

Inclusive Society: A Pathway To Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Murinshi Lily(PhD Research Scholar)^{1*}, Dr Bharti Sharma(Assistant professor)²

^{1*}Graphic Era Deemed to be university, Dehradun. Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0782-4918>

²Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun.

***Corresponding Author:** Murinshi Lily(PhD Research Scholar)

*Email: lilyim25@gmail.com

Abstract

Inclusion—fair representation and involvement of all people regardless of gender, colour, ability, or socioeconomic status—is the foundation of sustainable development. This research focuses on equality, education, and governance goals (SDG 1, 4, 5, 10, and 16) and the importance of inclusion in achieving them. In it, we examine inclusivity theoretically, its fundamental parts (minority representation, disability inclusion, and gender equality), and its links to the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries like Rwanda and the Nordics and global institutions like the UN have excellent inclusion strategies. Inclusive policies boost economic growth, social welfare, and inequality reduction, according to this analysis. However, economic inequality, bigotry, and institutional injustices continue to limit inclusivity. Case studies indicate that inclusive societies can succeed and fail. Results show the need for targeted measures to address inclusion barriers such as inclusive legal frameworks, accessible education, equitable healthcare access, and technology improvements. Public officials, educators, and business owners must collaborate to establish and implement inclusive, long-term policies. The review also highlights research gaps, such as in new technology landscape inclusion and its long-term implications. Finally, ethically and practically, sustainable development requires inclusivity. Addressing systemic issues and promoting equity in all areas can help societies achieve the SDGs and ensure a future without exclusion.

Keywords: inclusivity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), equality, governance, technological innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an inclusive society, everyone should have equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, handicap, or other factors. Inclusivity is morally needed and necessary for social cohesion and sustainable development. Economically and socially, inclusion means giving everyone a fair chance to participate in and profit from societies processes (Moyer & Hedden, 2020). It involves removing barriers to resources, decision-making forums, and other empowerment for disadvantaged populations. Inclusion aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to end poverty, inequality, and climate change. SDGs, adopted in 2015, are a series of seventeen interrelated goals aimed at ensuring a sustainable and improved future for everybody by 2030. Many emphasise diversity and inclusiveness. SDG 1 (No Poverty) seeks to end all forms of poverty since marginalised people are more vulnerable to economic hardship, according to the UN (Sugiawan et al., 2023). Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) supports equal access to quality education for all, especially children from conflict zones or with disabilities. Considering structural barriers to gender equality, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) strives to empower all girls and women and achieve gender parity. Goal 10 of the SDGs is to minimise national and international inequality. It emphasises equitable policies that address inequality. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) promotes inclusivity in peaceful societies by ensuring access to justice and accountable institutions. All of these targets emphasise the importance of inclusiveness for sustainable development (Faugoo, 2024).

Beyond representation, inclusion is multifaceted. It includes equality, empowerment, and involvement. An inclusive economy should allow everyone, including marginalised groups, to obtain good jobs, receive fair wages, and start their own businesses. Social inclusion involves previously excluded people in all elements of society, including healthcare, education, and politics (Sachs et al., 2019). These variables work together to improve people's lives and provide them greater chances to change the world. Despite global inclusion efforts, considerable impediments remain. Systemic inequities, bigotry, and a lack of resources keep many individuals on the periphery, especially in developing nations. Over 85 million disabled people in sub-Saharan Africa face challenges to education and job, perpetuating poverty and isolation (Sztey et al., 2021). Equally troubling is

that women still earn 77 cents for every dollar men earn worldwide (Dalby et al., 2019). These fundamental issues necessitate immediate inclusive policies and behaviours.

