Madonna Journal of Administration and Management Sciences, Vol 2, No 1

Rethinking Administrative Frameworks for Tackling Poverty, Inequality, and Exclusion in Pursuit of Inclusive Development

Ogbaga Fidelis Ogbonna (PhD)
Department of Business Education,
Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo
08068635942, ogbagaf@gmail.com

Abstract
This conceptual paper critically examines the intricate and reinforcing relationships between poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, arguing that these pervasive challenges collectively impede genuine human development and societal progress. Moving beyond mere definitions, this analysis posits that these phenomena are not isolated issues but rather symptomatic of deeper structural and systemic inequities. Drawing on established theoretical frameworks and a critical review of global development discourse, the paper explores how persistent disparities and exclusionary practices perpetuate cycles of disadvantage, particularly affecting marginalized populations. It offers a conceptual critique of conventional approaches to development, advocating for a holistic, rights-based, and inclusive development paradigm. The paper concludes by proposing a framework for understanding and addressing these interwoven challenges, aiming to stimulate further discourse and inspire more integrated policy responses.

Keywords: Administration Roadblocks, Integrated Policy Framework, Poverty, Inequality,
Exclusion, Inclusive Sustainable Development

Introduction

Despite decades of development efforts aimed at reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, these challenges persist globally, often manifesting in stubborn and complex forms (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 2016). A significant body of recent literature attributes this limited progress, in

part; to the inherent limitations of conventional, siloed policy approaches that fail to grasp the deeply interconnected nature of these issues and the structural drivers underpinning them. A critical analysis of past and present policy frameworks reveals that a major limitation lies in their siloed intervention strategies (Corus et al., 2016). Approaches focused solely on economic growth or isolated sector-specific interventions (e.g., education or healthcare) often fail to address the underlying structural drivers of poverty and inequality. This fragmentation can lead to unintended consequences, as interventions in one domain may inadvertently exacerbate problems in another if the interconnectedness is ignored. Moreover, the influence of power dynamics and dominant ideologies means that vested interests often undermine truly inclusive policies, resisting reforms that challenge existing hierarchies (Oxfam International, 2025). The frequent absence of a robust human rights-based lens further constrains policy effectiveness, transforming essential entitlements into discretionary provisions and hindering accountability (OHCHR, 2022).

Critiques of Purely Economic Growth Models

Historically, many development strategies have prioritized economic growth as the primary engine for poverty reduction, often underpinned by the trickle-down theory. However, recent analyses and empirical evidence have severely criticized this approach, highlighting its fundamental shortcomings in achieving equitable and inclusive development.

The Trickle-Down Fallacy and its Empirical Limitations

The trickle-down theory posits that tax cuts and other benefits for corporations and the wealthy will stimulate overall economic growth, with the prosperity eventually trickling down to benefit the broader population through job creation and increased wages. However, this theory has faced extensive empirical challenges and strong critiques. A 2020 report by Hope and Limberg from the London School of Economics, examining five decades of tax cuts in 18 wealthy nations, found that while tax cuts consistently benefited the wealthy, they had no meaningful effect on unemployment or overall economic growth. This research directly challenges the central tenets of trickle-down

Madonna Journal of Administration and Management Sciences, Vol 2, No 1

economics, suggesting that the promised widespread benefits often fail to materialize (Hope & Limberg, 2022).

Furthermore, critics, including President Joe Biden, have explicitly stated that trickle-down economics has never worked. The Roosevelt Institute (2024) argued that the systematic rewriting of tax codes since the Reagan era, favoring high-income individuals and corporations, has led to more inequality and less revenue for public investment, rather than shared prosperity. They highlight that corporate tax cut, such as those in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), disproportionately benefited CEOs and corporate executives, worsening racial inequality by reversing decades of progress in closing the Black-white wage gap (Roosevelt Institute, 2024). This empirical evidence suggests that wealth does not automatically trickle down but can, in fact, become concentrated, leading to widening income gaps rather than broad-based improvement.

