

Article

Radical inclusion and social cohesion: Strategies for integrating marginalized groups in Bo City, Southern Sierra Leone

Abu Kamara¹¹ Eastern Technical University, Department of Social Work, Kenema, Sierra Leone

Abstract

This study explores the preferred approaches for addressing the needs of marginalized groups, focusing on radical inclusion and social inclusion. Based on a field survey conducted in March 2025, findings indicate that radical inclusion is the most preferred approach, with 40.55% of respondents supporting it. Social inclusion follows with 29.55%, while 19.59% believe both approaches are equally effective, and 10.31% consider neither effective. These results highlight the growing recognition of radical inclusion as a transformative strategy in social policy and educational frameworks. The findings suggest that policymakers and social work practitioners should prioritize radical inclusion to enhance equity and participation for marginalized populations.

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Radical inclusion; social inclusion; marginalized groups; equity; participation; diversity

Introduction

By definition, Radical Inclusion involves the inclusion or integration of people especially those that have been marginalized by one or a combination of factors from fully participating into or accessing the general life chances of the society. It is an approach or attempt meant to kick against barriers set up by the society that discriminate against people preventing them from realizing their full potentials. Wikipedia, 2024 defines social Cohesion as strength of relationships and this sense of solidarity among members of the community.

There is a unique relationship between radical inclusion and social Cohesion in the pursuit of peace and tranquility in the society. It is believed that social tensions will be typically reduced when marginalized groups are holistically included or integrated into the society. It will also reduce social inequalities and promote development (My Journal Courier, 2004). However, many critics have argued that why many Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives will aim at promoting inclusivity yet they promote division and tensions in the society (My Journal Courier, 2004).

World Bank 2009 notes that the participation into the workforce by different people will promote innovation and greatly contributes to economic development. Patriotic Vanguard 2021, also notes that social inclusion will reduce social problems and prevent conflict that may crop up due to social exclusion. Having all to fully participate into development programs or initiatives of their land will promote their human rights. However, despite all these benefits, some people are still marginalized. Some communities still face obstacles preventing them

Corresponding Author Abu Kamara ✉ Eastern Technical University, Department of Social Work, Kenema, Sierra Leone

from accessing essential services, like healthcare, education and gainful employment. Globally, UNICEF report shows that sexual violence against children remains a critical issue. According to a UNICEF report from October 2024, approximately 90 million boys and girls worldwide have experienced sexual violence, with more than a billion women and men subjected to such violence during childhood (When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children, UNICEF, 2024)

A typical example could be found in Bo, the study area where people facing disabilities more especially children that have hearing and speech impairment, often a counter sexual abuse and other forms of abuses. Abdulai, 2018 notes that women in Bo reported system exclusion from decision making. Also, Peters, 2011 opines that youth unemployment increases social problems. Very little research or literature is available on radical inclusion. Studies done so far focus more on post war reconstruction with little or no efforts to analyze the problem caused by social exclusion, especially of marginalized or disabled persons. This calls for an urgent action. Thus, this study is suitable because it will address the problems caused by social exclusion and proffer strategies for integrating marginalized groups in Bo into every facet of the society's developments.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that informed this study is that of the conflict theory proposed by Karl Marx. According to Karl Marx, the society is divided into two classes, i.e., the Bourgeoisies (the haves, the controllers of the economic resources) and the proletariats, (who are considered as the haves not, the lower class, the laborers). What happened here, according to Karl Marx, is that the bourgeoisies use their economic powers to control the proletariats with an effort to maintain their positions. The bourgeoisies perpetrate inequalities by paying the proletariats lower salaries or wages. This negative structural agreement is a catalyst for conflict in any society, because the proletariats will one day get conscious of their positions (class consciousness), and will wage war on the bourgeoisies to change their own ugly economic and social situations. Conflict theory emphasizes economic imbalance and systemic oppressions.