An inclusive society builds social relationships, reduces inequality, and makes economies more resilient, enabling the SDGs. Inclusion helps societies fight poverty and climate change by combining the skills of different groups. Inclusivity has economic benefits, since diverse leadership teams outperform competitors by 35% (Yarnall et al., 2021). Social trust and political stability are key to sustainable development, and inclusive government may boost both, research finds. This research seeks to understand inclusivity's role in SDG achievement. It explores how inclusive policies and practices reduce poverty, education, gender inequality, and other inequalities. The report also examines inclusion issues and offers solutions. This research highlights best practices and successful case studies to assist policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders committed to inclusive society with actionable insights. In conclusion, inclusion underpins sustainable growth. As per the SDGs, an inclusive society leaves no one behind. This study emphasises the need for transformative approaches that prioritise inclusivity for sustainable development as the global society struggles with inequality and exclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding Inclusivity in the Context of SDGs

Sustainable development is based on multifaceted inclusivity. The Sustainable Development Goals emphasise inclusion through equal participation, resource allocation, and marginalised minority empowerment (Endo & Ikeda, 2022). Inclusion's theoretical foundations illuminate its relevance, but its core principles—minority representation, disability inclusion, and gender equality—illustrate its practical ramifications. An inclusive society is seen as an essential for achieving the SDGs as it fosters social, economic, and environmental equity all of which are crucial for sustainable development. The literature review explores the key themes, frameworks, and findings in the existing research on the relationship between inclusive societies and the SDGs.

According to Sen(1999), an inclusive society focuses on “capability”, meaning the ability for individuals to live the lives they value by providing access to resources such as education, healthcare, economic, economic opportunities, and political participation. Inclusion therefore, is not about reducing inequality but about creating environments that enable people to flourish and contribute to society in meaningful ways (UNDP, 2013). Inclusive society is crucial for eradicating extreme poverty. By making sure that the marginalised group are not left behind but are included and have access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities, inclusive policies can contribute significantly to poverty reduction (SDG 1). Narayan et al (2000) emphasized that social exclusion is a key driver of poverty, particularly in low-income communities. Inclusive education plays a pivotal role in achieving SDG 4(Quality Education). Research has found that inclusive education systems, which are open to all children irrespective of their social or physical challenges, are fundamental in fostering long-term human capital development (UNESCO, 2017). According to Seddon(2009) inclusive education contributes to human development by fostering skills and critical thinking necessary for active participation in society. We cannot deny the fact that Gender Inequality exists worldwide and in fact it remains one of the most persistent forms of social exclusion globally. Inclusive societies that address gender inequality and empower women and girls are essential to achieving SDG 5(Gender Equality). According to Kabeer(2012), Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a key driver of development. The evidence is clear: societies that promote gender equality tend to experience better economic growth, health, outcomes, and social stability. To achieve an inclusive society the leaders and policy makers must ensure universal access to health (SDG-3). A certain section of society especially those living in remote areas or those with disabilities, often face significant barriers to accessing healthcare services. Research shows that inclusive health systems, which prioritize equity and universal access, contribute to improved health outcomes for all, particularly for the poor and vulnerable(Marmot, 2015). Klasen(2010) argues that economic growth, if inclusive, has the potential to reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment.

3. RESEARCH GAP:

Globally there is a significant progress in understanding the relationship between inclusivity and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; however the research gaps remains which present

opportunities for further explorations for scholars and researcher to add an insight and new knowledge into the subject, which perhaps particularly to inform policymaker to intervened.

3.1 Intersectionality in Inclusive Development: Much of the existing research on SDGs tends to focus on one-dimensional aspects of inclusions. However, there is limited research on the intersectionality of various forms of exclusion including how race, class, disability and gender shape individuals experience of marginalisation. Addressing these intersections is crucial for crafting policies that address the multiple dimensions of exclusion and for ensuring that no group is left behind in the pursuit of the SDGs (Crenshaw, 1991; UN Women, 2020).

3.2 Inclusive Governance and Participation: While governance is frequently discussed as a means of fostering inclusivity, there is need for more empirical research on the effectiveness of inclusive governance structures. There is a lack of studies examining the role of marginalised groups in political decision-making and the impact of their participation on policy outcomes. It is necessary to note here that the incorporation of the voice of marginalised people would contribute to strengthening democratic processes and achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Notably the research should also focus on how inclusive digital policies and the expansions of technology access to underserved communities such as rural populations and people with disabilities can bridges development gaps. Additionally, more studies should be focus on how technologies innovation can be harnessed in an inclusive manner to create sustainable economic opportunities for marginalised communities (UNESCO, 2021).

