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Leave No-One Behind in Education: Terms of schooling inclusion for Tuareg communities in Libya and child miners in Bolivia

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Abstract

This paper examines the dialectic of persistent poverty and conditionalities of the formal schooling system in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda pledge to 'Leave No-One Behind' (LNOB). It argues that conditional access to formal schooling and the rigid structures of state education systems contribute to the persistence of inequality and poverty in communities facing historical and socio-economic marginalization. It takes case studies of child miners in Bolivia and the Tuareg in Libya to examine the 'terms of schooling inclusion' (ToSI) that they experience. The paper expands the original ToSI framework's focus on schooling and structural inequalities to add ontological and epistemological 'terms' that the two cases illustrate. By applying the ToSI lens, the paper challenges the depoliticization of schooling 'inclusion' and points to the persistence of conditionalities that, unless addressed, undermine Agenda 2030's potentially transformative focus on LNOB in education.

Keywords

Education

Leave No-One Behind

Sustainable Development

Inclusive Education Policy

Social Justice

Child miners

Nomadic communities

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 proposed education as an independent Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) and as an enabler of many of the other Goals, including ending poverty in all its forms (SDG 1). Alongside attaining these independent yet interconnected Goals, a pledge was made to 'Leave no one Behind' (LNOB), as an integral principle and driver of the 'transformative change' for which Agenda 2030 calls. The principle of LNOB mandates the identification and elimination of discrimination and inequalities, enabled by recognising the different forms of exclusion that are produced by (intersecting) systems of oppression, typically around gender, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic status. Responsibility for national level implementation of the global Agenda falls with national governments, on whom it is incumbent to ensure that appropriate and adequate responses are implemented through laws, policies and programmes (United Nations, 2016).

Nearly ten years after adoption of Agenda 2030, the 2024 Global Education Monitoring Report reported that 251 million children and youth remain out of school, and that the out-of-school population had declined by just one per cent over the past decade (UNESCO, 2024). In 2024, 1.1 billion people were living in multidimensional poverty, and of those, more than half were under 18 years of age (UNDP, 2024).

Translating the 'Leave No One Behind' principle into transformative practices in educational contexts demands careful analysis of the complexities and contradictions in formal education systems to understand how and why they leave particular communities behind. Paradoxically, education systems that ostensibly promote universal access widely also operate in ways that perpetuate exclusion and/or 'adverse incorporation' (Wood 2000 in Hickey and du Toit, 2007) under the guise of 'inclusion', or 'catching up' within the dominant schooling paradigm. The workings of formal education systems tend thus to reinforce the very situation that Agenda 2030, and SDG 4 specifically, seeks to address.

This paper examines the dialectic of persistent poverty and conditionalities of the formal schooling system in the context of global discourses of LNOB and Agenda 2030's aspirations for transformative change. To illustrate the structural inequalities, power imbalances, and ontological and epistemological assumptions that intersect to create being 'left behind' in education, we draw on Dyer's Terms of School Inclusion (ToSI) framework (Dyer 2013, 2014, 2018), with its antecedents in Hickey and du Toit's (2007) discussion of Adverse Incorporation and Social Exclusion (AISE). Through the ToSI lens, we examine how conditional access to formal schooling and the rigid structures of state education systems contribute to the persistence of inequality and poverty in communities facing historical and socio-economic marginalization. We expand the ToSI framework's initial focus on access here with reference to rights-based notions of education's 'accessibility' and 'acceptability' (Tomasevski 2001), as a means of shedding further light on Agenda 2030's underpinning principle of dignity, and transformative intent.

We illustrate our arguments with two case studies, one of child miners in Bolivia and one of Tuareg communities in Libya, which both speak to the terms of schooling inclusion that these marginalised groups must navigate. In Bolivia, 'transformative' reforms under Evo Morales

have preserved structural inequalities where formal education remains misaligned with labour realities and offers limited pathways out of poverty. In Libya, rigid school admission requirements and cultural misrecognition marginalise the Tuareg, restricting their economic opportunities and threatening their cultural and linguistic heritage. Both cases illustrate institutional barriers that can perpetuate exclusion and/or 'include' marginalised groups under unfavourable conditions, while trapping them in poverty cycles and implementing 'reforms' which affirm their disadvantage. The paper concludes with further discussion of the importance of recognising the terms of schooling inclusion and their unjust outcomes when considering children who are 'left behind' in education, and implications of this argument for Agenda 2030.

