverse range of projects and programs for individuals and communities. Many of these efforts seek to change underlying institutional structures—including police protection, disease-resistant seeds, insurance programs, and employment guarantee schemes (Barrett and Conostas 2014). Certain financial inclusion efforts (for example, savings through risk sharing and diversification mechanisms) also help individuals and households to anticipate and mitigate their exposure to risks or make their wealth less vulnerable to natural disaster shocks.

Agency and self-organizing capacity building can help to identify key strengths at the community level that enable resilience (GFDRR, forthcoming). For example, in conflict zones in the Philippines, sustained engagement of the state through organizing regular meetings with community leaders led to increased delivery of services to at-risk communities (Haim, Nanes, and Davidson 2021). Along the same lines, *strengthening access to information* can support both coping and adaptive capacities. Actively involving citizens in the government's collection and sharing of information can have the added benefit of creating stronger collaborative connections between government, citizens, and civic organizations, contributing to greater cohesion (Myers 2021).

Leveraging Process Legitimacy: How Things Are Done Matters

A key take-away from this book is that *how* development is done matters. How goals are formulated and how policies and programs are designed and implemented can often mean the difference between success and failure. Explaining in an accessible way how reforms are needed to fight climate change—for example, introducing green transport options—can make environmental policies more socially accepted (box 3.7). Promoting positive social norms and behaviors is an important part of this puzzle.

Box 3.7**Resilience—Kenya’s Financing Locally Led Climate Action Program**

The Bank’s Kenya Financing Locally Led Climate Action (FLLoCA) program establishes the first national-scale model of devolved climate finance (Arnold and Soikan 2021). The program is based on the premise that locally led adaptation can be more effective than top-down interventions, as local communities are more familiar with their context and what is needed to drive change. FLLoCA supports partnerships between local governments and their citizens to assess climate risks and identify socially inclusive solutions tailored to local needs. With communities across Kenya also dealing with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program takes a broad view of resilience and recognizes that communities are aware of their vulnerabilities and are experienced in managing multiple risks simultaneously. For example, investments may focus on activities that support livelihood diversification or community-level preparedness. Depending on what communities prioritize, investments may also promote water conservation and more efficient use of water, support natural resource management, rehabilitate degraded lands, or promote early warning systems. The program supports government fiscal transfers to local governments and aims to strengthen social cohesion by strengthening the interactions between communities and local governments. The program supports the government’s fiscal decentralization initiative and strengthens the links between national ministries for water, sanitation, urban development, agriculture, and communities, working through local governments.

Social norms affect what is considered acceptable behavior, whether individuals and groups trust each other, whether they are willing to engage and cooperate, and whether they face stigma or discrimination in their daily interactions. In fragile contexts, social norms can even shape people’s motivations and incentives to engage in violent behavior (United Nations and World Bank 2018). Interventions thus need to be sensitive to the social and normative context in which they are implemented.

Advancing socially sustainable development requires the promotion of process legitimacy in practice, which involves a certain mind-set as much as an operational tactic. At the highest level, engaging with process legitimacy requires all development actors—from government ministers and World Bank country directors to nongovernmental organization (NGO) managers and community leaders—to consider meaningfully their own role in shaping it. A useful starting point is acknowledging the potential for development efforts to be socially disruptive, no matter how well intentioned. Likewise, it is useful to recognize that mainstream professional development discourse and practice—grounded in numbers, written documents, and analytical abstractions—is but one way among many of comprehending the world. In reality, the professional discourses and practices of development are often at odds with the prevailing beliefs and ways of doing things in a given context. In such cases, development actors must realize that they *lack* legitimacy and must earn (rather than impose) it in order for their efforts to be socially sustainable.

The concerns or grievances generated by development interventions and policies should thus not be regarded as mere annoyances to mitigate, but as challenges to be addressed proactively. Indeed, a key aspect of the development process is for societies to build robust domestic policy

arenas incrementally—including capable administrative and judicial institutions, citizen engagement mechanisms, local government decision making, and civic spaces that provide voice to civil society—that can “manage” the increasingly large, complex, and contested tasks that development itself brings about (Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock 2017). This process involves strengthening systems for accountability (open government, public sector user feedback mechanisms, participatory or civil society monitoring); supporting groups traditionally excluded from the policy arena or lacking the means, confidence, vocabulary, or information to participate fully; and bringing groups with differing views together to explore solutions for common challenges.

