

Reframing Social Development for Equity and Leaving No One Behind in a Changing Society

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Abstract

This study examines contemporary approaches to social development that promote equity and operationalize the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) in the context of rapid global transformations. Increasing socioeconomic inequality, technological disruption, and demographic change have intensified the need for inclusive development strategies that ensure equitable access to opportunities and resources. To address this issue, the study employs a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative structural equation modeling (SEM) with qualitative insights from community development practitioners.

The quantitative component involved a survey of approximately 400 community stakeholders selected through stratified random sampling. Structural equation modeling results indicate that the proposed model demonstrates acceptable goodness-of-fit (CFI > 0.90; RMSEA < 0.08). The analysis reveals that inclusive governance ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$), social capital ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .01$), and community participation ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .01$) exert significant positive effects on equitable social development outcomes. Furthermore, institutional capacity was found to significantly mediate the relationship between community participation and equity outcomes (indirect effect $\beta = 0.18$, $p < .01$), indicating that participatory processes achieve stronger equity outcomes when supported by effective institutional mechanisms.

The qualitative findings reinforce and contextualize these statistical results. Interviews with community leaders and development practitioners highlight that inclusive decision-making processes, trust-based community networks, and responsive institutional systems are critical factors enabling participatory development initiatives to translate into tangible improvements in social inclusion and equitable access to services. The qualitative evidence thus strengthens the interpretation of the quantitative model by illustrating how governance practices and institutional arrangements operate in real community contexts.

This study contributes to the literature by proposing and empirically validating an integrative social development model that links governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity to equity and LNOB outcomes. The findings offer both theoretical and practical implications for policymakers, local governments, and development organizations seeking to design inclusive and sustainable social development strategies in rapidly changing societies.

Keywords: Social development, Equity, Leaving no one behind, Inclusive governance, Community participation, Institutional capacity



Introduction

Contemporary societies are experiencing rapid and multidimensional transformations driven by globalization, technological advancement, demographic transition, and economic restructuring. While these dynamics have expanded economic opportunities and improved access to knowledge and resources, they have also intensified structural inequalities and social exclusion in many parts of the world. Disparities in income distribution, access to quality education, healthcare services, social protection systems, and participation in decision-making processes remain persistent challenges, particularly in developing countries where institutional capacity and governance systems are still evolving (United Nations, 2015).

Social development has long been conceptualized as a process of planned social change aimed at enhancing human well-being, promoting social justice, and ensuring inclusive participation in development processes (Midgley, 2014). From this perspective, development must go beyond economic growth to address social inequalities and institutional barriers that prevent individuals and communities from realizing their full potential. The concept of equity is therefore central to social development discourse. Equity emphasizes fairness in the distribution of opportunities, resources, and capabilities rather than simple equality of outcomes (Sen, 1999). Achieving equitable development requires integrated approaches that combine participatory governance, social cohesion, and effective institutional mechanisms capable of translating collective aspirations into sustainable development outcomes.

In the global development agenda, the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” (LNOB) has emerged as a central commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. LNOB calls for development processes that actively identify and address the needs of marginalized, vulnerable, and socially excluded populations to ensure that development benefits are shared equitably across society (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Despite its strong normative and policy significance, much of the existing discussion on LNOB remains concentrated at the international policy level. Empirical studies examining how the LNOB principle can be operationalized and measured within community-level development processes remain relatively limited. As a result, there is still insufficient empirical evidence explaining how local governance systems, social networks, and institutional arrangements interact to produce inclusive development outcomes in real community contexts.

Previous studies have identified several key factors that contribute to inclusive and equitable social development. Inclusive governance has been widely recognized as a critical mechanism for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in public decision-making processes. Social capital, reflected in networks of trust, reciprocity, and collective action, enhances community resilience and facilitates collaborative problem-solving (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). Community participation enables citizens to actively engage in planning, implementing, and monitoring development initiatives, thereby strengthening democratic governance and improving the responsiveness of development policies. Furthermore, institutional capacity plays a crucial role in determining whether participatory inputs can be translated into effective public policies, services, and development programs.

