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Working Across the ‘Nexus’ of Equality, Sustainability, Inclusivity and Security: Existing Lessons, Future Directions

Jeremy Allouche



The strategic partnership between Irish Aid and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) focuses on social protection, food security and nutrition. The collaboration brings together research and capacity development with policy, programmatic and influencing know-how to support action that more effectively reduces poverty and injustice. The aim of the partnership is to combine cutting-edge evidence and learning to support implementation of Ireland's policy for international development, *A Better World*.

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Summary

This report examines integrated policy approaches for sustainable development, focusing on key lessons and recommendations that would support the implementation of integrated policymaking, with particular reference to Ireland’s policy for international development, *A Better World*. It is based on a review of existing evidence of various types of outputs (scientific articles, working papers, policy briefs) produced and co-produced by IDS researchers during our most recent strategy (2015–19) that specifically focuses on these integrated approaches.

The challenges of inequality, unsustainability, exclusion and insecurity – and their opposites: greater equality, sustainability, inclusivity and security – are each important in themselves. However, these themes also interact, both in their causes and consequences. There has been relatively less attention to these interactions in development-related research and action. Yet, as IDS research over the most recent strategy period has unfolded, it has highlighted their significance. We have found that it is often these interactions that make the difference, both to whether an intervention or change achieves its intended outcomes, and to whether it constitutes progressive change – and for whom. Development policymakers, practitioners and researchers thus require a better understanding and appreciation of these interactions. This report therefore aims to draw out thematic lessons about interlinkages among these themes. What are the tensions and trade-offs between these themes, in different contexts and settings? How can we identify and support reinforcing processes and outcomes, and synergies, between equal/just, sustainable, and security-enhancing development?

Keywords: nexus, equity, sustainability, inclusivity, security, urban, epidemic.

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1 Introduction

Ireland's international development policy priorities, as stated in *A Better World* (Irish Aid 2019), emphasise how a united, transformative, integrated international response is urgently required to follow through and deliver on the ambitious global agenda set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Integration and coordination have always been key objectives of the international aid agenda but holistic approaches are still difficult to achieve. The design of the SDGs themselves reflect this difficulty: as highlighted in a publication by a researcher from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), one of the problems with Agenda 2030, with its multiplicity of goals and targets, is that the indivisibility of the different goals is strongly asserted but weakly supported (McGranahan, Schensul and Singh 2016). The aim of this report is to review critically and analyse how current research at IDS is dealing with the 'nexus' of equality, sustainability, inclusivity and security. Ireland's international development policy priorities refer in a variety of ways to the goals of equality (including gender equality), sustainability (including climate action), inclusivity (reaching the furthest behind first) and security (linked to strengthened governance).

In its 2015–20 Strategy, IDS has focused on these four key areas for the following reasons. Firstly, inequalities within and between countries are rising in many settings and compromising development and wellbeing. IDS has particularly focused on the intersectional dimensions of inequalities and seeks to understand and influence the processes that create, and conversely can help curb, inequalities – locally, nationally, globally (Justino and Moore, 2015; IDS, ISSC and UNESCO 2016). Secondly, transformational approaches that enable pathways towards sustainable development and alliances for green and just change are urgently needed given the current political economy's impact on climate change, land degradation, pollution and biodiversity loss (Schmitz and Scoones 2015). Thirdly, finding social and institutional arrangements that enable people to be and feel safe and secure is, more than ever, imperative, not least due to identity-based and resource-extractive intra-state rivalries linked to transnational actors and movements (Luckham 2015). Finally, inclusive patterns of growth and development that promote a wider distribution of benefits, and inclusive forms of politics, are key for development processes and outcomes. Prioritising the vernacular and the perspectives of marginalised people and addressing how progressive change happens in both incremental and transformative ways provides entry points to address the complex interlinkages across the SDGs (IDS 2015).

The challenges of inequality, unsustainability, exclusion and insecurity – and their opposites: greater equality, sustainability, inclusivity and security – are each important in themselves. However, these themes also interact, both in their causes and consequences. There has been relatively less attention to these interactions in development-related research and action. Yet, as IDS research over the most recent strategy period has unfolded, it has highlighted their significance. We have found that it is often these interactions that make the difference, both to whether an intervention or change achieves its intended outcomes, and to whether it constitutes progressive change – and for whom. Development policymakers, practitioners and researchers thus require a better understanding and appreciation of these interactions. This report therefore aims to draw out thematic lessons about interlinkages among these themes. What are the tensions and trade-offs between these aims, in different contexts and settings? How can we identify and support reinforcing processes and outcomes, and synergies, between equal/just, sustainable and security-enhancing development?