Three high-level and overarching priorities are critical for putting these principles into practice. To foster process legitimacy and ensure that social sustainability is promoted in a way that works within the context of existing norms and values—such that decisions are considered fair, credible, and acceptable by all members and groups in a society—development actors should:

1. *Understand the policy arena.* Identifying the key aspects and contours of a given policy arena helps in assessing the viability of a specific policy or program and in gauging its chances of success. To be socially sustainable, interventions must be designed to work alongside (or in spite of) existing power structures, incentive systems, vested interests, and political or policy realities. As such, it is important to understand who the actors in the arena are, what their objectives are, what authority they have (and where it is derived from), and what the prevailing norms are that guide access to the policy arena as well as behavior and decision making within it. In some cases, shortcomings can be addressed; in others, it may be better for development actors to avoid direct investment and find alternative ways to engage.
2. *Work with all key stakeholders.* It is particularly critical to understand, engage with, and adapt to the needs of those who stand to lose from the reforms, investments, or policies being pursued, as they are often the stakeholders who are most familiar with the factors that may affect the effectiveness of the project or program. Programs promoting social sustainability should put explicit focus on engaging with groups who are at risk of being excluded from voice and decision making. Engagement also creates opportunities for real-time feedback loops, emergent learning, and efforts to promote positive norms and behaviors through iterative and participatory efforts (Appiah 2010).
3. *Engage for the long haul.* Since the right moment for change cannot always be anticipated, and because norms and values as well as institutions take time to change, engagement for social sustainability must be for the long haul. Staying engaged, investing in relationships, and building trust typically pay off. Doing so can pose challenges for development actors, who often face pressures to deliver more results in shorter time frames amid incentives for growth, efficiency, and measured effectiveness, but it enhances the social sustainability of their efforts.

These three core priorities for fostering process legitimacy are discussed in more detail below.

Understand the Policy Arena

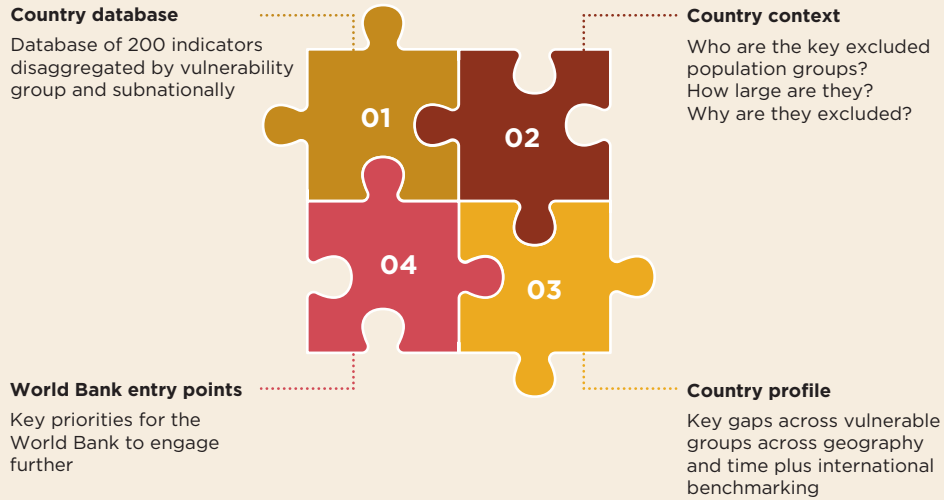
Understanding the context-specific drivers of inclusion, resilience, and cohesion is a critical first step for social sustainability (box 3.8). To design interventions for inclusion and resilience, it is

Box 3.8 Social Sustainability and Inclusion Country Diagnostic

The Sustainability and Inclusion (SSI) Country Diagnostic is a World Bank analytical tool that improves the understanding of social sustainability in a given country (Madrigal, Cuesta, and Pecorari 2022). It brings together evidence on key excluded groups, their numbers, and the drivers of exclusion. It also provides an in-depth profile of the main gaps in terms of inclusion, cohesion, and resilience and (to the extent possible in that country) how those gaps manifest between vulnerable groups, across locations, and over time. Ultimately, these diagnostics can help the Bank to identify entry points, key priorities, and the most meaningful operational and knowledge engagements with country clients on issues of social sustainability (figure B3.8.1).

The Cameroon SSI core diagnostic identified women, youth, and residents of former conflict areas as being most at risk, with climate variability as the main driver of vulnerability. The diagnostic influenced prior actions (policies) for a development policy loan on financial access and labor regulations for women and informed a vulnerability analysis conducted as part of Cameroon’s Country Climate and Development Report.^a

Figure B3.8.1 What Is an SSI Country Diagnostic?