Terms of schooling inclusion (ToSI): a conceptual framework

Being 'included' is, as Dyer (2014, 9) points out, a 'normative metanarrative of development', which is 'embedded in particular sets of normative assumptions about the organisation of social life' (see Hickey and du Toit, 2007). Public policy in general tends to represent inclusion and exclusion as polarised, fixed states (du Toit 2004), where 'exclusion is understood as an undesirable state and amenable to correction (i.e. 'inclusion') (Dyer, 2014: 9). This is clearly articulated in the effort of successive global education policy narratives to identify those who remain 'excluded' from formal education (e.g. WDEFA, 1990, and 2000) and target their 'inclusion'.

In their work on chronic poverty, Du Toit and Hickey (2007) contrasted social exclusion and adverse incorporation and argued, with reference to poverty alleviation, that a social exclusion lens frames the task of 'inclusion' as drawing poor people into markets to mitigate their exclusion from the development processes that are assumed to bring growth, and does not problematise 'inclusion'. An adverse incorporation lens, however, recognizes that since growth and the market can both produce poverty, a 'more explicit focus on power relations, history, social dynamics, and political economy' (ibid, p. 1) can reveal 'terms and conditions of incorporation' (du Toit 2005, 43), which may be adverse (du Toit 2003).

In her work on education for mobile pastoralist communities, Dyer (2013 and 2014) draws on the adverse incorporation – social exclusion distinction to emphasise that schooling is not a neutral good but comes on 'terms of inclusion'. These terms reflect the various formal and informal norms, principles, and decision-making of schooling systems and create 'borders' (Dyer 2018) that prospective school-users must navigate, and successfully cross, in order to attend school, stay there and achieve. Dyer's (2018) analogy of checkpoints in a border regime underlines that schooling is conditional on would-be learners meeting the system requirements that regulate access - its terms of inclusion. Refuting the depoliticized, static polarity demonstrated in policy discourses of inclusion and exclusion, she seeks to frame 'inclusion' as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. The ToSI framing also allows for discussion of agency in relation to negotiating the acceptability of terms of schooling inclusion, which may even lead to schooling refusal.

The ToSI conceptual frame was developed in response to pre-Agenda 2030 global policy narratives – particularly the second Millennium Development Goal - that posited improving schooling access as the key to inclusion. While the focus on access usefully highlighted the 'terms of inclusion' associated with the conflict between the sedentary normativity of schooling systems and mobility-dependent livelihoods (Dyer and Rajan 2023), the ToSI

framing has wider potential. We examine this potential here in the light of Agenda 2030's promise of LNOB and our concern that pursuit of SDG 4 may resort to a 'catch up' framing that denies its transformative potential and affronts the principle of human dignity that it espouses.

In general, discussions of inclusion and exclusion in education primarily focus on being enrolled in or out of school (Aikman & Dyer 2012). The term 'Left Behind' in the context of education in SDG publications thus tends to refer to being 'out of school' rather than being out of 'education' in all its forms. This is an important distinction. Equating education with schooling abbreviates education's broader dimensions and forms, framing it in a singular paradigm. This framing is problematic because it reinforces the legitimacy of this single form of education —schooling—while delegitimising or reducing the value of other forms of education, such as situated learning that often occurs in communities with distinct lifestyles, livelihoods and cultures (Dyer 2014). The ToSI framework uses 'schooling' specifically to refer to the modality of formal education, deliberately taking a stance against simplistic perceptions of education that are often shaped by underlying structures and power imbalances that determine which forms of education are recognised and legitimised.

The ToSI framework's emphasis on how conditions of school inclusion may not be suitable for different individuals and communities provides a crucial reflection of how schooling system's institutional structures are not universally inclusive, contradicting the very goal of SDG 4. For analysis of SDG 4's 'left behind' communities, we extend the ToSI analysis beyond hindrances to access and apply it to explore two important aspects that directly impact the realisation of SDG 4: alignment of the formal education system with a rights-based approach to education, in particular aspects of acceptability and adaptability, which link to considerations of quality; and weaknesses in the solutions often taken towards this goal. We unveil a critical inconsistency between the ambition to universalise access to 'quality' education and the systems' structure through which this goal should be delivered, illuminating how the terms of school inclusion that we identify hinder the achievement of crucial aspects of quality that SDG 4 proposes.