Methodologically, the authors have reviewed all the various types of outputs (scientific articles, working papers, policy briefs) produced and co-produced by IDS researchers over the 2015–19 period that specifically address these interactions (whether among pairs of aims, or across all). These were identified through interviews with Research Fellows at IDS

and participation in their cluster meetings. This is not an exhaustive and systematic review, as more than 1,926 outputs were published between 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, although the ideas summarised in this report are from IDS publications and those led by IDS authors, they cannot solely be attributed to IDS but rather represent IDS engagement with larger intellectual strands and traditions and with global partners. The report takes a critical and analytical stance, briefly reviewing the dominant ideas and assumptions around these interactions and examining to what extent IDS research supports or challenges this discourse. It then links these findings with Irish Aid policy priorities, as outlined in *A Better World* (Irish Aid 2019). The report is complemented by a [Policy Briefing](#) that reviews and examines integrated and holistic approaches (Allouche 2020).

This report is divided into three sections. The first looks at key contemporary challenges and policy examples and recommendations that show the need for a nexus lens. The second analyses the more recent research at IDS that addresses the interactions at the conceptual level between pairs of themes (i.e. conflict–inequality; equity–inclusivity; sustainability–conflict, inequality–sustainability). The final section provides concluding thoughts and summarises implications for researchers, policymakers and donors.

2 Defining the ‘nexus’ of equality, sustainability, inclusivity and security through specific lenses

We have chosen two examples of recent research at IDS that emphasise the need for an integrated approach to understanding specific issues and challenges around equality, sustainability, inclusivity and security. While traditionally many integrated approaches were promoted in rural settings, the first case study highlights these interactions as seen through an urban lens. The second example relates to a specific policy challenge – handling epidemics (with a focus on lessons from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa).

2.1 Using an urban lens to address these interactions

An evidence report by McGranahan (2016) looks at the role of cities and urbanisation in achieving the SDGs through the themes of inequality, security and sustainability. Each of the themes poses different challenges for cities and urbanisation, though in each case the relationship is somewhat paradoxical. Rapid urbanisation is often blamed for rising inequalities, but these inequalities are accentuated by efforts to inhibit the urbanisation of some of the more disadvantaged population groups, often migrating from rural areas where livelihood opportunities are becoming more limited. Cities and rapid urbanisation are also often blamed for urban insecurity and violence, but the rhetoric here is stronger than the evidence. Cities and urbanisation are also usually treated as undermining global sustainability due to industrialisation and high resource use and wastage. Generally, cities and rapid urbanisation have been part of the process that has helped bring the challenges of inequality, insecurity and unsustainability to the fore; now, they must also play a key part in addressing these challenges.

McGranahan (2016) contends that global policy circles still support the view that economic benefits should outweigh social and environmental costs. The 2009 World Development Report, which focused on reshaping economic geography, is a good illustration. While the report promoted the ‘3-D’ policy for governments (increasing density, shorter distances and reduced divisions), the social and environmental effects of a changing economic geography were excluded from its analysis. Cities are often viewed as engines of economic growth – a

perspective that can sometimes make it difficult to address inequalities, problems of exclusion and insecurity, and unsustainable practices. The perception of the city, between those who see it as a growth machine and those for whom the city is a place to live in, reflects a central tension in apprehending the links between sustainability, security and inequality.

The relationship between cities, urbanisation and inequality is complex and contingent upon intra-urban, intra-rural and rural–urban political and economic dynamics. Rapid urbanisation typically takes place during periods of socioeconomic and political crisis. Inequality is quite likely to rise during such periods. However, taking measures to make it more difficult for people to move to and settle in urban locations is exclusionary and likely to increase inequalities. This is especially likely when policies explicitly or implicitly target those who are unable to afford formal housing and to secure formal employment in urban areas.

Violence is urbanising along with people. Current data sets and more detailed analyses have not shown that urbanisation is an important driver of violence. In a different vein, some cities do not so much breed violence as have violence thrust upon them. The drug trade has contributed to the rise or transmutation of urban violence, including (in recent decades) in many Latin American countries. Larger-scale armed conflicts often involve fighting for control of strategically located cities, placing their populations at risk. Arms and armed conflict can also infiltrate cities in countries bordering those involved in armed conflicts. Irregular warfare is itself becoming increasingly urban, and this has fostered the militarisation of selected cities and an increasing focus of international as well as local counter-insurgency on urban conflicts and control. Finally, urban exclusion and informality can create violent spaces, though the majority of informal settlements are reasonably peaceful places.

