

LALICS-CSIC Seminar, Montevideo

Contributions from Science, Technology and Innovation to Social Inclusion

LALICS (Latin American Network on Learning, Innovation and Competence Building) is a network of Latin American scholars who are part of a global network on these aspects, Globelics, and ascribe to the framework of the innovation systems for development.

Within LALICS there are individuals and research groups with a special concern for understanding and promoting the dynamics of science, technology, innovation (STI), and knowledge -which includes the educational system- that allow turning them into tools at the service of the decline in various forms of social exclusion. This group states to have in common the next basic agreements: (I) knowledge and innovation can contribute to a substantial improvement in the living conditions - in the broader sense of the concept- of the deprived, vulnerable and forgotten population of our countries; (ii) the full expression of that potential requires the design and implementation of direct forms of articulation between policies and efforts in production of knowledge, learning and innovation, with the problems that hinder the social inclusion; and (iii) the design and implementation of useful, usable and efficient solutions requires the participation and involvement of different types of actors in various forms.

The participant of the LALICS seminar “Contributions from Science, Technology and Innovation to Social Inclusion”, held in Montevideo, Uruguay, on 11 and 12 August 2014, after the discussions agree to share the following considerations and proposals:

1. Regarding social inclusion and exclusion

The concepts of social exclusion and social inclusion require careful delineation to be used in connection with STI. This is particularly necessary because the definition of these concepts, which are of particular analytical utility, still does not recognize agreements and, also, because there is a growing international literature which is important to discuss. These are concepts that have been used in Latin America, where the starting point has usually been poverty and inequality, ie aspects of social exclusion. We propose the following set of approaches to these concepts:

- i.- Inequality and poverty are multifaceted phenomena that are important sources of social exclusion through, among other manifestations, the unequal access to various opportunities that others share;
- ii.- Social inclusion is also a multifaceted phenomenon, which is not only associated with the distribution of income, essential as it may be; should therefore be analyzed in the broader conception of development that integrates different-social, economic, cultural and political context dimensions;
- iii.- Social inclusion is a "located process", which takes place in specific contexts in which power relations and institutional arrangements should be considered for both analysis and action to unfold;
- iv.- Social inclusion is related to the guarantee of the rights of citizens. This involves ensuring access to resources and opportunities necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres, benefiting from a standard of living and being that is considered suitable for the society in which they live.

v.- Social inclusion implies a participation in the production of goods and services, individually or collectively, to ensure decent working conditions;

vi.- Social inclusion does not refer to the inclusion of populations to specific forms of social, economic, political or cultural organization, from which they would be "excluded";

vii.- Social inclusion is a policy guidance for many different types of action, in which can be involved and participate also very different social groups.

2. Regarding the plurality of approaches

Within this general framework, there are spaces for a variety of approaches on the relationship between STI and social inclusion. This plurality is expressed in the modality of social inclusion to which attention is paid, institutional spaces from which you work, the methodologies used to articulate STI and social inclusion, among other aspects. All these modalities, beyond their diversity, share the basic agreements listed in section 1, which marks the specificity of LALICS on this subject. Preserving this plurality is important to enhance the research perspectives and to advance the understanding of possible courses of action that allow to consolidate them.

3. Key actors and their functions

Moving towards what constitutes the main objective of this group within LALICS -getting STI to contribute to social inclusion- requires that various actors play certain roles. Some of the key actors are listed below, and, in parentheses, their functions:

i. Actors connected with various forms of social inclusion problems and able to identify and make them visible (problem identification)

ii. Actors involved in the design and implementation of public policy (STI and social), university policy and research policy, as well as international cooperation policies (orientation of research agendas, defining programs of STI policies aimed at social inclusion, etc.)

iii. Actors with the ability to put their knowledge at the service of social inclusion: academic community, in all fields of knowledge; firms in all areas of production of goods and services; communities with accumulated experience (knowledge supply)

iv. Actors with ability to implement and scale-up the results so that they effectively contribute to social inclusion, involving corporations, cooperatives, small producers, other social organizations as well as public procurement policies (implementation, scaling-up and diffusion of results)

v. Actors that ensure the most diverse dialogues between those who "identify problems", those who offer knowledge, and those that produce solutions (knowledge articulation)

We state that it is not only necessary that all these actors participate in the linkage process of the STI to social inclusion, but also that this must be done systemically. This implies a strong linkage between stakeholders along with respect to the different logics at play, based on serious and committed dialog, and considering the needs and interests of all participants.