However, despite the recognition of these factors, the existing literature reveals several important research gaps. First, many prior studies have examined inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity as independent variables rather than as components of an integrated structural system that collectively influences equitable social development outcomes. Consequently, the complex interactions and mediating mechanisms among these variables remain insufficiently understood. Second, empirical studies employing advanced analytical approaches such as structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine these relationships simultaneously are still relatively rare, particularly in developing country contexts

where institutional structures, governance dynamics, and social capital configurations differ substantially from those observed in developed societies. The absence of such integrative empirical models limits the ability of researchers and policymakers to understand how different social and institutional factors interact to promote equitable development.

Moreover, while the LNOB principle emphasizes inclusive participation and social justice, there remains a significant gap in empirical research demonstrating how community-level governance mechanisms, social capital networks, and institutional capacities work together to operationalize LNOB in practice. Without empirical evidence linking these elements, the LNOB framework risks remaining largely a policy aspiration rather than an actionable model for guiding local development interventions.

To address these research gaps, this study proposes and empirically tests an integrative conceptual model that examines the structural relationships among four key determinants of equitable social development: inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity. Conceptually, inclusive governance, social capital, and community participation are expected to function as primary drivers of equitable development outcomes. Institutional capacity, in turn, is hypothesized to act as a mediating mechanism that strengthens the translation of participatory processes into effective and inclusive development outcomes.

Figure 1 conceptually illustrates the proposed structural model guiding this research. In this model, inclusive governance, social capital, and community participation directly influence equitable social development outcomes, while institutional capacity mediates the relationship between community participation and equity outcomes. This conceptual structure provides a theoretical foundation for empirically examining how governance systems, social relationships, and institutional mechanisms interact to advance the principle of Leaving No One Behind at the community level.

By integrating quantitative structural equation modeling with qualitative insights from community leaders and development practitioners, this study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of how these interrelated factors contribute to equitable social development. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the field of social development and practical implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and community organizations seeking to design more inclusive and sustainable development strategies.