In today's more affluent cities, long-term sustainability no longer depends just or even primarily on the relationship between the city and its regional hinterland. As nodes in the global economic system, cities can now import resources, intermediate goods and consumables from far greater distances. They can also displace their wastes, pollution and ecologically damaging activities, including through trade. There is enormous variation in the types of environmental burdens incurred by different cities and neighbourhoods. The environmental burdens created by activities in the poorest cities (and especially their poorest settlements) tend to stay close to home and threaten people's health directly, including unsanitary toilets or no toilets at all, smoky kitchens, polluted wells, pest infestation, and so on. The burdens created by the most affluent cities and neighbourhoods are increasingly global, undermining the world's life-support systems; ecological footprints and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions required to support per capita consumption tend to be higher in more affluent cities and neighbourhoods. Whether urbanisation and cities enhance or undermine the sustainability transition that is needed, they clearly have an important role to play.

Urbanisation and cities can facilitate the combined pursuit of greater equality, security and sustainability. This can be done through inclusive urbanisation. More inclusive urbanisation means planning not just for low-income urban populations and their growth, but also with them. Better-organised informal communities and informal workers sometimes appear as an obstacle to addressing the problems of informality, but they can become (and, in some cities, already have become) an important part of the solution.

Whatever is done in terms of urban inclusion, there will always be trade-offs as well as synergies between achieving economic growth, reducing inequality, achieving secure and inclusive societies, and accelerating the transition to sustainability. The most powerful groups in many cities still prioritise economic growth, despite the push towards considering wellbeing as the ultimate goal.

Box 2.1 Policy recommendations, based on McGranahan (2016)

- Open up more urban land in plots suitable for affordable housing, in a manner that allows self-build options to compete with private and public options (planning more actively and progressively for urban expansion, and also for densification; and removing exclusion from urban spaces, markets and services based on identities, but also based on structural barriers, such as those linked to informality).
- Design urban social security systems to reduce inequalities, and to allow for rural–urban mobility and urban inclusion (mobile national social security programmes could both reduce inequalities directly, and reduce urban incentives to exclude migrants and expel their low-income populations).
- Provide safe policing in informal settlements (violence is more likely to occur when there are strained relations between local authorities and the residents of deprived and excluded communities).
- Achieve a sustainability transition, learning from previous urban turning points (i.e. sanitation and pollution revolutions).

2.2 Using an epidemic lens to address these interactions

IDS and Irish Aid both played an important role during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. But the Ebola crisis has revealed the deeper challenges of the post-2015 context. Leach (2015) argues that the depth and extent of the crisis in the three most affected countries – Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, united as the Mano River Union – are the result of ‘structural violence’ in the sense of an interlocking set of institutions which produce interlaced inequalities, unsustainabilities and insecurities.

The ‘weaknesses’ in health systems in the region are the result of particular political economies of neglect – including those fostered by the aid system. The politics of international aid during the cold war contributed to the support of despotic leaders. In Sierra Leone, for example, President Siaka Stevens (1971–85) was allowed to undermine state services and appropriate aid revenues in return for cold war alliance. This was followed by two decades of aid conditionalities and structural adjustment reforms (the 1980s and 1990s), which hollowed out state services such as health and education. Direct aid to health followed in the 2000s, but often narrowly focused on particular diseases and health issues in relation to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets. Thus, donor and non-governmental organisation (NGO) programmes have been ‘vertically’ targeted at HIV, malaria, and mother and child health, but at the expense of the less glamorous task of building state capacity to train, retain and pay health staff. The more recent aid focus on universal access has not been directed in ways that would build the resilient accessible networks of rural health and paramedicine that might have led rural people to see hospitals and health centres as places of care – as opposed to ones to be avoided and sometimes resisted.

This pattern of political economic relations also has broader consequences that contributed to the Ebola crisis. It has fuelled economic inequalities, enabling high incomes and wealth for some people, but leaving most without formal employment and seeking precarious rural or urban livelihoods. These inequalities of income and assets intersect with ‘horizontal’ inequalities – across gender, ethnicity, location – in shaping patterns of disadvantage and advantage, in place-specific and nuanced ways. In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, inequalities faced by women and young people who are denied access to land, property and rights over their own and other’s labour by state and customary institutions are part of these inequalities, which keep some people in deeply precarious positions. There are also horizontal spatial inequalities between those living in the forest areas and those along the coast. The state was key in shaping these spatial inequalities and state-supported outbreak control teams were therefore met with great suspicion in these regions. Misguided

exhortations against eating bushmeat did not just deny people vital sources of protein and livelihood, but contributed to the deluge of misinformation that undermined local trust in what officials said about Ebola. Furthermore, militarised, forcible responses to the Ebola crisis in the form of roadblocks, quarantines and lockdowns recreated memories of war and further eroded trust in public authorities.