Source: Madrigal, Cuesta, and Pecorari 2022.

a. The World Bank Group’s Country Climate and Development Reports are diagnostic reports that integrate climate change and development considerations. See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/country-climate-development-reports>.

important to understand who is at greatest risk of not benefiting from (or even being adversely affected by) interventions and what are their specific needs and constraints. What works to enhance inclusion in higher education or labor markets for urban women from majority ethnic groups is typically not the same as what works for rural women from discriminated ethnic minorities. Resettling households from flood-prone coasts to inland villages may increase resilience for those whose

livelihoods are transferable to the new environment, but it may be disastrous for fisher people or others who depend on the coastal economy. Similarly, social tensions or conflict can derail even the best development interventions, so a thorough understanding of what drives conflict—who the different parties and decision makers are as well as how tensions can be mitigated and addressed—is essential to promote effective and sustainable solutions.

Moreover, it is critical for development practitioners to understand what constitutes process legitimacy in a given context to ensure that interventions function within local rules, principles, and authority structures. Without this understanding, interventions are likely to be resisted and may not be implementable. This understanding requires deep engagement with local power dynamics. Even if politicians and other decision makers seek development progress, they may struggle to pursue these goals effectively, manage coalition governments, navigate fiscal problems, or respond constructively to public discontent because of the need to maintain the support of vested interests, including pressures for favors from family members or close allies (Fritz, Levy, and Ort 2014).

The insight that politics and the political economy of countries matter to the success of reforms is not new (see, for example, Fritz, Kaiser, and Levy 2009; Woolcock 2014; World Bank 2017), but it has not been translated consistently into action. Understanding the policy arena also includes a broader understanding of a given context's social norms and values, which can undercut the effectiveness or sustainability of projects and programs. Even with the best of efforts, it can be challenging for outsiders to grasp or navigate the often-complex social dynamics at play in low- and middle-income countries, especially in contexts of weak governance or fragility. Moreover, the capacity to pursue a socially sustainable development agenda (including technical and financial resources) matters greatly. In some cases, shortcomings in the policy arena can be addressed once they have been identified and understood; in others, it may be better for development practitioners to engage analytically and support dialogue where possible, but not invest directly. In many contexts, certain sectors or areas of engagement will be more conducive and have higher capacity than others. Box 3.9 presents a simplified typology for assessing the viability of social sustainability efforts.

Box 3.9 Typology for Social Sustainability

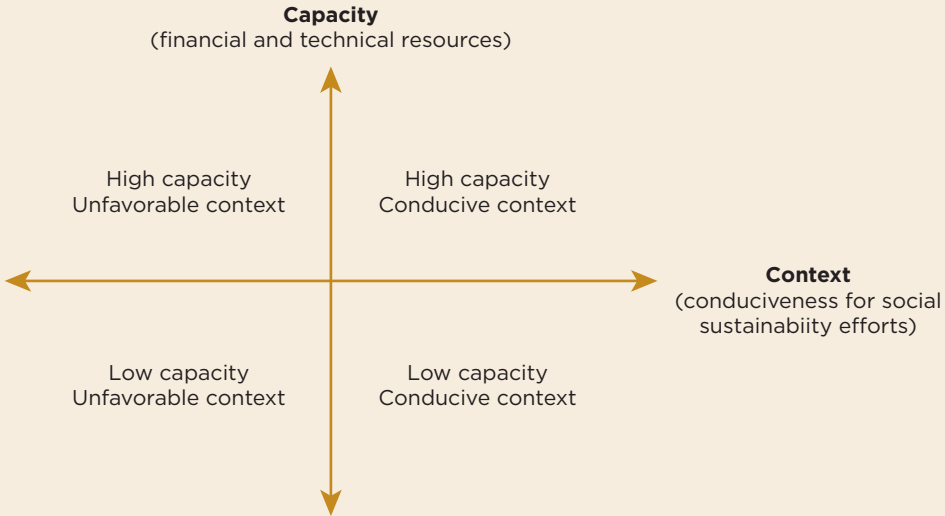
When social sustainability is challenged in one area, there may be openings in another. If a given country has political sensitivities around promoting the inclusion of a specific group, for instance, there may still be openings around strengthening resilience for all vulnerable groups; similarly, where the policy arena around the energy sector is very narrow, the education sector might be highly transparent, open, and inclusive. In such cases, development actors may achieve more results by investing in resilience or education efforts rather than targeted work on inclusion or energy, respectively.