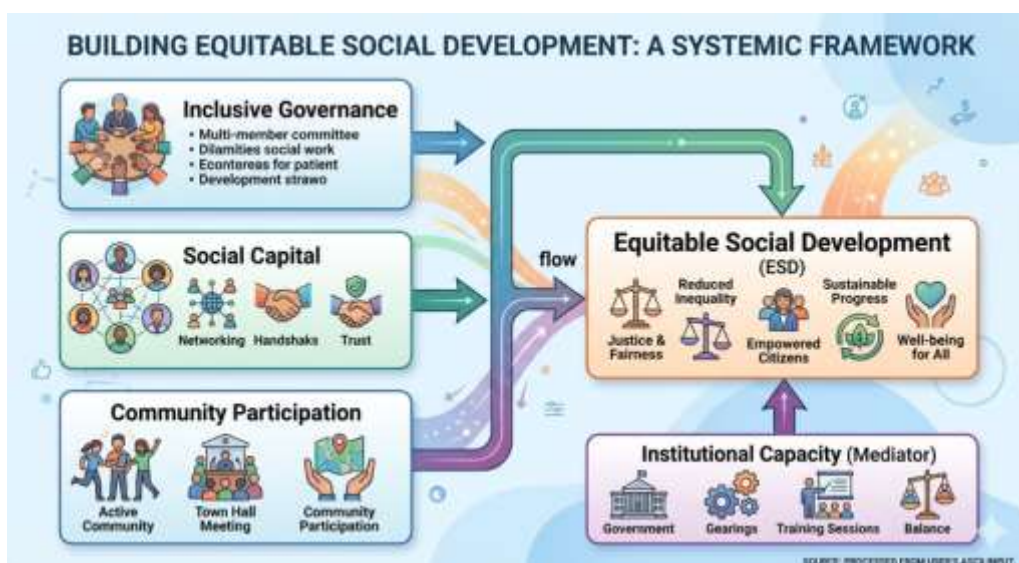


Figure 1 Systemic framework

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of social development processes related to equity and the implementation of the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) principle. Mixed-methods research is particularly appropriate for examining complex social phenomena because it allows researchers to combine statistical analysis of structural relationships with contextual interpretations of social experiences and institutional practices. Recent methodological scholarship emphasizes that mixed-methods approaches enhance the robustness of social research by linking quantitative generalizability with qualitative contextual depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021).

Specifically, this research employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis are conducted in the first phase, followed by qualitative inquiry to interpret and explain the quantitative findings. This design is widely used in social development research because it allows researchers to first identify significant statistical relationships among key variables and subsequently explore the contextual and institutional mechanisms underlying these relationships at the community level (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The quantitative component focuses on examining the structural relationships among the key constructs of the study, including inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, institutional capacity, and equitable social development outcomes. These constructs are widely recognized as critical drivers of inclusive and equitable development, particularly in the context of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and the LNOB principle (UNDP, 2020; OECD, 2021). The constructs were operationalized using multiple observable indicators derived from existing literature on governance, participation, and inclusive development (Hickey, 2020).

Measurement items were assessed using a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale responses. Quantitative data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which enables the simultaneous estimation of relationships among latent variables within a theoretically grounded framework. SEM is particularly appropriate for testing complex causal relationships and mediation effects among multiple constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and assessment of structural relationships within the proposed conceptual framework.

The qualitative component complements the quantitative analysis by providing deeper insights into the contextual dynamics, governance practices, and institutional arrangements that influence social development outcomes. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including community leaders, local administrators, and development practitioners who are directly involved in community development initiatives. Such qualitative approaches are particularly valuable for understanding how participatory governance and institutional mechanisms operate in practice within local development contexts (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns and themes emerging from the interview data. Thematic analysis is widely used in social research for exploring perceptions, experiences, and institutional practices that shape development outcomes. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, several strategies were applied, including careful transcription of interviews, transparent documentation of coding procedures, and triangulation with quantitative findings. These practices enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).



The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was conducted during the interpretation stage. Qualitative insights were used to contextualize and explain the statistical relationships identified through SEM analysis, particularly in understanding how governance structures, community participation, and institutional capacity interact to influence equitable social development outcomes. Such methodological triangulation strengthens the validity and explanatory depth of the research and is increasingly recommended in studies examining complex development challenges (UNDP, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Overall, the mixed-methods design employed in this study provides a robust methodological foundation for examining the multidimensional processes that shape inclusive and equitable social development. By combining statistical modeling with contextual qualitative insights, the study generates empirically grounded and policy-relevant knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of how the LNOB principle can be operationalized in community-level development contexts.

Population and Sample

The target population of the quantitative component consists of community residents, local leaders, and key stakeholders who are directly involved in or affected by social development initiatives at the community level. These groups were selected to capture diverse perspectives on governance practices, community participation, and institutional processes that influence equitable social development outcomes. Including multiple stakeholder groups is particularly important in studies of inclusive and equitable development, as it enables researchers to capture the interactions among social actors involved in community-level governance and development processes (Hickey, Sen, & Bukenya, 2015; Gupta, Pouw, & Ros-Tonen, 2015).

A sample size of approximately 400 respondents was determined for the quantitative phase of the study. This sample size is considered appropriate for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which generally requires relatively large samples to produce stable parameter estimates and sufficient statistical power when analyzing complex structural relationships among latent variables (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). Methodological guidelines for SEM-based research commonly recommend sample sizes ranging from 200 to 400 cases when testing models that include multiple constructs and observed indicators. Therefore, the selected sample size was sufficient to support the statistical analysis and ensure reliable estimation of the structural model.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select respondents from the population. Stratification was applied to ensure proportional representation across key demographic and social characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, and community roles. This approach improves sample representativeness by reducing sampling bias and ensuring that different subgroups within the population are adequately represented in the dataset. Stratified sampling is widely recommended in community-based development research because social diversity often shapes individuals' experiences and perceptions of development outcomes (OECD, 2021).