Environmental degradation and growing resource pressures have further contributed to poverty and inequality. Large-scale mining and land investments have made rural livelihoods increasingly precarious for small-scale farmers and contributed to migration to peri-urban areas, where people's access to health-care centres was very limited.

Box 2.2 Policy recommendations, based on Huff (2015a)

- Build cultures of trust across sectors. Strengthening health systems for resilience means strengthening social and political systems, which in turn build the capacities of institutions and individuals to respond to hazards. This means going beyond surveillance, health infrastructure, training and the delivery of medical care to long-term investments and support for institutions that foster trust.
- Support interdisciplinary research, including local knowledge and expertise, with cross-sectoral cooperation and ecological surveillance activities to build greater knowledge and capacity around contemporary human–environment–wildlife dynamics.
- Support resilient livelihoods and equitable investment programmes as an essential part of rebuilding societies to make them less vulnerable and able to respond effectively to outbreaks.
- Bring the social and economic ‘margins’ of societies to the forefront of human development planning; dismantle exclusionary structures to enable the people who inhabit them to play important roles in the upgrading and management of their environments.
- Respond effectively to gendered dimensions of hazards and crises by working creatively with existing social models and institutions, and build resilience by reconfiguring the institutions that exacerbate and entrench structural violence.
- Invest in capacity to learn from and support successful local responses and show how collaborations can be realised at scale. Local knowledge and perspectives on containing Ebola and other disease outbreaks must be central to political, public health and biomedical responses.

Both examples show how a better understanding and appreciation of these interactions would have provided a better basis for designing policy interventions in specific sectors. The next section explores how debates across pairs of themes are currently framed, how IDS research supports or challenges these dominant narratives, and its relevance to Irish Aid policy priorities.

3 Interlinkages among these themes

3.1 Conflict–inequality

There is a long academic tradition in discussing the links between conflict and inequality, mostly around the concepts of vertical and horizontal inequalities. Luckham (2015) argued that the liberalisation of economic and social structures, including the removal of social welfare protections, may have helped generate the conditions for conflict at local and national levels. He further shows that while reductions in group inequalities are essential,

care must be taken not to provoke a backlash from other groups; this has been associated with the Tamil rebellion in Sri Lanka, for example. To avoid such consequences, the historical, political and social contexts of specific inequalities must be understood, and used to ensure that policies are appropriate and effect long-term change rather than transient fixes (Luckham 2015). Contextual understanding is crucial. Since research suggests that inequality between major groups may be acceptable at certain levels, an understanding of where this line is drawn in specific contexts may highlight potential flashpoints. It may also be helpful to apply lessons learned in one context to locations with similar contexts in order to pre-empt and prevent violent responses to inequality (Luckham 2015). The key narrative in debates on conflict and inequality is really around horizontal and vertical inequalities as a cause of conflict, and we have less evidence on policy solutions to address the interactions between horizontal inequalities and peace-building.

Ongoing research at IDS has advanced this new research agenda by focusing on government public expenditure and redistributive fiscal policy, including cash transfers to the poorest, and minimum wage legislation.

Research by the International Centre for Tax and Development focused on taxation and peace-building (van den Boogaard *et al.* 2018). The authors argue that there are key risks in rebuilding taxation regimes during a peace-building period and some objectives may be contradictory. Key risks include unequal and differential treatment, which may spark the contentious issues behind the conflict in relation to horizontal and vertical inequalities. Tax reform may become politically contentious. However, the authors provide evidence that rules-based policymaking and transparency should take priority to support the broader goal of equity-based tax policy and administration, which is more difficult for interest groups to exploit. Such strategies may have the added advantage of strengthening the state-building and governance-enhancing roles of taxation, which may have value for peace-building efforts in divided societies (*ibid.*).

Another piece of research from the Household in Conflict Network (HiCN) focused on the relationship between government expenditure and welfare protection and peace-building (Justino and Martorano 2016). Building on previous research that looked at redistributive public expenditure in education and health, wage subsidies, lump-sum transfers or land reforms, the authors showed that welfare spending reduced the probability of conflict, using data for 12 Latin American countries between 1970 and 2010.