Growth without Equity, Rising Inequality despite Economic Expansion

A critical limitation of purely economic growth models is their failure to guarantee equity. Numerous countries have experienced periods of robust economic expansion, yet simultaneously witnessed rising income and wealth inequality. This phenomenon, often termed growth without equity, underscores that economic expansion alone is insufficient to address systemic disparities (World Bank, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, abruptly halted the reduction in global income inequality and caused the largest increase in global income inequality in at least three decades, with disadvantaged groups experiencing greater work and income losses and slower recovery (World Bank, 2024).

Research also links rising market power and corporate markups to increased wealth inequality. As market power concentrates, it can stifle overall economic growth while simultaneously increasing profits for dominant firms, driving up asset returns that primarily benefit wealthier households. This dynamic deepens the divide between the rich and the poor, leading to substantial welfare losses for the majority while only the top 1% (and especially the top 0.1%) experience gains. This empirical reality demonstrates that while growth is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for reducing poverty or inequality, and without explicit

Madonna Journal of Administration and Management Sciences, Vol 2, No 1

redistributive policies, growth can even exacerbate existing disparities (Impullitti & Rendahl , 2025).

Shortcomings of Sector-Specific Interventions

Traditional development and social policies have often operated in silos, addressing issues like education, healthcare, or poverty alleviation as separate, disconnected challenges. This sector-specific approach frequently overlooks the complex interdependencies between these domains, leading to partial solutions with limited effectiveness (Corus et al., 2016).

Education Policies without Addressing Systemic Inequalities

While education is widely recognized as a pathway out of poverty, education policies often fall short when they fail to address underlying systemic inequalities. Research shows that educational attainment varies significantly by socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, and geography. Interventions focused solely on increasing school enrollment, for example, may not succeed if they ignore deeper issues such as child labor, malnutrition, lack of sanitation facilities, or inadequate resources in schools serving marginalized communities (UNICEF, 2023). The systemic nature of disparities in education is deeply rooted in socioeconomic factors, leading to a cyclical relationship between poverty and educational inequities. Policies that do not transcend superficial interventions and address structural and cyclical aspects of inequality are unlikely to break the enduring cycle of disadvantage.

Healthcare Initiatives That Fail to Reach Excluded Populations

Similarly, healthcare initiatives, despite their crucial importance, frequently fail to reach excluded populations due to systemic barriers and biases. Health inequities among under-represented ethnic and racial groups have resulted in significant economic costs in countries like the U.S. Studies highlight widespread discrimination against multiple racial and ethnic groups in healthcare settings, contributing to disparities in access and outcomes. Gender and age biases, as well as biases against LGBTQIA+ individuals, also present significant barriers to equitable healthcare access, impacting patient-provider interactions, treatment decisions, and overall quality of care. Healthcare initiatives that do not

explicitly address these systemic biases, geographical access issues (especially for rural and remote populations), or affordability concerns will inevitably bypass those most in need, thereby exacerbating existing health inequalities (Chetty et al., 2020; Hall, 2022; Stroumsa & Wu, 2018).

Poverty Alleviation Programs with Limited Scope or Sustainability

Many poverty alleviation programs have demonstrated limited scope or sustainability when implemented in isolation from broader structural reforms. Evaluations frequently reveal that while some programs may offer temporary relief, they often fail to create lasting pathways out of poverty due to a narrow focus. For instance, studies on poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria highlight that they often fail to address fundamental societal issues like corruption, economic inequality, and ethno-religious conflicts, thereby remaining an exercise in futility. Programs designed by individuals disconnected from the impoverished context, without involving the general population in planning and execution, frequently lack continuity and fail to achieve sustainable development. The success of credit and employment programs for the poor, requires attention to broader principles like avoiding anti-poor rules, finding alternatives to physical collateral, and ensuring that extra credit can be productive—indicating that the context and supporting structures are as important as the program itself (Adebajo et al., 2024; Adzu & Babanyaya, 2022).

Neglecting the Interconnectedness in Policy Design

A fundamental flaw in conventional policy design is the failure to explicitly acknowledge and address the interconnectedness of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, as well as their underlying structural drivers (Prince et al., 2023).

