

The Path to Leave No One Behind



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There are many who proclaim 'leave no one behind' (LNOB) as the new paradigm shift in development (see for example [here](#)). While, from a conceptual perspective, LNOB is the continuation of 'inclusive development' which replaced 'pro-poor growth' in the early 2000s, it indeed marks a paradigm shift for development practice. As the overarching commitment of the [Agenda 2030](#), LNOB means that achievements for every single of the 17 SDGs must be monitored and evaluated based on the question whether the poorest people in fact have been reached. The MDGs lacked clear goals on inclusion. Consequently, 'pro-poor growth' and 'inclusive development' could be (mis-)used by development practitioners as rhetorical devices rather than creating practical commitment. With the Agenda 2030, this is no longer possible. LNOB unambiguously implies that people on the very bottom are the top priority – for all SDGs!

How can this be achieved? How can we ensure the poorest people benefit from our programmes/projects? How can we design and implement our programmes/projects in a way that they effectively improve the lives of the ones at the very bottom? In her think piece [Market System Approaches and 'Leaving No One Behind'](#), [Jodie Thrope](#) looks at this question through a Market for the Poor (MfP) lens. She asks: What role can market systems approaches play in reaching people at the very bottom? Her paper suggests that market systems approaches can work for the most marginalized if certain criteria are met for diagnostics, project design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. These criteria are:

1. **Strong contextual knowledge:** enables projects to identify and reach very marginalized groups.

2. **Taking a sequenced approach:** *Moving at an appropriate pace for beneficiaries is critical for the inclusion and sustainability of the project and requires sufficient time investment in achieving results.*
3. **Building connections:** *Marginalized people often suffer from low visibility and isolation. Support to building social capital is therefore well placed and should include establishing groups among marginalized people as well as linking them to broader (formalized) structures. An exclusive focus on the former carries the risk to further exacerbate their isolation as a group.*
4. **Institutional barriers:** *There is a need to reflect on whether institutional factors – such as formal policies or social norms – are adequately incorporated in the contextual analysis and ongoing monitoring/evaluation and whether possibilities for interventions at an institutional level have been considered. (See also the contribution on invisible power [here](#).) Without this reflection, market systems approaches risk to address symptoms rather than root causes for marginalization.*

Thrope's suggested project enablers highlight that a market system approach can work for the most marginalized. In more pessimistic words, this means that an MfP approach is not pro-LNOB per se. However, looking at the four key factors identified, this seems to be true for most development projects regardless of the chosen approach. For example, it is commonly agreed (at least in theory, while in practice this seems to be more challenging to achieve) that contextual knowledge is critical for the success of any type of development intervention. From this viewpoint, Thrope's article contains a strong reminder to the development community that most marginalized people are not easy to identify and that it is more difficult to achieve results for them than for better-off groups.

The popular question among development practitioners currently is: Are we ready to invest time and resources in the most marginalized while we could achieve results more easily and quicker without them? This question is triggered by pressure from donors and political environment to achieve quick results and avoid project failure. Hence, the success of LNOB will ultimately depend on donors' understanding of the true practical implications of LNOB: To invest more time and money in the most marginalized people and to take more risk of failure.

Additional References:

[Market System Approaches and 'Leaving No One Behind'](#)

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