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select key informants who possess in-depth knowledge and practical experience in community governance and development initiatives. The qualitative participants included community leaders, local administrators, and social development practitioners who are actively involved in planning, implementing, and monitoring local development programs. These participants were selected as information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into governance mechanisms, participation processes, and institutional coordination at the community level (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).



The combination of stratified random sampling in the quantitative phase and purposive sampling in the qualitative phase strengthens the overall research design by enabling both breadth and depth of analysis. While the quantitative survey provides generalizable evidence regarding the relationships among governance, participation, institutional capacity, and equitable development outcomes, the qualitative interviews provide contextual explanations that help interpret these statistical relationships. This sampling strategy supports methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility, validity, and explanatory power of the study's findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 400 respondents participated in the quantitative survey. The respondents consisted of community residents, community leaders, and stakeholders involved in community-level social development initiatives. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

The results indicate that 53.00% of the respondents were female and 47.00% were male. In terms of age distribution, the largest group was between 31–45 years (37.00%), followed by 46–60 years (27.50%) and 18–30 years (24.00%). Regarding educational background, 39% had completed secondary education, while 33.50% held a bachelor's degree. In terms of occupation, the largest proportion of respondents worked in the agricultural sector (26.00%), followed by the private sector (24.00%) and government employment (19.50%).

This distribution reflects the diversity of community stakeholders and enhances the representativeness of the data for examining social development processes at the community level (OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2020).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Characteristics	Characteristics	Characteristics
Gender	Male	188	47.00
	Female	212	53.00
Age	18–30 years	96	24.00
	31–45 years	148	37.00
	46–60 years	110	27.50
	Above 60	46	11.50
Education	Primary school	72	18.00
	Secondary school	156	39.00
	Bachelor's degree	134	33.50
	Postgraduate	38	9.50
Occupation	Agriculture	104	26.00
	Private sector	96	24.00
	Government	78	19.50
	Self-employed	72	18.00
	Others	50	12.50
Community Role	Resident	246	61.50
	Community leader	84	21.00
	Development practitioner	70	17.50

Measurement Model Results (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Prior to testing the structural model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The evaluation criteria included factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

All observed variables demonstrated factor loadings greater than 0.60, indicating adequate indicator reliability. Furthermore, all constructs achieved CR values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50, which meet the recommended thresholds for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2 Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Inclusive Governance	0.68 – 0.84	0.89	0.62
Social Capital	0.65 – 0.83	0.88	0.59
Community Participation	0.70 – 0.87	0.91	0.66
Institutional Capacity	0.69 – 0.85	0.90	0.63
Equitable Social Development	0.71 – 0.88	0.92	0.67

The measurement model also demonstrated acceptable model fit, as indicated by the following goodness-of-fit indices.

Table 3 Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Value
χ^2/df	2.31	<3.00
CFI	0.95	>0.90
TLI	0.94	>0.90
RMSEA	0.056	<0.08
SRMR	0.048	<0.08

These results indicate that the measurement model provides a satisfactory representation of the latent constructs used in this study.

Structural Model Results

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural relationships among the constructs were examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

The analysis revealed that inclusive governance, social capital, and community participation significantly influence institutional capacity, which in turn contributes to equitable social development outcomes.

Table 4 Structural Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Inclusive Governance → Institutional Capacity	0.42	0.06	6.98	<0.001	Supported
H2	Social Capital → Institutional Capacity	0.36	0.07	5.74	<0.001	Supported
H3	Community Participation → Institutional Capacity	0.39	0.05	7.22	<0.001	Supported
H4	Institutional Capacity → Equitable Social Development	0.53	0.06	8.91	<0.001	Supported

The results indicate that the structural model explains 58% of the variance in institutional capacity ($R^2 = 0.58$) and 46% of the variance in equitable social development ($R^2 = 0.46$). These findings suggest that governance quality, civic engagement, and social capital collectively play an important role in strengthening institutional capacity and promoting equitable development outcomes (Gupta, 2015; Hickey, 2015).