It is worth mentioning that, according to Amartya Sen's idea that in the development process people should be seen as agents, not as patients, we believe that innovation for social inclusion requires actors with agency, which implies that the promotion of broader and varied forms of participation in the various stages of the innovation process becomes central. It should be also noted that the emphasis on participation is not only due to its intrinsic importance as a mechanism for inclusion, but it is directly related to the quality of the production of knowledge and solutions that are built.

4. Regarding the challenges

Successful coordination between STI and social inclusion faces a number of challenges:

- i. At the conceptual level: the exclusive role associated to economic growth attached to STI in several development approaches, and the need to rethink development in terms of knowledge and innovation, aiming to contribute to the best tradition of Latin American thought in the topic.
- ii. At the level of public policies: the fragmentation of public policies, with particular reference to STI and social policies with limited dialog and articulations. The transformation of STI policies is itself a significant challenge since, in Latin America, the investment in STI is predominantly public. Among the difficulties implied in this transformation, it needs to be mentioned the strong influence from major productive and financial interests, with their associated asymmetries and inequalities derived from market strategies, in the definition and feasibility of inclusive public policies.
- iii. At the level of academic policies: the frequent unilateral character of the evaluation and incentive systems which punish those academic trajectories requiring multi, inter, transdisciplinary approaches and the development of research agendas in collaboration with non academic partners as it is the case with research and innovation for social inclusion. The development of interactive agendas also requires the transformation of long standing university traditions and structures, which constitutes another significant challenge.
- iv. At the level of actors: the difficult establishment of dialogs among different actors in order to exchange visions and develop a common language that facilitates not only problem and demand identification but also allows effective engagement of all parties involved. This difficulty is partially derived from weak or non existent mediators who may build bridges among problem construction, demand development and the search for solutions.
- v. At the social level: (a) the weak structural knowledge demand in Latin America; (b) the relative invisibility of social inclusion problems which could be addressed by STI strategies; (c) the lack of legitimacy, even at the discourse level, of STI policies oriented to social inclusion; (d) the difficult development of an agenda of social problems that can be addressed by STI, to which a broad set of actors and public policies, universities, firms, social movements, communities and social organizations, among others, can be articulately committed.

5.- Proposal for the future

This research group will work in three directions:

The first one, of a theoretical character and evidence based, is the development of a LALICS

analytical framework on STI and social inclusion, from an inclusive and sustainable development perspective. This is particularly urgent in order to move forward in the theoretical justification of several LALICS proposals as well as to promote better dialogues among network members and with different approaches developed at international organisms (WB, IDB, EU, OCDE, IDRC, ECLAC, etc) and academic communities in different world regions. The basic idea is to develop our own look, disciplinary plural and evidenced based on the region, in order to enhance the Latin American way of thinking on STI incorporating a vital social inclusion perspective. This is strategic for a region which despite recent improvements continues to be the most unequal in the world. We aim in particular to legitimize and promote academic the problem "STI and social inclusion" at a GLOBELICS level.

The second work direction seeks to promote the training of human resources with the approach "STI and social inclusion": (i) to support graduate theses related to this subject; (ii) to organize a course "STI for social inclusion" and try to include it as part of the varied graduate courses in the region associated with STI -management, STS, policies-; and (iii) to organize a summer school on STI policies oriented to social inclusion.

The third work direction one focuses on the spread and impact of this subject: (i) to propose thematic panels in a wide variety of academic and political events associated with STI, as well as specific issues of social inclusion, for example in the field of health, as a way to promote discussion; and (ii) to disseminate to policymakers and international agencies the results of the investigation.

The tasks ahead are arduous, but as a result of LALICS-CSIC Seminar we are convinced that the future collective efforts can bear fruit in each of our countries and the region as a whole.