A typology can help development actors to navigate these trade-offs and make judgment calls regarding what to prioritize in the face of time and budget constraints. Figure B3.9.1 illustrates a simplified typology for mapping the potential social sustainability of development efforts along two key dimensions: *context* and *capacity*. Context, as

(continued)

Box 3.9
Continued

Figure B3.9.1 A Typology for Social Sustainability



Source: World Bank.

discussed throughout this book, is the full set of social factors that characterize a given community or society and its policy arena (including norms, behaviors, and beliefs), which can be conducive or not conducive to change. Capacity, by contrast, refers to the capability of development actors, including governments and other authorities, to get things done (establishing and maintaining peace, setting compliance mechanisms for revenue collection, enforcing rights). Such capacity can be technical (level of staff expertise, administrative resources) or financial (resources to undertake large-scale citizen engagement efforts).

The potential success of any policy or program (in terms of its social sustainability) depends on a combination of context and capacity. In figure B3.9.1, the far corner of the top-right quadrant represents the most promising potential for socially sustainable development, the far corner of the lower-left quadrant represents the least promising, and the areas closer to the axes represent moderate viability. Considering this typology, it is not surprising that high-income economies are often more inclusive, cohesive, and resilient and have higher levels of process legitimacy than fragile or conflict-affected countries. Even so, some high-income countries still have less favorable contexts (for example, those with persistent levels of social exclusion, lack of gender equality, or political or social dynamics that deprioritize efforts like climate change adaptation or mitigation). As with the examples above, within a given country one sector may also have more or less capacity or a more or less conducive context than other sectors.

(continued)

Box 3.9 Continued

Of course, as this book has emphasized, *how* development is done also matters greatly. A given policy or program is unlikely to succeed if the affected community or society does not support it, does not accept the authority who designed it, or does not see its implementation as legitimate—or if there is no process for reconciling the potential concerns, disagreements, and tensions that may arise. In other words, process legitimacy determines what is seen as acceptable or desirable within a given country, both in terms of what to support and how to support it. This will differ widely across countries—and within countries, it may differ widely across sectors, demographics, or even individual policies and programs.

Although assessing process legitimacy cannot be reduced to a simple rubric, some classic examples of challenging cases are described below.

- *Fragmented legitimacy* can occur where different sections of a population have deeply divided views on what is acceptable or desirable—which will always be the case to some extent but is more pronounced and difficult to resolve in certain contexts (for example, countries with ethnonational conflict or significant differences on development pathways between groups, such as farmers and pastoralists). In these cases, development actors can help by creating space for contentious discussions and participatory processes to occur, particularly at the local level, where the tensions or conflicts often play out. Community and local development instruments, for example, can be effective.
- *Challenged legitimacy* can occur when existing rules, norms, or values are threatened by an emerging challenge, crisis, or the development process itself. A classic example is gender equity in places where some groups oppose efforts to promote girls' education, female participation in the workforce, or access to contraception—thus challenging the legitimacy of traditional views about gender. To overcome such challenges, development actors can incentivize particular reforms or projects, such as offering technical assistance and supplemental concessional financing (for example, to strengthen transparency in governments struggling with corruption or to support communities hosting refugees if they develop sustainable integration strategies). Supporting different perspectives to play out in the policy arena can also be helpful here.
- *Displaced legitimacy* can occur where governments are not supported by most of society (for example, after some coups or where democratic institutions do not function). In these cases, there is often still some degree of consensus among the population about what to do and how to do it, and development actors can support such efforts through nonstate bodies rather than the government, often also working at the community level.

This book does not aim to provide detailed and customized guidance on all the potential interventions and engagements across different types of communities and societies. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of being aware of how context and capacity interact with social sustainability to drive outcomes. Any typology or assessment of social sustainability (including this one) is time-sensitive and fleeting, and, as noted previously, development itself can alter both the context and the capacity for social sustainability.

Work with All Key Stakeholders

Development actors must foster space for all stakeholders (especially those at risk of exclusion) to be meaningfully and regularly involved in the policy arena, such that all groups can provide feedback, feel that their concerns are taken seriously, and perceive the change process as legitimate. It is critical to understand whether certain norms or rules keep specific groups outside the arena; if they do, a key concern is how to enlarge the policy arena and foster greater contestability. Are there openings for more engagement, consultations, participatory budgeting and monitoring, feedback loops, or programs to influence norms? If necessary, can support be provided to allow excluded groups to engage in these openings? Emergent learning approaches for project management, as well as meaningful engagement that allows stakeholders to voice concerns and shape the design of policies and programs, can provide the flexibility needed to try out new approaches to reach groups at risk of exclusion, taking into account feedback from communities in real time.