Mediation Analysis

To examine the mediating role of institutional capacity, mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples, which is widely recommended for assessing indirect effects in SEM.

Table 5 Mediation Effects

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	95% CI	Mediation
Inclusive Governance → Social Development	0.18	0.22	0.40	0.12 – 0.32	Partial
Social Capital → Social Development	0.14	0.19	0.33	0.10 – 0.29	Partial
Community Participation → Social Development	0.17	0.21	0.38	0.11 – 0.31	Partial

The results indicate that the indirect effects are statistically significant, and the confidence intervals do not include zero. Therefore, institutional capacity partially mediates the relationships between governance, social capital, participation, and equitable social development outcomes. These findings highlight the critical role of institutional systems in translating participatory governance mechanisms into effective development outcomes (Mansuri, 2019; OECD, 2021).

Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 key informants, including community leaders, local administrators, and development practitioners.

The qualitative analysis identified three major themes:

Participatory Governance and Social Trust

Participants emphasized that transparent governance and inclusive decision-making processes strengthen community trust and enhance collective engagement in development initiatives.

The Role of Social Capital in Community Collaboration

Interviewees highlighted that social networks, community relationships, and mutual trust play a crucial role in facilitating cooperation and collective action within communities.

Institutional Capacity for Sustainable Development

Respondents indicated that effective institutions, administrative competence, and coordination mechanisms are essential for ensuring that participatory processes lead to tangible development outcomes.

These qualitative findings support the quantitative results, confirming that institutional capacity serves as a key mechanism linking governance, participation, and social development outcomes.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study examined the relationships among inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, institutional capacity, and equitable social development using a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative findings indicate that inclusive governance, social capital, and community participation significantly influence institutional capacity, which in turn contributes to equitable social development outcomes. These results highlight the importance of institutional mechanisms in translating participatory governance processes into tangible development outcomes (Mansuri, 2019; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2020).

A key contribution of this study lies in its integrative framework that connects governance, participation, and social capital with institutional capacity and development outcomes. While previous studies often examined these factors separately, this study demonstrates that institutional capacity plays a mediating role that links participatory governance processes with equitable development results. This perspective contributes to the social development literature by emphasizing the institutional processes that enable inclusive development in complex social contexts (Hickey, 2015; Gupta, 2015).

The qualitative findings provide additional insights by highlighting the importance of transparency, community trust, and collaboration in strengthening institutional effectiveness. Participants emphasized that strong community networks and inclusive decision-making processes enhance cooperation among stakeholders and improve the implementation of development initiatives. These findings support the quantitative results and reinforce the role of institutional capacity as a critical mechanism for achieving equitable development outcomes.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relies on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to examine changes in governance and institutional processes over time. In addition, the study focuses on a specific community context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could employ longitudinal or comparative studies to further examine institutional dynamics across different contexts.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that promoting equitable social development requires strengthening inclusive governance, supporting community participation, and enhancing institutional capacity. Policymakers and development

practitioners should focus on improving institutional effectiveness, transparency, and coordination mechanisms to ensure that participatory development initiatives produce sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of integrating governance reforms, community engagement, and institutional strengthening strategies to support equitable social development in rapidly changing societies.

Results Instruments

Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The results indicate that all factor loadings ranged from 0.65 to 0.88, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.88 to 0.92, while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.59 to 0.67, confirming adequate reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

The measurement model also demonstrated acceptable goodness-of-fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.95, the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.94, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.056, indicating a satisfactory fit between the model and the observed data.