3.3 Culture Norms and Values

Research has shown insufficient attentions to the role of cultural factors in fostering and inclusive society that supports SDGs achievement. Culture norms and values often influence the degree of inclusion in a society, particularly in areas like gender equality (SDG 5) and access to education (SDG 4). More research is needed to understand how cultural perceptions of inclusive shape societal behaviours and policy frameworks, and how to effectively leverage cultural understanding to promote inclusivity in development practices (UNESCO, 2019). Inclusion of indigenous people is not only important in achieving SDGs but it also enables the people to understand their way of life and traditions. Significantly studies could also examine how vulnerable communities, such as indigenous peoples and low income populations are involved in climate action strategies, how their traditional knowledge is practises, their traditional medicinal herbs and their way of preserving and protecting their indigenous land and forest all these factors can be integrated into sustainable development policies. A research on these topic could serves as a link between social inclusion and environmental justice could help create more equitable and effective climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Addressing these research gaps will be crucial for advancing global agenda for sustainable development

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVITY

Social justice and equitable underpin inclusion. John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness states that society should prioritise its most disadvantaged by distributing resources and opportunities fairly (Kurniawan & Rizky Samudro, 2024). This aligns with the SDGs' "leaving no one behind" ideal, which requires marginalised populations to participate in all stages of development. According to Amartya Sen's capability approach, expanding individual freedoms and capabilities promotes inclusion. Sen says economic measures are not the only development indicators. People's access to healthcare, education, and political participation matters most (Khajuria et al., 2022). Pierre Bourdieu's social capital highlights how ties and networks may promote or hinder diversity and inclusion. According to (Kuada, 2019), marginalised people may lack social and cultural capital. This collection of theoretical perspectives shows that inclusion is about eradicating systemic barriers that prevent people from realising their full potential, not just having them represented.

4.1 Key Components of an Inclusive Society

An inclusive society encompasses various dimensions, each of which is integral to achieving the SDGs. The following components are particularly significant:

- SDG 5 (Gender Equality) addresses gender equality, a basic problem for inclusivity. Women and men must have equal access to education, employment, and decision-making platforms in inclusive communities (Rad et al., 2022). We must fight patriarchal values, close the gender wage gap, and promote women leaders to achieve this goal. The World Economic Forum (2022) reports that Rwanda now has over 60% female lawmakers, demonstrating its gender inclusion efforts. These programmes benefit women and society.

- Disability inclusion means accommodating people with disabilities so they can participate in society. Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) emphasise inclusive education and equal access for disabled people. However, stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, and policy execution often impede progress. Over one billion individuals have disabilities, and many endure structural exclusion (Omodan, 2024). To ensure equal opportunity, inclusive policies must include assistive technology and disability rights laws.
- Inclusivity requires ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Goal 16 of the SDGs (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) emphasises minority-inclusive leadership. Minorities' marginalisation has led to healthcare, political, and educational disparities (Kasinathan et al., 2022). Indigenous peoples in Latin America face many barriers to getting vital services, despite safeguarding biodiversity and cultural objects, according to the UNDP (2018). Community-based programming, affirmative action policies, and cultural preservation must increase minority involvement to achieve inclusion.

4.2 Global Efforts towards Inclusivity

International groups, governments, and NGOs have led global inclusiveness efforts. These efforts align with the SDGs, which aim to empower marginalised groups and address systematic inequalities.