They also found that government spending has greater impact with regard to small-scale conflict and in reducing the probability of new episodes of conflict. The main explanation for this is that government spending promotes economic stability, which reduces economic inequality, but also promotes the process of democratic consolidation. These results confirm that there is room for integrated policymaking in order to promote welfare policies and the democratic process, and to reduce violence.

Placing insecurity and conflict within the context of other inequalities and recognising the links between them can help us tackle peace-building. Both of the examples given will provide further evidence in relation to Irish Aid's new strategic priority to reduce humanitarian need and strengthen governance, in particular linking domestic resource mobilisation and tax administration in post-conflict contexts and providing examples of the 'nexus' of interactions with peace, humanitarian and development processes, with a focus on state-building and inequalities.

3.2 Equity–inclusivity

Existing research at IDS on the relationship between equity and inclusivity has been approached through concepts of intersectionality and power (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016), as inequity and marginalisation are ultimately caused by specific political and policy processes that are built on power imbalances. These power imbalances can occur at micro and macro levels, whether determining local access to services and broader agency, voice and representation in local decision making, or voice and representation in broader political decision making. This relationship between equity and inclusivity has been approached through several thematic areas at IDS, including nutrition and gender.

In terms of nutrition, existing research has already argued that the focus should be on inequity rather than simply inequality, as the systematic and entrenched impacts of health disparities on children stem from disadvantage that accrues systematically to particular groups of people because of their socioeconomic position. Studies on health equity have argued that health system improvements are not enough on their own as they tend to accrue to the richest segments of the population unless specific measures are taken to make such health systems pro-poor (Marmot and the Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2007). As innovative governance health-related nutrition policies in China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Kerala and Sri Lanka have shown, this can happen under very different political systems and circumstances, so long as political will and policy is oriented towards such pro-poor measures. Other sector-specific policies such as in social protection and education can similarly be targeted to reach marginalised communities, some of which may be linked to health service provision, including nutrition advice.

The research done by Harris and Nisbett (2018; forthcoming) highlights the need to broaden existing research on nutrition beyond poverty and patriarchy. Forms of exclusion from essential goods, services, resources and politics can be based on a number of socioeconomic criteria, including gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, or geographic location. In many cases, these causes of discrimination are multiple and intersecting, and in most cases, they tend to accrue over time to particular groups such that it becomes entrenched and naturalised – what social epidemiologists refer to as ‘embodiment’. Children’s bodies in particular become the agents through which social and material deficits are passed from one generation to another – with children born to malnourished mothers more likely to suffer birth irregularities of danger to both mother and child, to have a lower birthweight, and to be malnourished throughout their childhood. Such early embodied disadvantage only becomes entrenched throughout the life course for marginalised children. Acknowledging the basic determinants as unnatural and avoidable systemic processes that drain particular groups of resources and power is key to understanding and addressing those determinants. Many of the basic determinants of malnutrition affect children not as individuals but as members of families and groups that exist in specific social, economic and political contexts, which condition access to the resources that enable good nutrition.

In assessing and addressing the basic determinants, it is therefore important to understand the particular circumstances of different population groups and their access to programmes and services, and to social and political redress.

In terms of gender, recent research at IDS has looked at the relationship between higher levels of political inclusion and gender-based inequalities in the context of legislation against domestic violence in countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (namely Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Ghana, India and Bangladesh) (Nazneen, Hickey and Sifaki 2019). The rise of women’s participation in political institutions has helped generate a significant amount of interest in the question of whether women’s political inclusion has enabled them

to achieve influence over the institutions and policies that help shape gender equity outcomes. While 'progressive' policies that do not seek to challenge gendered relations of power are proving acceptable to governments in the global South, initiatives that seek to transform gender relations continue to face significant resistance. Furthermore, the inclusion-to-influence agenda is problematic in itself and can only offer a partial view of the politics that helps shape gender equity. It is inherently problematic, in that it tends to frame women's political inclusion in instrumental terms, as being valuable only insofar as it leads to other outcomes, rather than insisting that it is a valuable right in and of itself. One of the dangers here is that should women's political inclusion be found to be an ineffective route to achieving gender equity, women's inclusion would then become questionable according to this logic. The approach tends to reify gendered roles and responsibilities in ways that reflect rather than challenge unequal gender relations. The problem is that in exerting their agency, women become solely responsible. This is problematic as it also relegates the role of female political actors to single-issue advocates. Nazneen *et al.* uncover the multiple political dynamics that influence governments to adopt and implement gender equity policies, pushing the debate beyond simply the role of women's inclusion in influencing policy, and proposing the new concept of 'power domains' as a way to capture how inter-elite bargaining, coalitional politics and social movement activism combine to shape policies that promote gender equity (*ibid.*). The research demonstrates that women's presence in formal politics and policy spaces does not fully explain the pace in adopting and implementing domestic violence law. Underlying drivers of change within broader domains of power also include: the role of clientelist politics and informal processes of bargaining, coalition-building, and persuasion; the discursive framing of gender-equitable ideas; and how transnational norms influence women's political inclusion and gender-inclusive policy outcomes.