The Failure to Address Structural Drivers of Poverty and Inequality

Many policies tend to treat poverty and inequality as mere symptoms rather than recognizing them as products of deeper structural drivers within economic, political, and social systems. For example, focusing solely on individual-level interventions (e.g., job training) without

addressing systemic biases in labor markets, discriminatory laws, or unequal distribution of assets, will inevitably yield limited results. Research indicates that poverty and inequality remain intractable partly because many current approaches focus on targeting the poor rather than challenging the structures that generate poverty and inequality (Equity Initiative, 2023). Acknowledging the role of income inequality in mediating the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction underscores that growth alone is insufficient if its benefits are not equitably distributed. Policies that ignore the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate these structural barriers are destined to be ineffective in the long run.

Unintended Consequences of Isolated Interventions

The lack of an integrated perspective can lead to unintended consequences of isolated interventions, often exacerbating the very problems they seek to solve. Development interventions, even with good intentions, can inadvertently create winners and losers if not carefully designed to account for existing inequalities and contextual factors. For example, a new infrastructure project designed to boost economic activity might disproportionately benefit wealthier landowners, while displacing poorer communities without adequate compensation, thereby increasing horizontal inequalities. Similarly, climate and development interventions that are poorly planned can worsen underlying problems and increase vulnerabilities, especially for communities with a history of conflict. This highlights that interventions, by their very nature, can reshape social and economic landscapes, and without a holistic impact assessment, they risk doing more harm than good (Lomax et al., 2023)2023).

The Role of Power Dynamics and Political Economy

Beyond technical shortcomings, the limitations of conventional approaches are deeply embedded in power dynamics and political economy, where vested interests and dominant ideologies can actively undermine inclusive policy formulation and implementation. They include the following:

How Vested Interests Can Undermine Inclusive Policies

Vested interests, defined as perceived self-interest in specific public policies, represent a significant barrier to inclusive policy-making. Powerful economic elites, corporate lobbies, or political factions that benefit from the status quo of inequality and exclusion often exert undue influence on policy processes, resisting reforms that could challenge their advantages. For instance, policies aimed at progressive taxation, stronger labor protections or universal social services often face fierce opposition from groups whose wealth or power might be curtailed (Oxfam International, 2025). This political resistance means that even technically sound and evidence-based inclusive policies can be watered down, blocked, or poorly implemented due to the concentrated power of those who benefit from existing disparities.

The Influence of Dominant Ideologies

The influence of dominant ideologies, such as neoliberalism, profoundly shapes development policy, often prioritizing market efficiency and individual responsibility over social equity and collective welfare. Critical theories of ideology argue that such frameworks can perpetuate injustice by misrepresenting social realities and arbitrarily privileging some groups over others. For example, the emphasis on fiscal austerity and deregulation, hallmarks of neoliberal thought, has been criticized for exacerbating inequality and limiting the state's capacity to provide universal social protection (IMF, 2023). These ideologies can create "false consciousness" by framing systemic issues as individual failings, thus diverting attention from structural reforms necessary for genuine inclusion.

Evaluation of Past and Present Policy Frameworks

An evaluation of past and present policy frameworks offers crucial lessons learned, emphasizing the need for integrated and transformative strategies as follows:

- Analysis of Successes and Failures of Specific Anti-Poverty, Inequality Reduction, and Social Inclusion Programs: Recent evaluations of anti-poverty, inequality reduction, and social inclusion programs reveal a mixed bag of successes and failures.

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs in Latin America, for example, have demonstrated considerable success in reducing poverty and improving health and education outcomes, particularly for children, by providing direct financial support conditional on school attendance or health check-ups (Ravallion, 2016; UNICEF, 2023). However, their sustained impact often depends on broader economic growth and complementary public services. Conversely, programs that focus solely on microfinance without addressing broader market access or social protections often have limited long-term impact on poverty reduction for the most vulnerable.