Radical conclusion therefore aims at addressing these imbalances by agitating the holistic inclusion of all individuals in decision making, ensure equitable distributions of resources, provision of healthcare facilities for all, education and employment opportunities for all. This approach is in line with the recommendation given by Karl Marx about classless society. He believes that the exclusion of people or the continuous arbitration of inequality in the society will provide a breeding ground for conflict, and that, the only way to advert this is to promote a just society, or a classless society, where everyone will be seen as equal, sharing resources in common. Both radical inclusion and Marx theory share common features of dismantling oppressive structural systems or barriers. While Marx centered on class struggle, radical inclusion broadens this lens to address the intersectional marginalization of people. Together, they offer a framework for transformative Justice that challenges both capitalist exploitation and systemic exclusion

Radical inclusion vs. Social Inclusion

The two concepts aim to achieve the same thing, which is, to integrate people that have been marginalized into the mainstream of society. They want to ensure that no one is left behind or

pushed to the corner irrespective of their status, religion, tribe, education and so on. For instance, the aim of education, according to the National Policy on radical commission in schools, 2021 argues that providing equitable access to education for all children in Sierra Leone is a priority of the leadership of the new direction government of his excellency president, Julius Bio and is a critical component of the mid-term national development plan 2019-2023 (NDP), titled "Education for development". It defines Radical Inclusion as the intention inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society, or institutions, a further state silence and infrastructure added to the other intentional actions exclude.

It adds that radical inclusion means that these silent, exclusionary policies, morals stances, formally stated actions, institutional regulations, national laws and systemic frameworks should be removed intentionally and with urgency to achieve inclusion (National Policy on Radical Inclusion in schools, (2021). Radical Inclusion is more transformative in its approach as it tries to deliberately dismantle barriers embedded into the social systems with the bid to ensure full participation of individuals, especially the marginalized.

Social Inclusion, on the other hand, encompasses the act or process of assisting people that are disadvantaged to have access to life changing opportunities and other necessary resources that can better their lives. Social Inclusion uses a gradual or steady approach to achieve its aims. It differs from radical inclusion in that it banks on policies and community driven mechanisms to include disadvantaged people into mainstreams of society.

Hayes, A., Edward, B., & Gray M. (2008) note that social exclusion is synonymous to poverty. They argue that one of the main challenges facing social inclusion agendas is that there is no generally accepted definition of what constitutes social exclusion; and therefore, several definitions have been used. They point out a definition given by the UK Social Exclusion Unit (1991) as a short hand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown". The above definition typically describes the pains disadvantage people go through due to social exclusion, which is the opposite of social inclusion. All of the factors highlighted in the definitions support each other, thereby leading to a continuous circle of deprivation and poverty, which also, is a weapon killing the full involvement of people in community life. For development to take place and be sustainable, both social inclusion and radical inclusion movements can be emphasized, but to a very large extent, one can not underestimate the impact created by radical inclusion, which is broader and deep in scope-seeking to radically challenge and change the unfavorable societal norms and values that impede development.

Case Studies of Radical Inclusion in Post Conflict Societies

Radical inclusion movements have been reinforced in post conflict societies to facilitate their peace building initiatives and to prevent their countries from relapsing into conflict. It can be seen that Sierra Leone suffered 11 years of rebel war, partly due to systemic injustice some segments of the population suffered at that time and therefore needed a revolution to change such an oppressive system. Since the war formally came to an end in 2002 several peace building initiatives have been under taken by the government to enhance stability and tranquility. For instance, the National Youth Commission established in 2009 by the Bio government gives voice to youth to participate in decision making and policy formulation,

The Disability Right Act, (2001) also gives opportunity for physically challenged people to have access to public domains in terms of employment opportunities, healthcare facilities, access to schooling and so on.

In South Africa, just after the apartheid system that saw racial segregation and exclusion, frantic moves were made to rebuild the system. For instance, Mamdani, 2000 notes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) ensures that victim' testimonies, but critiqued for prioritizing symbolic reconciliation over that of reparation.

Souhall, 2007 opines that the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) redistributed wealth and corporate ownership to Black South Africans. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) is a policy of the South African government, which aims to facilitate broader participation in the economy by black people. It is a move to address inequalities that were created by the apartheid (<https://en.wikipedia.org>) retrieved on the 10/3/2025 at 5:25 am.

The Land Restitution in South Africa is a process that also aims at restoring land to people and communities who were forcefully disposed of the land after 19 June, 1913 as a result of racial discriminating laws or practice. (<https://en.wikipedia.org>) retrieved on the 10/3/2025 at 5:25 am.