Both examples show how progressive policies have very limited impact in addressing the links between equity and inclusivity if the power dynamics – and, more fundamentally, the structural drivers – are not addressed to change how patterns of inequality and exclusion are being reproduced over time. They provide interesting pointers for Irish Aid's priorities around gender equality and strengthening governance, by providing links between gender-based violence and women's empowerment, both of which are central to the strategy, and inclusive governance, around rights-based approaches and nutrition.

3.3 Sustainability–conflict

The key dominant discourse linking sustainability and conflict views environmental degradation and pressures as a threat to peace and security. Arguments raised over potential 'water wars' in the Middle East, diamond wars in Sierra Leone or climate wars in South Sudan are widely discussed and debated. Climate wars are now becoming the dominant discourse in linking unsustainability and conflict, with apocalyptic scenarios and predictions (see books such as Harald Welzer's *Climate Wars: What People will be Killed For in the 21st Century*). This remains an incredibly powerful and compelling political discourse among policymakers and NGOs, despite being widely critiqued by scholars.

Relations between insecurity and unsustainability are complex and there is a real danger of catastrophist narratives that misrepresent environmental change and overlook inequality dynamics. Minerals, for instance, are captured by elites and put into global trading networks, fuelling inequalities and bringing unrest and conflict. The further paradox is that interventions aimed at addressing environmental change, such as large-scale conservation and carbon market schemes, may sometimes undermine rights and justice, becoming 'green grabs' (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones 2012), which dispossess people of livelihoods and resource rights in favour of distant global aims, further fuelling resistance.

One particular aspect of this relationship – namely between the green economy, financialisation and conflict – has been analysed by Amber Huff (2015b). A key aspect of the

United Nations' sustainable development approach centres on creating markets for financialised 'natural capital' products, particularly in resource-rich, lower-income countries, based on a 'triple-win' approach: achieving environmental sustainability, socially inclusive economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, the projects on the ground often shift the rights of access and control of land and resources away from direct users to select local elites, state agencies, NGOs and/or private investors.

Two further studies by Huff (2016, 2017) illustrate these tensions through a case study in Madagascar. The government of Madagascar and a multinational mining corporation have sought to offset environmental damage caused by extensive mining activities through establishing private restrictive protected areas (PAs) dedicated to biodiversity offsetting. In this instance, the state, private sector actors, NGOs and displaced and under-compensated local communities have come into repeated and sometimes violent conflict as a result of the inequitable arrangements of the offsetting scheme.

Even though 'communities' have ostensibly been empowered through various policy reforms, it is rare for rural communities to withhold consent during the consultation process, and disagreements and conflicts tend to emerge in reaction to, rather than in anticipation of, land dispossession. This may be due to high initial expectations of economic opportunities and wealth transfer on the part of local leaders, but is also surely related to a lack of access to economic and institutional alternatives, political pressure, and fears of retaliation by those in more powerful positions, as well as misconceptions about the legal framework and local people's legal rights.

Protests and general strikes have occurred around the QMM (QIT Madagascar Minerals) Rio Tinto mining complex near Fort Dauphin in the south east of the country since mining activities began in 2009. Hundreds of Malagasy people from around the region have protested against loss of forest access, involuntary relocation, unfair compensation for lost lands and livelihoods, the destruction of sacred forests and removal of ancestral tombs, and widely perceived unfairness in QMM's practice of importing mine workers from other countries and regions rather than training and hiring local people (as had been promised during consultations). A particularly large protest occurred in January 2013, in which hundreds of lightly armed protestors – many of whom had experienced eviction from lands now controlled by the mines – blocked roads and trapped employees (including the chief of Malagasy operations) in a mining site. After the company threatened to withdraw from all operations in Madagascar, the protest was quelled through government military force.