- Successful programs often share common principles: they are designed with a clear understanding of the target population's specific needs, they integrate multiple interventions (e.g., income support with health and education), and they are supported by strong institutional frameworks and political will. Failures, conversely, often stem from a lack of political buy-in, corruption, poor targeting, insufficient funding, or a failure to address the underlying structural barriers faced by marginalized groups.
- Lessons Learned and the Need for Integrated Strategies: The overarching lesson learned from analyzing past and present policy frameworks is the imperative for integrated strategies that move beyond siloed interventions. The 2013 UN Report on the World Social Situation: Inequality Matters explicitly called for a reorientation of macroeconomic policies to promote sustained, inclusive, and equitable growth, stressing the need for the integration of social and economic policies. This means adopting a multi-dimensional approach that recognizes the complex interplay between economic, social, political, and environmental factors.
- Address structural drivers: Go beyond symptoms to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality, including discriminatory laws, unequal land distribution, and biased institutions.
- Promote policy coherence: Ensure that interventions in one sector do not inadvertently undermine progress in another, and that all policies work synergistically towards common goals.
- Adopt an intersectional lens: Design policies that explicitly

acknowledge and address how different forms of disadvantage (e.g., gender, race, disability) intersect to create compounded vulnerabilities.
- Strengthen governance and accountability: Foster transparent and inclusive governance structures that can resist vested interests and ensure equitable implementation of policies.
- Empower marginalized communities: Involve affected populations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies that impact their lives, ensuring their agency and self-determination.

Ultimately, overcoming the limitations of conventional approaches requires a paradigm shift towards holistic, equity-driven, and transformative policy frameworks that are responsive to the interconnected nature of global challenges and the specific needs of vulnerable populations. The persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and exclusion underscore the inadequacy of conventional, fragmented approaches. The empirical evidence overwhelmingly points to their mutual reinforcement and the deep-seated systemic drivers that perpetuate them. Overcoming these limitations necessitates a fundamental shift towards integrated, rights-based, and multi-dimensional development strategies that actively dismantle the structures of disadvantage and foster genuine, inclusive participation for all. This understanding forms the critical basis for proposing a more coherent and effective framework for inclusive development.

Recommendations

Based on the critical analysis of the intertwined nature of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, and acknowledging the limitations of conventional approaches, the following recommendations are proposed to foster genuinely inclusive and sustainable development:

- Adopt an Integrated, Multi-Dimensional Policy Framework
- Shift from Silos to Synergy: Policymaking must explicitly recognize and address the complex, reciprocal relationships between poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Instead of treating these as distinct issues, integrated national development plans should be formulated, ensuring that interventions in one

domain (e.g., economic growth) are aligned with and reinforce progress in others (e.g., social protection, access to justice).

- Implement Multidimensional Measurement: Utilize and refine multidimensional poverty and inequality indices (e.g., MPI, Gini for income/wealth, Palma Ratio, indices of opportunity) as primary policy targets. This will ensure that progress is measured beyond mere income, capturing deprivations in health, education, living standards, and other crucial dimensions of human well-being.
- Prioritize Structural Reforms and Progressive Redistribution
- Combat Wealth and Income Concentration: Implement progressive taxation systems (income, wealth, inheritance, corporate profits) to generate resources for public investment and reduce extreme wealth concentration.
- Strengthen Labor Market Institutions: Advocate for policies that ensure decent work, living wages, and robust social protection floors for all workers, including those in the informal and gig economies. This includes strengthening collective bargaining rights and addressing precarious employment conditions.
- Reform Financial Systems: Introduce regulations to curb excessive financialization and speculative activities that contribute to inequality, directing finance towards productive, inclusive investments.

By adopting these integrated and transformative recommendations, nations and the international community can move beyond the limitations of past approaches and genuinely strive towards societies where all individuals have the opportunity to live lives free from poverty, dignified by equity, and enriched by full inclusion.