In recent years, there has been broad recognition of the importance of concepts like citizen engagement and social accountability, which are about creating spaces for stakeholders to engage in policy and project processes and supporting the participation of civil society. However, there is still much progress to be made to ensure that engagement is fully representative of all groups in society, that there is genuine support from key decision makers for transparent and participatory processes, and that such engagement meaningfully informs the design and implementation of projects (Masud, Kumagai, and Grandvoinet 2019; World Bank 2018a). At the World Bank, the 2018 Environmental and Social Framework represents an important leap forward in this regard (box 3.10).

Box 3.10

Fostering Process Legitimacy through the Environmental and Social Framework

The World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) recognizes that sustainable development requires effective collaboration with everyone who has a stake in the outcome of a project. The ESF makes it mandatory for borrowing country governments to engage with stakeholders (including communities, groups, or individuals affected by proposed projects) and other interested parties through information disclosure, consultation, and informed participation. A growing number of Bank projects leverage the ESF to ensure that groups who are otherwise excluded from decision making can participate more actively in the policy arena, strengthening their inclusion but also fostering process legitimacy more broadly.

In Türkiye, for example, ESF consultations highlighted constraints that prevented many women, youth, refugees, and host community members from engaging in income-generating activities, including the shortage of local child care options and the lack of soft skills. These findings shaped the design and implementation of the Türkiye Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Cohesion Project.

(continued)

Box 3.10 Continued

Similarly, the Tajikistan Socio-Economic Resilience Strengthening Program used a wide range of stakeholder engagement approaches and methods to cover a diverse range of project beneficiaries. These approaches helped to motivate local authorities to support participatory monitoring of project activities.

In Guatemala, the ESF consultation process for the Modern and Resilient Agri-Food Value Chains Project (designed in response to COVID-19) specifically included engagement around how the project could foster the participation of persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and women, which led to an expansion of beneficiaries to include indigenous peoples and women producer organizations. For the Early Childhood Care and Education Project in El Salvador, the ESF provided the space to develop differentiated strategies for the inclusion of children with various educational needs, including children with disabilities, children whose parents are in jail, and children from ethnic minorities.

Participation of stakeholders also has to be iterative—in other words, it must be regular and continuous, and stakeholders need to see that their involvement makes a difference (World Bank 2018a). It is also important to consciously and continuously engage groups at risk of exclusion to ensure that they can participate meaningfully in consultations and provide feedback throughout the project cycle. This effort necessitates concern for timing, location, and appropriate support (disability-accessible locations, provisions for child care). All participants need to feel that they are treated with respect and that their feedback and inputs are considered based on their merit and relevance, which may require specific support or training for women, youth, or members of specific racial, religious, or ethnic groups (box 3.11) (Masud, Kumagai, and Grandvoinet 2019). Often, simple modifications to development operations can go a long way to promoting process legitimacy (box 3.12).

Engage for the Long Haul

As noted at the start of this chapter, processes of social change happen slowly and over time, and this protracted time frame can pose challenges in the face of pressures to deliver more results in shorter timelines. Development actors, including governments, international financial institutions, NGOs reliant on donor funding, and other stakeholders, often operate on project timelines that are too short to achieve measurable results in terms of social change. Even among policy makers and development actors with the best intentions, institutional incentives for growth, efficiency, and measured effectiveness often pose challenges for conducting rigorous stakeholder engagement and participation up-front and can distract attention away from the importance of social factors.

Box 3.11 **Strengthening the Links between Communities and Elected Officials**

In 2013 the government of Senegal sought to harmonize its decentralization and local governance efforts. In support of these efforts, starting in 2018, Tostan piloted an innovative approach called Strengthening Democracy and Civic Engagement (SDCE) in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund. Following positive results in eight Senegalese districts, Tostan is currently integrating the SDCE in all of its community programs in the country.

SDCE training modules engage communities through Tostan-facilitated community management committees (CMCs) (see box 3.6) as well as elected officials at the district level. The training modules are offered in local languages and use Tostan’s human rights-based approach and participatory methodology, paying special attention to enabling women’s participation. Through their CMCs, communities in the district become aware of the roles and responsibilities of their elected officials, reinforce their own engagement toward community well-being, and are better placed to collaborate with decentralized government structures and hold them accountable.

Through these engagements, SDCE enhances community capacity to advocate and collaborate with local government in pursuing a collective vision of well-being. At the same time, it builds the capacity of elected officials in decentralized government structures to manage resources and carry out their community development mandates. By contributing to stronger relationships between communities and decentralized government officials, the program is building trust and contributing to social cohesion.