Another study by Lind (2017) explored the oil fields in Turkana (Kenya) where oil operations have recently expanded in agrarian and pastoral margins. The exploitation of the resource needs to be situated within a broader debate in Kenya on power sharing and public finances between national and sub-national levels of governance, and vocal claims for participation and autonomy. Very much in line with the case study in Madagascar, oil development has fuelled conflict in a number of ways, including:

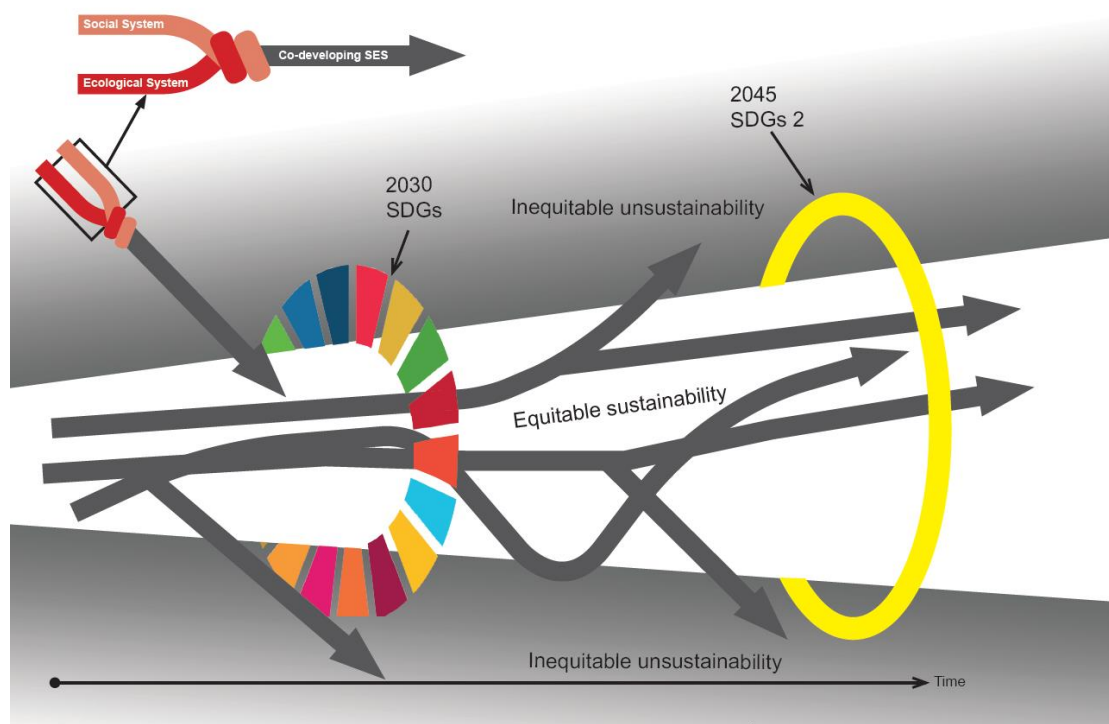
- failing to meet expectations of community and individual economic opportunity
- creating valued, scarce opportunities for jobs, casual work and contracts
- establishing compensation mechanisms over which people then fight
- generating individual grievances (tree cutting, death of livestock) that lead to wider protests
- igniting tensions around land and resource claims
- encouraging political rivalry and rent-seeking around company efforts to promote local benefits.

In the absence of escalation and harm, conflict is not always necessarily a bad thing, as the examination of emerging conflicts can highlight unanticipated issues, grievances and trends that are of broad significance to policy and to the wellbeing of stakeholders. Developing guidance on means of assessing unanticipated conflicts, trade-offs and synergies as they arise in the context of large-scale investment is crucial, as is establishing mechanisms for initiating participatory and transparent processes of conflict resolution prior to escalation. Indeed, processes of conflict resolution can be important to achieving and enhancing justice and development outcomes in situations characterised by asymmetrical economic and power relations and legacies of mistrust and exploitation. Overall, this set of research links particularly well with Irish Aid’s strategy on climate action, reducing humanitarian need and strengthening governance, and the extent to which climate issues cause instability and immediate risks that demand attention.