Policies and Initiatives from the UN and Other Global Organizations

The UN's frameworks and action plans have been vital in strengthening inclusiveness. In the spirit of "leaving no one behind," the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasises inclusivity. This agenda seeks to accomplish all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on No Poverty, Gender Equality, and Reduced Inequalities (SDGs 1–10) (van Vuuren et al., 2022). Resources and opportunities for all are crucial. The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is another landmark UN project. To completely integrate disabled individuals into society, it requires equal access to healthcare, education, and work (Mahida et al., 2021). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognises Indigenous struggles and demands for autonomy, cultural preservation, and economic integration (Moallemi et al., 2020). International agencies like UNESCO and the World Bank have inclusive policy. The World Bank's Inclusion Matters report advises investing in healthcare, education, and infrastructure to help disadvantaged populations participate in the economy (Milton, 2021). The Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO emphasises inclusive education to achieve fairness for girls and children with disabilities in low-income countries (McCandless, 2021).

Case Studies: Countries Making Progress Toward Inclusivity

Several countries have demonstrated significant progress in fostering inclusivity, serving as models for global efforts.

1. Rwanda leads the globe in gender inclusion with over 60% of parliament seats held by women. The Gender Monitoring Office and other directives to encourage women in politics are substantially responsible for this improvement (Ortiz-de-Montellano et al., 2023). By increasing women's economic and political power, these measures have helped SDG 5.
2. Finnish schools are noted for including disabled students in regular classes. To promote equal learning, the Basic Education Act gives each kid customised help (Aref, 2024). Finland's inclusive policies can aid SDG 4 (Quality Education).
3. The Bolivian government recognises Indigenous rights. Indigenous groups receive resources and sovereignty under the 2009 constitution, following UNDRIP principles. Land redistribution and intercultural education have improved Indigenous peoples' quality of life, advancing Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (Moyer & Hedden, 2020).

5. BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVITY

Despite global efforts, numerous barriers continue to hinder the realization of an inclusive society. These challenges are multifaceted, often stemming from systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices.

Economic Disparities

Economic inequality hinders inclusivity. The globe Inequality Report 2022 states that the wealthiest 10% in the globe hold 76% of the wealth, while the poorest 50% own 2% (Faugoo, 2024). These inequities disproportionately affect women, Indigenous peoples, and disabled people. Poor people cannot stop the cycle of poverty and marginalisation because they lack resources. According to the WHO, approximately 85% of

disabled people in sub-Saharan Africa are poor due to systemic discrimination in job and social services. Addressing these inequalities requires targeted initiatives like affirmative action and social safety programs.

Discrimination

Gender, racial, religion, and disability discrimination hinders inclusivity. Gender-based discrimination hinders women's education, employment, and political participation. Globally, women get 77% of men's wages, with the gender pay gap worsening in rural and low-income areas (Sachs et al., 2019). Racial and ethnic discrimination prohibits minorities from enjoying society's benefits. Black and Hispanic Americans had higher unemployment rates and lower healthcare access than white Americans, according to (Endo & Ikeda, 2022). Stopping discrimination requires advocacy, inclusive leadership, and legal changes.

Lack of Access to Education and Healthcare

Healthcare and education disparities hamper inclusion. More than 258 million children and teens aren't in school, per UNESCO (2021). Girls, refugees, and disabled youngsters have worse numbers. Also worrying are healthcare disparities. According to the WHO, more than half of the world's population lacks basic healthcare, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Rural South Asian maternal mortality rates are high due to poor healthcare infrastructure (Kurniawan & Rizky Samudro, 2024). Healthcare and education spending must bridge these gaps, especially in neglected areas.

Interlinkages between Inclusivity and SDGs

Inclusivity is a cornerstone for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it fosters equitable access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making. By addressing systemic barriers and embracing diversity, inclusivity has a profound impact on poverty reduction, education, and governance, which are critical to sustainable development.

Impact of Inclusivity on Poverty Reduction

Inclusivity helps end poverty (SDG 1) by providing financial resources and social safety nets to impoverished areas. Gender, race, and disability marginalisation perpetuates poverty. Programs to encourage women in the workforce have yielded economic benefits. According to a 2015 McKinsey Global Institute analysis, gender parity might boost global GDP by \$12 trillion by 2025. By creating work for rural populations, especially women, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has helped many escape poverty (Rad et al., 2022). All-accessible financial systems are crucial. Grameen Bank has helped poor Bangladeshis become self-sufficient by providing loans (Kuada, 2019). These examples show how inclusivity may change poverty's core causes.