Box 3.12 **Working with Civil Society for Third-Party Monitoring in Tajikistan**

National development projects financed by external organizations are often implemented and overseen by a small group of government workers in a given country, typically with limited requirements for ongoing engagement with civil society. This situation can sometimes lead to a shortage of process legitimacy because information is not shared publicly. Social accountability approaches seek to involve civil society throughout the implementation and monitoring process. In Tajikistan, to promote social accountability in a project providing temporary social assistance for vulnerable households in response to COVID-19, the Bank hired a consortium of Tajik civil society organizations (CSOs) to help to ensure that the project continues to be accountable and effective.^a

The CSO consortium is leading a coalition of eight other grassroots organizations that engages local authorities, health providers, and users to monitor project implementation in 16 hospitals across the country. Their participatory approach employs various innovations, including mobile-enabled household surveys to track the receipt

(continued)

Box 3.12 Continued

of cash transfers, verification of assets in hospitals, public hearings for community members to ask questions or raise concerns, an online platform to facilitate two-way feedback between the government and citizens, and the use of “mystery customers” to monitor health grievance redress mechanisms. By integrating local grassroots organizations at the forefront of results monitoring, third-party monitoring helps to foster process legitimacy by providing feedback loops between citizens and the state and builds capacity and experience in locally led social accountability between CSOs and government representatives.

a. The World Bank’s Global Partnership for Social Accountability Trust Fund provided a US\$320,000 grant to hire the CSO consortium as part of the World Bank’s Tajikistan Emergency COVID-19 Project (TEC-19).

However, some moments in time are more amenable to positive social change than others. Likewise, windows of opportunity can often emerge suddenly due to country-specific or global events (for example, the election of a reform-oriented administration, rapid economic growth, or even shocks like COVID-19) that necessitate drastic changes in the way things are done. Development actors cannot always anticipate the right moment for change, but investments in building relationships and trust tend to pay off. Staying engaged, building trust, making connections, and generating coalitions and partnerships can help development actors to detect and be prepared to act as windows of opportunity emerge (see box 3.13) (Green 2016, especially ch. 1).

This book has argued that increasing social sustainability is critical for designing and implementing programs that lead to poverty reduction and shared prosperity. To meet the challenges of the 21st century, “business-as-usual” will not suffice. The book aims to advance the concept of social sustainability and sharpen the analytical foundations on which it rests; it is not, however, meant to be the final word on social sustainability. Its broader goal is to inspire greater commitment to social sustainability, leading to more investments and more research and helping to refocus the development agenda on this critical pillar.

As noted in chapter 2, more efforts are needed to address key data, measurement, and methodological challenges. Among other benefits, better data and measurement would help to build the evidence base for what works for social sustainability and to address some of the implementation challenges. Developing a suite of indicators or dashboards with data relevant to social sustainability could help to capture trends over time as well as disaggregated analytics, focused on each of the key components of social sustainability and specific groups at risk of exclusion (due to gender, age, disability status, SOGI, displacement, religious or ethnic status, and other indicators of vulnerability and marginalization). While the Social Sustainability Global Database (SSGD) and the Global Sustainability Global Dashboard developed as companions of this book are steps in that direction (Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa 2022; Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022), more work

Box 3.13 The Panama Indigenous Peoples Plan

In 2012 members of the Ngäbe and Buglé groups protested the government of Panama's proposed dilution of their rights to consultation over extractive and hydroelectric project development within their territories. In confrontations with the government, two Ngäbe were killed and 89 were injured. To promote peaceful engagement between the government and Ngäbe leaders, a Conciliatory Dialogue was established and resulted in an agreement to prepare a National Plan for the Integral Development for the Indigenous Peoples of Panama. After two years of community consultations, the dozen traditional congresses and councils for indigenous peoples in the country approved the plan, calling for it to be adopted as national policy with an annual budget allocation.

In 2015 the World Bank systematic country diagnostic for Panama identified the stark inequalities still faced by indigenous peoples, suggesting that the plan was not being implemented effectively (Koehler-Geib and Scott 2015). The Bank team leveraged its dialogue with the government to include support for the plan within the 2016 country partnership framework and to ensure that new lending in Panama would contribute to its implementation, including a development policy loan series with prior actions to legally recognize the National Indigenous Peoples Roundtable and advance the implementation of the plan.

While these actions were not initially successful, continued dialogue with the government advanced awareness and appreciation of the plan. The Bank provided technical assistance on international good practice, and in 2016 the government requested Bank financing to implement the plan. The Bank's indigenous peoples loan to Panama would be the first of its kind in 20 years. All of the critical design decisions were carried out with the roundtable, the government, and the Bank in a triparty process—designing *with* indigenous peoples instead of *for* them. The Bank's continuous engagement also contributed to the creation of the National Council for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in 2018 (formerly the National Indigenous Peoples Roundtable). The council provides a structured platform for coordination between the 12 indigenous congresses and councils and government agencies to execute a coordinated development agenda in indigenous peoples' territories that is in line with the plan. This council is a unique structure that significantly strengthened the voice and participation of indigenous peoples in policy making.