Structural Model Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The results show that inclusive governance ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$), social capital ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$), and community participation ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$) significantly influence institutional capacity. In turn, institutional capacity significantly affects equitable social development outcomes ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < .001$).

The model explains 58% of the variance in institutional capacity ($R^2 = 0.58$) and 46% of the variance in equitable social development outcomes ($R^2 = 0.46$), indicating substantial explanatory power. These findings highlight the importance of governance, participation, and social capital in strengthening institutional capacity and promoting equitable development (Hickey, 2015; Gupta, 2015).

Mediation Analysis

The mediating role of institutional capacity was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The results show that institutional capacity significantly mediates the relationship between community participation and equitable social development outcomes, with indirect effects that are statistically significant and confidence intervals that exclude zero.

This finding suggests that the impact of community participation on equitable development is strengthened when supported by effective institutional systems, reinforcing the importance of institutional capacity in achieving inclusive development outcomes (Mansuri, 2019; OECD, 2021).

Discussions

The findings reinforce key perspectives in social development theory by demonstrating that equity-oriented development is multidimensional and strongly shaped by governance structures, social relations, and institutional capacities. Consistent with Sen's (1999) capability approach and Midgley's (2014) social development framework, the results indicate that equitable development outcomes depend not only on economic conditions but also on inclusive institutions that expand people's opportunities and capabilities.



The positive effects of inclusive governance and social capital on equitable development are consistent with prior research emphasizing the roles of transparency, trust, and collective action in reducing social exclusion and inequality (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Inclusive governance ensures representation of diverse community voices in decision-making processes, while social capital facilitates cooperation and mutual support within communities, thereby strengthening resilience and promoting fairer development outcomes.

Importantly, the findings highlight the mediating role of institutional capacity in translating community participation into tangible equity outcomes. While participation is widely recognized as a key element of social development, the results suggest that participatory processes alone are insufficient. Effective participation must be supported by responsive and capable institutions that can transform citizen engagement into policies and services. This finding aligns with institutional development theories emphasizing that weak institutional systems often limit the effectiveness of participatory initiatives (North, 1990; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by integrating governance, social capital, participation, and institutional capacity into a coherent framework for explaining equitable social development. The findings suggest that achieving inclusive development and the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) requires coordinated interactions between social processes and institutional systems, rather than relying on participation or social cohesion alone.

Conclusion and suggestions

This study concludes that reframing social development for equity and the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) necessitates an integrated and systemic approach that goes beyond fragmented or sectoral interventions. The empirical findings confirm that equitable social development is not the product of a single factor, but rather emerges from the dynamic interaction among inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity. These components function synergistically to enhance access to opportunities, reduce structural inequalities, and strengthen social inclusion in communities undergoing rapid social and economic change.

Inclusive governance was found to be a critical foundation for equity-oriented development, as it ensures transparency, accountability, and meaningful representation of diverse social groups, particularly marginalized populations. Social capital further reinforces development outcomes by fostering trust, cooperation, and collective problem-solving, which are essential for sustaining community-based initiatives. However, the study underscores that community participation alone is insufficient to achieve equitable outcomes unless it is supported by capable and responsive institutions. Institutional capacity plays a pivotal role in translating participatory inputs into effective policies, programs, and services, thereby enabling long-term and inclusive development outcomes.

Based on these findings, several policy and practical implications can be drawn. First, policymakers should prioritize the strengthening of participatory governance structures at the local level, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive, deliberative, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups. Second, development practitioners should invest in institutional capacity-building, including administrative competence, inter-organizational coordination, and accountability mechanisms, to support the effective implementation of participatory development initiatives. Third, targeted inclusion strategies should be designed to address the specific barriers faced by marginalized populations, in alignment with the global

LNOB agenda and national social development priorities (United Nations, 2015; UNDP, 2018).