3.4 Inequality–sustainability

Inequalities and (un)sustainability interact in many ways (see Leach *et al.* 2018). Unsustainability often arises from various forms of structural inequality. Poverty and inequality may result in people being driven to unsustainable practices, and various forms of discrimination cause negative environmental changes, as (for example) access to resources is squeezed. Differences across class, gender, race, wealth and location are often highly correlated with exposure to environmental pollution, land degradation, climate change impacts and more. Major economic inequalities can drive competition for status that in turn reinforces unsustainable patterns of consumption. Inequalities also undermine the collective solidarities that may be needed for cooperation, whether locally, nationally or globally, in addressing environmental challenges that so often have the character of ‘public’ goods. Understanding and addressing these ‘interaction dynamics’ requires a social-ecological systems perspective incorporating understandings of power. The challenge is for systems to develop along pathways which stay within a space of ‘equitable sustainability’, defined by and extending beyond Agenda 2030 (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Getting into and staying in an equitable–sustainability space



Source: Leach *et al.* (2018), [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). © Gary Edwards/IDS.

Thus, inequality and discrimination are deeply intertwined with patterns of unsustainability. These interlacings are appreciated in definitions of sustainability that integrate its environmental, economic and social dimensions. The urgency of climate change and related challenges have sometimes led to calls to put environment first, and to promote environment-saving technical and market solutions even if they have social costs in the short term. However, we would question this approach if large portions of society are excluded from or harmed by sustainable development solutions. While sustainability solutions may be achieved through technical–managerial and top-down processes that do not address the structural inequalities that produce unsustainable practices, and that reflect the differential impacts of unsustainability, these are unlikely to have the political momentum and citizen buy-in to construct really durable sustainable pathways for development.

A research project at IDS, for instance, focused on urban air pollution and inequalities in fast-industrialising countries to explore this relationship (Schröder, Shen and Srivastava 2018). Several studies have established clear links between air pollution and health outcomes and have underlined how air pollution has become a silent public health emergency or a ‘new tobacco’. But what is too often ignored in the debate are the links between air pollution, health and socioeconomic inequalities. Some people in some countries, particularly people with lower socioeconomic status in developing countries, are more vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution. They often face higher exposure to pollution due to their living and working conditions. Some of the highest air pollution exposures are inflicted on those who make their living on the streets, including street vendors, waste collectors, traffic police or rickshaw drivers. They lack access to proper nutrition and medical services, which further constrains their ability to adapt to hazardous pollution. They often lack sufficient knowledge or information on pollution and protection, and even if they do have access, many cannot afford expensive air masks and indoor purifiers. Moreover, they do not have the option to escape the polluted areas by ‘quitting the city’ (through holidays or migrating to other countries), as many rich people do nowadays.

As a result, the burden and costs of reducing air pollution were unfairly distributed to disadvantaged groups, who were eventually required to sacrifice their welfare (jobs, education, and even lives) for pollution reduction. For example, in December 2017, some rural residents around Beijing were freezing to death due to their bulk coal heating system at home being cut off as a result of the Chinese government’s initiatives to reduce the capital’s winter pollution level. In the case of Delhi, the city continues to grapple with air pollution year after year, peaking in the winters, triggering a severe health crisis in the national capital. In 2016, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 4.2 million premature deaths were caused by outdoor air pollution each year. About 90 per cent of those occurred in low- and middle-income countries and 50 per cent were in India and China alone. As more developing countries follow in China and India’s footsteps and accelerate their urbanisation and industrialisation processes, the problem of air pollution will become truly global. This is not only a developing country issue; research in developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada shows similar disparities.

Policy responses have not factored in these inequalities. Most of the mitigation measures are either limited to technical fixes or appropriate only for people who can afford them. Prescriptions such as living indoors and/or wearing masks do not apply to those who work on the streets or are casual labourers who cannot afford these luxuries. Schröder *et al.* revealed that in Beijing, some of the policy interventions designed to mitigate air pollution in fact further exacerbated social inequalities as people of lower socioeconomic status were often excluded from their design and implementation.

4 Conclusion

Equity, sustainability, security and inclusivity are interlaced through processes and outcomes. Appreciating the tensions between these themes can in turn help identify pathways that connect them positively, building synergies between equality, justice, sustainability and security in reinforcing pathways. How these interlacings play out, and thus what it takes to support positive interconnections, will vary enormously for different contexts and settings. There will be no single 'motorway' that links them, but rather a multiplicity of different pathways. This is important, as existing research has highlighted how dominant discourses around these relationships tend to simplify and narrow down in a linear fashion the causality between these key dimensions. From a policy perspective, this means that the anticipated benefits of integrated approaches need to be more clearly articulated and allow for platforms for better exchanges and methods between research and policy on how to approach these potential synergies.

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