Indigenous authorities noted during project negotiations the significant transformation in their participation at the table with the Ministry of Finance and the Bank since the days when powdered milk was dropped from helicopters on their communities. The investment project to implement the plan was approved in 2018 and served as a catalyst for other development organizations to contribute financing, including the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank, which prepared a complementary loan of US\$40 million.

(continued)

Box 3.13 Continued

The investment in relationships and trust building is paying off as the Bank continues supporting the government's commitment to strengthen the participatory policy-making process and the allocation of public resources to indigenous communities. The Bank accompanied the government in the preparation of Law 301, which establishes measures for the Integral Development of Indigenous Peoples in Panama and was unanimously approved in 2022. This new law sets an important precedent for the region and aligns with international best practices. Some of the elements that make this legislation innovative include (a) the adoption of the National Indigenous Peoples Development Plan; (b) a framework for the inclusion of all indigenous peoples, both within and outside indigenous territories, in planning and implementation of policies and public investments; and (c) a monitoring system to keep track of policy commitments and targets. There is still much work to be done, but the Bank's continuous engagement is helping Panama to tackle the structural exclusion of indigenous peoples.

remains. More efforts are also needed to use the increasingly available sources of big data (social media, commercial information, telecommunications, remote-sensing data) and more sophisticated artificial intelligence methods that complement traditional household data and administrative records.

In addition to supporting operations, better analytics can help to strengthen the case for why social sustainability matters. In addition to macro-level tools like the SSGD, more micro-level analysis can help to estimate the costs of exclusion and vulnerability, quantify the impacts of lack of cohesion or resilience on development outcomes, and understand the broader effects of interventions that support social sustainability. A stronger empirical understanding of these issues will help to persuade and motivate policy makers and key stakeholders, including governments, World Bank staff and leadership, and other development institutions, to take social sustainability more seriously.

As this book has made clear, however, operationalizing social sustainability involves much more than conducting empirical analysis or generating and replicating evidence on "what works." In practice, socially sustainable development is about navigating a complex set of challenges and trade-offs, which often cannot be anticipated and for which there is no blueprint or guidebook. Promoting cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and especially process legitimacy is critical for sustainable development, but it also presents unique challenges and requires its own set of tools and approaches to advance. Crafting those tools and approaches—and improving them over time through research and experience—is central to meeting today's development challenges and those of tomorrow.

Notes

1. For example, the passage of US civil rights legislation in the 1960s was an important step toward racial equality but also triggered backlash from its opponents. See Boussac (2021); Patterson, Santiago, and Silverman (2021); World Bank (2013).

2. In many countries, women who pursue an economic role may be sanctioned, including through domestic violence, if they are perceived to be challenging the status quo. See Boudet et al. (2013).
3. The *World Development Report* on development and climate change noted that accepting uncertainty is “inherent to the climate change problem” (World Bank 2010).
4. By contrast, the program did not improve levels of cooperation in communities where women worked independently, suggesting that these programs induce improvements in cooperative capacity by providing the space or trigger to do so. See Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein (2015).
5. Valli, Peterman, and Hidrobo (2019) looked at cohesion in refugee-host settings while examining a short-term transfer program targeting Colombian refugees and poor Ecuadorians in urban and periurban areas of northern Ecuador. They found improvements in cohesion among Colombian refugees in the host community through enhanced personal agency, attitudes accepting diversity, confidence in institutions, and social participation, without any negative impacts among Ecuadorian counterparts. The authors attribute the impacts to the joint targeting of Colombians and Ecuadorians, the interaction between nationalities at monthly nutrition sessions, and the messaging around inclusion by program implementers. Cited in Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint (2022).
6. The family reform introduced a requirement for both spouses’ consent in the administration of property, abolished the right of spouses to deny permission to the other spouse to work outside the home, and raised the minimum age of women to marry. See Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo (2013).
7. This list is not exhaustive and merely illustrates some of the constraints. For more information, see World Bank (2018b).
8. Negative or unsustainable coping strategies include drawing down savings, selling assets, skipping meals, taking children out of school, resorting to illegal activities, or exhausting natural resources. See the discussion in chapter 2.