Radical Inclusion has therefore been a key strategy employed by post conflict societies, especially Sierra Leone and South Africa to rebuild their broken walls and to promote peace and national cohesion. It ensures that no one is left behind or disadvantaged from participating into the economic and social lives of their societies. This, to a very large extent, discouraged the ability or potential for a state relapsing into another civil war.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Several efforts or attempts have been made to propagate the radical inclusion movement in Sierra Leone, more so in the area of education and that of social development. Yet, noticeable gaps still exist on its implementation and the impact on the study area, Bo Sierra Leon. for instance, most studies on radical inclusion focus on Sierra Leone at large, (National Policies) losing sight of the local context, the challenges at local level. Also, little or no empirical data are available on what radical inclusion movement is achieving in Bo. Therefore, the questions anyone will want to ask are:

- What impact has it created on the retention rate of marginalized peoples in schools, especially physically challenged?
- How prepared are teachers in embracing and implementing the radical inclusion initiatives more so when this condition of service is relatively poor?
- What is the community perception on allowing girls that are pregnant to access schools?
- How has access to finance, job opportunities and vocational training impacted the livelihoods of people that are marginalized in Bo?

All of these remain to be critical issues that need immediate concern and response. By addressing them through empirical data can help to redefine policies, improve implementation strategies and finally, promote sustainable radical inclusions.

Method

Research Design

Mixed research methods were employed-qualitative and quantitative. To gather qualitative data, in depth, interview, focus group discussions, and administration of questionnaires were done. While cross sectional survey technique was employed to collect quantitative data.

Sample Size and Selection Procedures

80 respondents were used for this study using purposive sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. The key informants were appropriate persons that had the needed information relevant to the study of radical inclusion policies and practices, including educators and school administration, such as teachers, principals, education officers. All of them shared their ideas on how radical inclusion is implemented in schools. Participants were also drawn from Ministry of Education and Social Welfare who provided policy insight on radical inclusion. Representatives from civil society and NGOs helped to assess community-based inclusion process and efforts.

In order to have a fair representation of excluded and marginalized population the study also used stratified sampling procedure; respondents were divided into strata (subgroups) and made a random selection from each group. The subgroups included students and youths, girls, children with disabilities, pregnant girls, single mothers and other women facing social exclusion were carefully selected to form the study population.

Both purposive and stratified Sampling techniques ensured that key stakeholders, including policy makers and marginalized population were included or represented in the study which provided clear reliability and validity of the study.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected to enrich the validity of the study. Primary data were collected using semi structured key informant interviews and semi structured questionnaires, while secondary data were collected through documentary reviews, that is, by reviewing other people's work relevant to the study.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the questionnaires and key informant interviews guides were checked for errors. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data were represented in tables and graphs showing absolute and relative frequencies for the tables for easy interpretation. Qualitative data were subjected to that of thematic analysis where data were coded, text shorting, creating categories and finally, interpreted the data describing radical inclusion initiatives.

Findings

The research revealed that large portion of the population or respondent are familiar with social inclusion and radical inclusion concepts, even though still lack much awareness. This indicates that knowledge gaps still exist even though large percentage of the respondents demonstrated awareness. This is found in the analysis below.

Understanding and Perception of Radical Inclusion and Social Inclusion

Table 8 presents respondents' understanding and perception of radical inclusion and social inclusion. The results indicate that 102 (35.1%) of respondents reported understanding the concepts very well, while 98 (33.7%) indicated they understood them somewhat well. Meanwhile, 56 (19.2%) admitted they did not understand well, and 35 (12%) stated they were not familiar at all. This suggests that while a majority of respondents have some knowledge of radical and social inclusion, a significant portion remains unfamiliar with the concepts.

Table 1. Understanding of radical inclusion and social inclusion

Understanding Level	AF	RF (%)
Very well	102	35.1
Somewhat well	98	33.7
Not well	56	19.2
Not at all	35	12.0
Total	291	100

Source: Field Survey March, 2025

It was revealed that radical inclusion is more appropriate in supporting marginalized groups or population, followed by social inclusion. However, some respondents pointed out that both radical and social inclusion methods should work hand in glove to enhance greater inclusion of marginalized groups or population in the mainstream of society. This is presented in the analysis below.

Preferred Approach for Addressing the Needs of Marginalized Groups

Table 9 illustrates respondents' preferences regarding radical inclusion and social inclusion as approaches for supporting marginalized groups. The data show that 118 (40.5%) prefer radical inclusion, while 86 (29.6%) support social inclusion. Meanwhile, 57 (19.6%) believe both approaches are equally effective, whereas 30 (10.3%) think neither approach is effective. This suggests that radical inclusion is perceived as the most effective strategy for addressing marginalization.