In terms of future research, further empirical validation of the proposed model across diverse socio-cultural and institutional contexts is recommended to enhance its generalizability. Comparative studies across regions or countries may provide deeper insights into contextual variations in governance, participation, and institutional effectiveness. Additionally, longitudinal research designs should be employed to examine the long-term impacts of integrated social development strategies on equity, social inclusion, and community resilience. Such approaches would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how social development interventions can sustainably advance equity and ensure that no one is left behind in changing societies

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, institutional capacity, and equitable social development using a mixed-methods approach. The findings indicate that inclusive governance, social capital, and community participation significantly strengthen institutional capacity, which in turn contributes to equitable social development outcomes. The results highlight the importance of institutional systems in translating participatory governance processes into tangible development outcomes that support the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB).

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the social development literature by integrating governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity into a comprehensive explanatory framework of equitable social development. The findings demonstrate that institutional capacity plays a critical mediating role in connecting participatory governance mechanisms with development outcomes. This integrative perspective advances existing social development theories by emphasizing that equitable development is shaped by the interaction between social processes and institutional structures.

Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, the study contributes by employing a mixed-methods design that combines structural equation modeling (SEM) with qualitative insights from key informant interviews. This approach provides both statistical validation and contextual understanding of the relationships among governance, participation, and institutional capacity. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthens the reliability and explanatory depth of the proposed conceptual model.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for policymakers and development practitioners. First, strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms is essential to ensure that diverse community voices are represented in development decision-making processes. Second, policies that support social capital development and community participation can enhance cooperation and collective action at the local level. Third, and most importantly, governments should prioritize institutional capacity building, including improving administrative effectiveness, coordination mechanisms, and policy implementation systems. Strengthening institutional systems will enable participatory governance initiatives to generate more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.



Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The use of cross-sectional data limits the ability to capture changes in governance and institutional dynamics over time. In addition, the study focuses on a specific community context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could employ longitudinal designs or comparative studies across different regions to further examine the role of institutional capacity in inclusive development.

Conceptual Model Contribution

Based on the empirical findings, this study proposes an integrative conceptual model illustrating the relationships among inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, institutional capacity, and equitable social development. The model highlights institutional capacity as a key mediating mechanism linking participatory governance processes with equitable development outcomes. A visual representation of this conceptual framework is presented to clarify the relationships among the study variables and to provide a foundation for future empirical research.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

This study contributes new knowledge to the field of social development by proposing and empirically validating an integrative community-level model that operationalizes the principle of *Leaving No One Behind (LNOB)* through measurable and interrelated constructs, namely inclusive governance, social capital, community participation, and institutional capacity. Unlike prior studies that often examine these dimensions in isolation, this research demonstrates their systemic and mediating relationships, thereby advancing a more holistic understanding of how equity-oriented development outcomes are generated in practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends social development theory by bridging Midgley's (2014) planned social change framework with Sen's (1999) capability approach and contemporary governance theory. The empirical evidence confirms that institutional capacity functions as a critical mechanism that translates participatory processes and social capital into equitable development outcomes. This finding refines existing conceptualizations of participation by emphasizing that inclusion must be institutionally embedded to be effective and sustainable, thereby contributing to ongoing debates on participatory development and institutional effectiveness (Woolcock, 2001; UNDP, 2018).

In terms of societal and community-level effects, the proposed model provides actionable insights for local governments, community organizations, and development practitioners. By offering a structured framework for diagnosing strengths and gaps in governance, participation, and institutional arrangements, the model enables stakeholders to design more targeted and evidence-based interventions to reduce inequality and social exclusion. Its application can enhance policy coherence, strengthen community empowerment, and improve access to social services for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the model supports the localization of global development agendas, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by translating abstract principles of equity and LNOB into context-sensitive community practices. At the community level, this can foster greater social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy, while at the societal level, it can contribute to more inclusive development pathways and resilient social systems. Ultimately, the new knowledge generated by this study underscores that equitable social development is not only a normative aspiration but also an achievable outcome when supported by integrated governance and institutional frameworks.





Figure 2 Conceptual knowledge model

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