Impact of Inclusivity on Education

Providing quality education to all needs inclusivity (SDG 4). Inclusive education systems prioritise equal access for girls, disabled pupils, and minority communities. Inclusive education has increased global enrolment rates for historically under-represented populations. According to UNESCO (2021), Kenya's Free Primary Education Policy has considerably boosted the number of low-income and disabled children in school. The OECD (2019) states that Finland's inclusive education strategy enhances educational outcomes by integrating disabled children into regular classrooms. Digital inclusivity is crucial in modern schools. India's DIKSHA platform, which provides digital learning resources, helped many youngsters, especially in distant areas, continue their schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic (Omodan, 2024). These initiatives demonstrate that inclusive education systems are more resilient and flexible.

Impact of Inclusivity on Governance

Sustainable Development Goal 16 fosters inclusive governance, which encourages open, accountable, and participatory decision-making. It combats systematic inequality by involving under-represented groups in policymaking. Nations with inclusive governments have stronger social cohesion and economic prosperity. Rwanda has almost 60% female MPs, making it one of the world's most female-dominated nations (World Economic Forum, 2022). The country's gender quotas require 30% female government representation. This comprehensive approach has given the nation swift economic growth and social stability. Decentralisation promotes inclusive leadership. Indigenous organisations have direct policymaking power under Bolivia's 2009 Constitution. Meeting Indigenous community issues improved governance (Mahida et al., 2021). Technology-driven efforts strengthen inclusive governance. Estonian electronic government portals promote openness and reduce administrative burdens for underserved communities (Moallemi et al., 2020).

1. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE REVIEW PAPER:

The review paper explores the critical role of an inclusive society in the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of the findings are:-

Social and Economic Growth

The main goal of SDGs is to enhance the social and economic growth. An inclusive society promotes the active participating of all social groups, including marginalised and vulnerable populations, in economic and political life. This participation not only leads to more equitable economic growth but also ensures that the benefits of development reach the widest possible population (UNDP, 2020). By fostering diversity in decision-making it leads to the fair representation of people from all walks of life which will significantly contribute to sustainable economic outcomes (World Bank, 2018). Inclusivity transforms economic and social systems by fostering equal growth and social cohesion. Inclusivity benefits the economy by increasing labour diversity and resource equality. Nordic countries with inclusive policies have proved that gender equality and social safety nets boost economic productivity. Since Sweden's laws guaranteed equal parental leave for men and women, the World Bank (2021) reports steady economic growth. INCLUSIVE projects empower marginalised people, tackling systemic inequities. Rwanda's inclusive leadership, with over 60% of legislators being women, has changed healthcare, education, and poverty reduction policies (Milton, 2021). This technique shows how inclusive practices can improve service access. Collective identity and social cohesion define inclusive communities. Canadian multicultural policies that embrace variety have helped communities recover and reduced discrimination. According to the OECD (2020), Australia's reconciliation efforts have helped Indigenous tribes live in peace and retain their culture. These examples demonstrate how inclusion fosters resource fairness and shared wealth and well-being.

Gender Equality as a Cornerstone for Inclusive Development

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015, provide a comprehensive framework for global development over the next decade and beyond. SDGs emphasise the inclusion of both genders equally, the belief that both women and men should have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights has evolved into a global imperative. Achieving gender equality benefits not only women and girls but also contributes to overall societal well-being. According to research, the equal representation or inclusion of men and women tends to have a better economic growth, lower levels of poverty and greater levels of social stability (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Effective Governance and Policy Implementation

Effective governance is crucial for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The existence of transparent governance and strong policies is fundamental for the active participation and making public policies and institutions accountable. It fosters a respect for the rights, dignity and privileges of all people, while also making sure that they represent their people fairly and fulfil their responsibilities within the society. The policy makers engage with open consultations with members of society about municipal issues such as the budget, and enhancing in open consultation with members of society about municipal issues such as the budget and the free flow of information to citizens and other stakeholders. Policy formulation made at all levels of governance is made to achieve transparency and accountability by all decision makers and stakeholders.