Conclusion

This review has highlighted the inherent limitations of conventional, siloed approaches to development. Purely economic growth models, often premised on the empirically challenged trickle-down theory, have consistently failed to deliver equitable outcomes, demonstrating that growth without deliberate redistributive policies can exacerbate inequality. Similarly, sector-specific interventions in education or

healthcare, when implemented in isolation from broader systemic reforms, often fail to reach the most excluded or address the root causes of their disadvantage. The failure to acknowledge and address the interconnectedness in policy design frequently leads to unintended consequences, reinforcing existing structural drivers of poverty and inequality. In summary, the persistence of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion is not a testament to the intractability of these problems but rather to the inadequacy of fragmented and often politically constrained responses. The evidence underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift: one that moves beyond treating symptoms to confronting the systemic drivers and interconnected nature of these global challenges. Future policy frameworks must therefore adopt an integrated, multi-dimensional, and rights-based approach. Such a framework would prioritize policy coherence, address power imbalances, dismantle discriminatory structures, and genuinely empower marginalized communities, thereby fostering genuinely inclusive and sustainable development for all.

References

Adebajo, A. A., Chukwudi, C. E., Olu-Owolabi, F. E., & Salako, S. A. (2024). Poverty Alleviation Policies and Elitist Approach in Nigeria: An Assessment. Journal of International Politics and Development, 8(9), 1-18

Adzu, I. S., & Babanyaya, B. M. (2022). Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: A Study of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (2001–2020). Jalingo Journal of Social and Management Sciences, 4(1), 1–14.

Bhalla, A. S., & Lapeyre, F. (2016). *Poverty and exclusion in a global world*. springer.

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M. R., & Porter, S. R. (2020). Race and economic opportunity in

the United States: An intergenerational perspective. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 135(2), 711–783.

Corus, C., Saatcioglu, B., Kaufman-Scarborough, C., Blocker, C. P., Upadhyaya, S., & Appau, S. (2016). Transforming poverty-related policy with intersectionality. Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 35(2), 211-222.

Hall, G. C. N. (2022). Multicultural psychology. Routledge.

Hope, D., & Limberg, J. (2022). The economic consequences of major tax cuts for the rich. Socio-Economic Review, 20(2), 539-559.

Impullitti, G. and P. Rendahl (2025). Market power, growth, and wealth inequality. Discussion Papers 2025/01, University of Nottingham, Centre for Finance, Credit and Macroeconomics (CFCM).

International Monetary Fund. (2023). *Fiscal Monitor: Social expenditure for inclusive growth.* IMF. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2023/04/12/fiscal-monitor-april-2023-social-expenditure-for-inclusive-growth

Lomax, J., Osborne, M., & Lambe, F. (2023). Locating the Unintended Consequences of Interventions: A Tool for Analysing Impact Inequality in Development Programming. Stockholm Environment Institute. https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/luci-tool-sei2023.011.pdf

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022). *Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on racial discrimination and the right to health. OHCHR.*

https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5261-report-high-commissioner-human-rights-racial-discrimination

Oxfam International. (2025, January 15). *Inequality Inc.: How corporate power drives extreme wealth and harms us all. https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-inc*

Prince, A. I., Ehi, O. E., Brown-Ofoeme, M. N., Collins, O., & Alobele, I. A. (2023). Social policies and poverty reduction in Africa: A Nigeria-centered perspective. IIARD J. Human. Soc. Policy, 9(1), 49-77.

Ravallion, M. (2016). *The economics of poverty: History, measurement, and policy. Oxford University Press.*

Roosevelt Institute. (2024, January 17). *Trickle-Down Doesn't Work, and New Research Proves It. https://rooseveltinstitute.org/2024/01/17/trickle-down-doesnt-work-and-new-research-proves-it/*

Stroumsa, D., & Wu, J. P. (2018). Welcoming transgender and nonbinary patients: Expanding the language of "women's health". American journal of obstetrics and gynecology. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2018.09.018

UNICEF. (2023, September 13). *Poverty and deprivation among children: A global overview. UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/reports/poverty-and-deprivation-among-children-global-overview*

World Bank. (2024a). *Poverty & Equity Data Portal. World Bank. https://povertydata.worldbank.org/*

World Bank. (2024b). *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2024 (Forthcoming). World Bank Publications*