While SDG 4 provides no singular definition of education quality, it does not rely only on quantitative indicators such as learning outcomes scores. UNESCO emphasises that the inclusivity of culturally relevant and appropriate curricula is central to quality learning (UNESCO 2025). This focus, and the rights-based emphasis of SDG 4, align with the quality standards that are outlined in considerations of education as a human right: that education be 'acceptable', ie. culturally relevant, respecting the values, dignity, and agency of individuals and communities, while also being 'adaptable', ie. flexible enough to accommodate their diverse needs (Tomasevski 2001). Linking to the broader concerns of Agenda 2030 and its call for a transformative approach that cuts across all SDGs, advocacy for education for sustainable development (ESD) emphasises that quality education must foster transformative learning, empowering learners to contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO 2017).

We turn now to our two case studies to illustrate these arguments, exploring terms of schooling inclusion in two differing country contexts, to demonstrate how adverse incorporation and social exclusion can be institutionalised within the formal education system.

Case study 1: Child miners and ToSI in Bolivia.

Introduction

Realisation of the LNOB principle is, as we noted in the Introduction, contingent on national and local contexts. In Bolivia, entrenched socio-economic and geographic inequalities complicate inclusive policy implementation. The case of child miners in Potosí illustrates a persistent gap between policy discourse and lived realities (Slice 2023), revealing the limitations of standardised inclusion frameworks in communities shaped by extractivism and intergenerational poverty. This case study uses the ToSI framework to challenge the policy assumption that inclusion is inherently beneficial: it shows, rather, that inclusion can be an instrument of accommodation without transformation, embedding individuals within systems that fail to address their structural disadvantages.

The situation of child miners in Bolivia exemplifies this dynamic. While formally enrolled in the schooling system, many learners face rigid curricula, socio-economic constraints, and cultural dissonance, rendering participation unfeasible or alienating. This results in symbolic inclusion—evident in enrolment figures—but lacking substantive empowerment or prospects for upward mobility. This analysis argues that Bolivia's extractivist economic model—centred on value extraction rather than creation—intensifies the challenges identified by the ToSI and AISE frameworks: structural conditions that perpetuate inequality and limit the transformative potential of education. The architecture of schooling itself often functions as a mechanism of social control shaped by a centralised authority and rigid norms, driven by the impetus of extractive rather than development agendas. The case of Potosí illustrates how adverse incorporation, rather than outright exclusion, marginalises child miners, revealing the limits of LNOB principles in practice.

The argument unfolds in three parts. First, it contextualises child labour and education in Bolivia, highlighting how inclusive reforms—framed under Vivir Bien, decolonisation, and the LNOB agenda—have primarily been symbolic. Increased enrolment has been mistaken for meaningful participation, obscuring the socio-economic realities of child miners. Second, it applies the ToSI framework innovatively, distinguishing between tangible and intangible terms of schooling to examine how barriers to inclusion operate at both material and cultural levels. Finally, through the lens of AISE, the analysis demonstrates how child miners are not excluded in a conventional sense but rather adversely incorporated into formal systems that fail to accommodate their lived experiences. The conclusion calls for a transformative educational paradigm rooted in decentralisation, epistemic plurality, and community-led governance—centred on lived realities rather than global development templates.

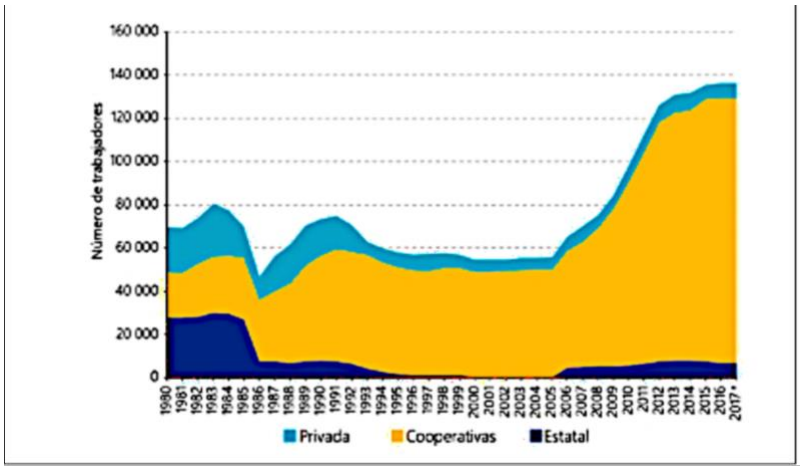
Structural conditionalities and adverse incorporation in Bolivia: a focus on the mining industry