Education and Access to Technology

Inclusivity in education and access to technology plays a significant role in bridging the digital divide, which is closely related to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). Education provides an opportunity to learn the history and culture of one's and other societies, which will enable the researchers and the young people to understand and appreciate each other's cultures and traditions in this diversified world. It also instills the values, respect and appreciate the difference of other practices and culture. Education can empower the people who are marginalised or excluded from participating in discussion and decision-making. Learning about the historical processes and changes allows people to understand the way in which they have been affected by socially inclusive or exclusive policies, which ultimately influences the values. Choice and judgment of individuals who are in decision-making position. Provide equitable access to education and enables individuals, especially those from disadvantaged background to engage fully in the economy and society, driving innovation and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2021)

Challenges in Achieving an Inclusive Society

Long-standing social and political systems often resist diversification efforts. Institutional racism and other historical biases may hinder inclusive policies. Despite affirmative action, caste-based bias remains in India's educational and vocational sectors (Aref, 2024). Inclusive policies require significant funding. Funding social safety nets, healthcare, and education for underserved communities is difficult. Many low-income states struggle to implement inclusive policies due to limited resources and competing agendas (Moyer & Hedden, 2020). Inclusivity struggles with systemic inequities. Healthcare, education, and technology disparities exacerbate inequality. ITU notes that the digital divide hampers rural areas' access to online learning and jobs. We need new legislation, grassroots activism, and international partnership to address these challenges.

Strategies for Fostering Inclusivity

Inclusion requires targeted interventions that address individual needs and systemic constraints. Governments should promote equal, high-quality education for marginalised communities. UNESCO's Education for everyone initiative and others recommend universal primary education (Faugoo, 2024). Universal healthcare models like the Nordic ones safeguard disadvantaged populations. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act in South Africa is essential to addressing systemic inequalities (Endo & Ikeda, 2022). Low-cost internet and digital literacy programs may help close the digital gap. Due to Digital India, more rural people can access the internet and participate in educational and occupational programmes. Screen readers and speech-to-text technology have given disabled people a voice and opened possibilities in the business and education. Online resources can open and simplify government services. E-governance in Estonia fosters inclusivity by making all government services accessible to all residents.

2. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusivity is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals because it boosts economic growth, reduces inequality, and improves community well-being. This study highlights inclusive policies' benefits in Rwanda, Canada, and the Nordics. These measures have united people, improved government, and ensured resource equality. Political and social resistance, economic limits, and systematic inequities still make progress difficult. These results show how crucial it is to collaborate to remove barriers and promote inclusion. Lawmakers must enforce anti-discrimination laws and strengthen legislative frameworks to protect vulnerable communities. Promoting digital inclusiveness and international cooperation is necessary to close digital disparities and align national rules with global standards. Culturally relevant lessons, professional development, and community involvement can help educators create an inclusive learning environment. Equity measures include educating teachers to serve kids from diverse origins and integrating diversity into educational institutions. Corporations and civil society groups must hire inclusively, embrace diversity, and build public-private partnerships to implement community-focused projects. Corporate social responsibility and NGO campaigning help underprivileged people. Future research should focus on how inclusion affects society and the economy over time, particularly in healthcare, education, and technology. We need global comparative studies to understand how cultural and political issues effect inclusive policy. We should also examine how block chain and AI can foster diversity and inclusion. Inclusion is a moral and practical approach to sustainable development. We can help everyone attain their potential and improve society by removing structural barriers and promoting equality. To achieve inclusivity and advance the global agenda for sustainable development, stakeholders, educators, and policymakers must collaborate.

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