

## EQUITY & SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

(Lecture Note prepared by Chanda Gurung Goodrich, Senior Fellow – Research, SaciWATERS for the SAWA Fellows Training, Kandy, Sri Lanka – 2-13 September 2009).

The principles of Equity and social stratification oppose one another. **Equity** means whereby people must have access to equal opportunities. All barriers to economic and political participation should be eliminated. Whereas **Social Stratification** denotes *Inequity*

**Equity** refers to just and fair. Equity thus recognizes "*difference*", whereas Equality assumes "*sameness*"

Equity is the process to address difference in order to attain equality.

Two types of equity -Horizontal and Vertical Equity

**Horizontal Equity** - equal resources and attention be given to everyone to access those resources which they need to realize their potential as human beings

**Vertical Equity** -different needs of different categories of people need to be recognized and addressed in terms of equitable allocation of resources.

So people with certain obvious disadvantages should get some special treatment – example of this is the quota system or the reservation system for various categories of people who are disadvantaged in various ways in relation to the “general” category.

**Social Stratification** Social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. Thus it refers to structure of inequality between groups which persists across generations

In sociology and anthropology, social stratification is the hierarchical arrangement of individuals into social classes, castes, and divisions within a society.

Types of stratification varies across societies and time (historically)

Four fundamental principles explain why social stratification exists:

1. Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences;
2. Social stratification persists over generations;
3. Social stratification is universal but variable;
4. Social stratification involves not just inequality, but also beliefs

**Types of stratifications:**

**Caste** - A caste system is social stratification based on ascription. It is the caste that determines any individual's position on status attributes ascribed by birth rather than achieved by any act during the course of one's life time. Pure caste systems are "closed" with no social mobility - this status is passed inter-generationally.

Caste systems are typical of agrarian societies. A rigid sense of duty and discipline are critically important in such societies. Industrialization increases personal choice and individual rights, but does not end social stratification.

**Class** - The Class System is in a way representative of industrial societies. Class systems are defined as social stratification based on individual achievement. Open social mobility is critical to this type of system. However, over time this stratification took over new forms with the entry of other factors other than individual achievement coming into play. This type of stratification differs in different kinds of societies - slavery, feudalism and capitalist, based on wealth, ethnicity, race, region, etc.

All these systems of stratification have inequality and exploitation embedded within them.

**Gender** - refers to the social construction of biological differences:  
Gender based division of labor, access to and control over resources and benefits. Gender based inequalities are embedded with other social stratifiers.

Some of the differences e.g. gender, ethnic group, race, language are not under the control of the people and cannot be changed.  
Some are achieved so can be changed - wealth, occupation, religion, etc.

***Social stratification and inequity is related to water because:***

These define access to water for agriculture and domestic use as well as for sanitation  
Regional variations in access to water due to agro-ecological conditions as well as different policies dependent on interest groups

**Questions to Probe Social Equity**

Who does what?

Who gets what and why?

What is gender division of labor?

What is the control of resource (water) and bargaining position of women and socially disadvantaged groups?

How are public resources (water supply) distributed between different groups?

What is the process of inclusion and exclusion in decision making?

How do men and women use water resources and for what purposes?

How are the contributions (labor, time, payments in cash and kind) to the development and management of water resources divided between women and men, rich and poor, socially included and excluded communities?

Who makes decisions about water use and management at various levels? (households, communities, water users groups and committees and, at the local administrative levels - panchayats, blocks, districts, etc.

Who benefits from projects and program resources?

Who bears the costs of a new project or program often disproportionately? (in terms of work load increase, reduction in leisure, declines in health, income, etc.)

Do women and men from different socio-economic, religious, and ethnic groups benefit equitably?

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