Table 2. Understanding of radical inclusion and social inclusion

Approach	AF	RF (%)
Radical inclusion	118	40.5
Social inclusion	86	29.6
Both equally effective	57	19.6
Neither effective	30	10.3
Total	291	100

Source: Field Survey March, 2025

Radical inclusion initiatives, though widely recognized as vital for integrating marginalized populations into community structures, are frequently met with significant implementation challenges. This study's findings from Bo City reveal a complex and mixed perception of these efforts. While some respondents acknowledged the positive impacts—particularly in advancing the empowerment of women and girls and providing a level of support to conflict-

affected youth—others highlighted considerable barriers that continue to undermine the successful realization of radical inclusion goals.

Chief among these barriers are limited financial and material resources, inadequate and irregular funding, resistance from certain community factions, weak enforcement of existing inclusion-related policies, and insufficient awareness and sensitization efforts. These findings closely reflect the outcomes of Kamara's (2022) research in Sierra Leone's Northern Region, which similarly noted that financial instability, policy incoherence, and cultural resistance significantly hinder the adoption of inclusive frameworks.

Moreover, this study observed that localized research on radical inclusion remains largely inadequate, with little context-specific evidence to guide the design and implementation of effective programs. Conteh and Sesay (2021) also emphasized this gap, arguing that the lack of disaggregated, community-based data impairs targeted intervention planning and prevents accurate measurement of impact. Without contextually grounded insights, national inclusion policies risk becoming overly generic or disconnected from local realities.

A further concern emerging from this research is the unequal distribution of benefits across marginalized groups. Women and girls appear to receive the bulk of the attention and support, whereas minority groups and persons with disabilities continue to be underserved. This is consistent with findings from the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Unit (2020), which highlighted that programs often disproportionately favor more visible or better-organized groups, sidelining those who lack representation or advocacy.

Importantly, the research suggests that exploring potential variations in preferences for inclusion strategies among different marginalized groups—such as youth, women, and people with disabilities—would add critical depth to future analysis. Understanding these nuanced preferences can lead to the development of more responsive, tailored strategies that genuinely reflect the unique needs and aspirations of each group, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model. For instance, while youth may prioritize access to education and employment, persons with disabilities might place more value on infrastructural accessibility and inclusive health services.

Taken together, the findings of this study and comparable literature across Sierra Leone emphasize that while radical inclusion is an essential pathway toward equity and social justice, its successful implementation depends on addressing multiple, intersecting challenges. These include resource limitations, policy and institutional weaknesses, variations in needs among target groups, and a lack of community ownership and localized knowledge. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more evidence-based, inclusive, and participatory approaches that can transform radical inclusion from theory into practice.

In conclusion, while radical inclusion holds immense potential for social transformation, its success is contingent upon addressing these multifaceted barriers. Cross-study comparisons reinforce the urgent need for strategic, evidence-based, and community-driven solutions that can turn the vision of radical inclusion into a sustainable reality.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study indicate that while radical inclusion is gaining recognition, there are still significant challenges in terms of awareness, implementation, and sustainability. The

preference for a complementary approach to radical and social inclusion suggests that stakeholders should focus on integrating both strategies rather than choosing one over the other. Financial constraints, policy gaps, and community resistance remain major hurdles, underscoring the need for increased funding, stronger policy enforcement, and grassroots engagement.

Additionally, the study highlights critical gaps in research, particularly in the areas of economic empowerment and employment. Future research should prioritize practical applications, localized case studies, and impact assessments to bridge the gap between theory and implementation. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in ensuring that radical inclusion becomes a sustainable and effective tool for addressing marginalization in post-conflict and developing societies

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

- Formulation and implementation of strong government policies that capture the interest of marginalized and excluded population into the mainstream;
- Availability of adequate funding to implement radical inclusion initiatives;
- Supports from international communities or Organizations, and Non-governmental Organizations towards the radical inclusion initiatives;
- Improvement in national commitments and Local engagements;
- Greater efforts be put on leadership driven initiatives; this will strengthen inclusion efforts
- Strengthen educational training and advocacy campaigns to facilitate a greater understanding and consequently, acceptance from the people.

Declarations

Competing interests: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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