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Conclusion

A Perfect Storm

As the world moves deeper into the 21st century, a perfect storm has gathered force in which the overlapping crises of COVID-19, climate change, rising levels of conflict and social tensions, and a global slowdown are inflaming long-standing challenges and exacerbating inequality, persistent structural barriers, and deep-rooted systemic inequities. How these trends manifest is heavily social, and their consequences are having intense social repercussions. A range of socially destabilizing forces are accelerating in many places, including polarization, declining levels of trust, and social unrest. When certain individuals and groups perceive that they are systematically excluded from progress, when they are unable to cope with climate shocks, or when groups in society do not trust the state or each other, this situation can translate into grievances, into human capital losses, and eventually into social tensions and even conflict. These tensions, in turn, pose risks to economies and economic sustainability, as social unrest has been shown to lower gross domestic product in countries that experience it (Barrett and Chen 2021).

These challenges are making it harder to sustain the progress that humanity has already achieved and call for placing a greater focus on social sustainability. For much of the last 75 years, social sustainability has taken a backseat to growth and, more recently, the environment, relegating social factors to the important but narrow concerns of “do no harm” or the fringe of interesting but marginal and noncritical goals. However, addressing the challenges of the 21st century in ways that promote poverty reduction and shared prosperity will require communities and societies to come together to find, agree upon, and deliver socially sustainable solutions. Oftentimes, the policies that are needed are clear, including less regressive taxation, more social expenditures and better-quality service delivery for all, fewer nontargeted subsidies, more competitive markets that regulate monopoly power and protect consumers, or low-carbon growth strategies. Yet getting these policies adopted and implemented is challenging. A greater focus on

process legitimacy, inclusion, cohesion, and resilience can be an important force to put policies in place for environmental and economic sustainability. Without a focus on social sustainability in the policy arena, there is also a risk that policies will only benefit the few, leading to more inequality and potential social unrest.

Another key message from this book is that social sustainability can be defined and measured. While indicators for environmental and economic sustainability are better established, an emerging and diverse literature provides the foundations for measuring the social dimension of sustainability. Future work is needed to address data, measurement, and methodological issues, but recent research has made important progress toward an empirical understanding of social sustainability. In particular, the World Bank's new Social Sustainability Global Database offers a critical new tool for analysis, with indexes for inclusion, cohesion, resilience, and process legitimacy built on 71 global indicators measuring factors like community connections, trust within and between groups, early signs of tensions or violent conflict, well-being disaggregated across social groups, and participation in social activities or political and decision-making processes (Cuesta, Madrigal, and Pecorari 2022). In short, while further work is needed to refine and develop such indicators, it is feasible to measure and assess the necessary arrangements for individuals, groups, and entire societies to exist and work together in harmony through time.

Meeting the challenges of the 21st century requires prioritizing social sustainability as a key pillar of sustainable development, alongside economic and environmental sustainability. In practice, this means integrating social sustainability into the forefront of development discourse, theory, and implementation. It means giving the social dimension of development equal consideration as its economic and environmental counterparts in analyses, strategies, and operations. It means making broader efforts and a deeper commitment to bolstering social sustainability's key components: putting a cohesion lens, an inclusion lens, and a resilience lens on all projects, programs, and policies. It means promoting process legitimacy by understanding the policy arena, fostering space for all stakeholders within it, and engaging for the long haul even when progress slows or completely reverses. Above all, it means elevating social sustainability as a local, national, corporate, and global priority and committing the time, resources, and collective energy to pursue it.

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SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN DEVELOPMENT

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

All development is about people: the transformative process to equip, link, and enable groups of people to drive change and create something new to benefit society. Development can promote societies where all people can thrive, but the change process can be complex, challenging, and socially contentious.

Continued progress toward sustainable development is not guaranteed. The current overlapping crises of COVID-19, climate change, rising levels of conflict, and a global economic slowdown are inflaming long-standing challenges—exacerbating inequality and deep-rooted systemic inequities. Addressing these challenges will require *social* sustainability in addition to economic and environmental sustainability.

Social Sustainability in Development: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century seeks to advance the concept of social sustainability and sharpen its analytical foundations. The book emphasizes social sustainability's four key components: social cohesion, inclusion, resilience, and process legitimacy. It posits that

- Social sustainability increases when more people feel part of the development process and believe that they and their descendants will benefit from it.
- Communities and societies that are more socially sustainable are more willing and able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in ways perceived to be legitimate and fair so that all people may thrive over time.

By identifying interventions that work to promote the components of social sustainability and highlighting the evidence of their links to key development outcomes, this book provides a foundation for using social sustainability to help address the many challenges of our time.



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