The structural conditionalities and crisis of educational purpose that underpin contemporary reform in Bolivia reflect a systematic yet erratic conception of development. This is actively shaped by state coercion, symbolic gestures, and the political dynamics of what Gramsci termed a *passive revolution*. Since the 2006 election of Evo Morales, the Bolivian state has rhetorically centred historically marginalised groups through discourses rooted in *Vivir Bien* (Living Well) and constitutionally embedded frameworks of inclusion. Morales' presidency was heralded as pivotal for empowering indigenous and working-class communities, promising a rupture with neoliberalism and the colonial state (Errejón & Serrano 2011).

Nevertheless, as McNelly (2023) argues, the reforms undertaken by the Morales administration exemplify a passive revolution—a top-down process in which change is introduced not through popular mobilisation but by dominant elites seeking to preserve their authority under the guise of transformation. This phenomenon is sustained by the hypostatisation of abstract social categories, particularly 'the people' and 'the indigenous,' which are deployed as homogenised, depoliticised constructs to legitimise state power (Lynch 1984, 243). These categories function not to advance pluralistic emancipation, but to pacify dissent and forestall substantive structural reform. As a result, reforms manifest as superficial alterations that leave the underlying architecture of exclusion intact. Rather than dismantling the structural roots of inequality, such reforms produce what Panoto (2024, 380), drawing on Lehman (2022), describes as 'quietism in the public sphere'—a political condition marked by passive acquiescence to the status quo. The outcome is not empowerment but detachment: the state's inclusive rhetoric conceals persistent marginalisation, and - under the guise of educational and economic inclusion - adverse incorporation into Bolivia's extractive economy.

The dynamic of adverse incorporation is starkly illustrated in the structure of mining cooperatives in Potosí. Mining has long served as the backbone of Bolivia's economy, financing state reforms well into the 21st century. Since the 1952 agrarian revolution, successive regimes have sought alignment with the mining sector as a condition of political stability. Government discourse romanticises mining as a pillar of Bolivia's national identity and resistance to neoliberalism, portraying miners as heroic figures embedded in the country's 'economic and cultural fabric' (Perreault 2018; Villavicencio 2021). The 2009 Constitution institutionalised this narrative by codifying a 'plural economy model' that positions the mining cooperative sector as a custodian of ancestral, communitarian knowledge (Wanderley 2019). However, this rhetoric has enabled a form of symbolic inclusion that legitimises exploitative conditions, particularly in Potosí. Through cooperative structures, which have expanded significantly since the 1980s (see Figure 1), miners are 'included' in national development discourses while remaining embedded in asymmetrical power dynamics. This form of inclusion reinforces exploitative hierarchies, aligning with Bolivia's extractivist model that privileges value extraction over creation.

Figure 1: Changes in numbers employed in Bolivia's mining industry 1980-2017, by sector



* Figure 1 shows numbers by sector: blue = private, yellow= co-operatives, purple = state

Source: Rodriguez et al. (2020, 18)

As Rodriguez et al. (2020, 18) illustrate in Figure 1, the historical prominence of cooperatives within the mining industry has expanded notably since the 1980s. This upward trend coincides with the educational reforms implemented in Bolivia during the 1990s and the early 2000's, suggesting a potential interplay between these socio-political changes and the evolving role of mining cooperatives.

The symbolic recognition of the rapidly expanding co-operative sector obscures the reality that it reproduces entrenched inequalities, particularly for those at the bottom of the labour hierarchy. The sector is stratified into *socios*—those with decision-making power and access to profits—and *peones*, who perform the most dangerous labour for meagre wages (Marston 2013)**.** The reality for *peones*, including children, is one of extreme precarity. They endure unsafe, unsanitary conditions, lack social protection, earn as little as $7 per day (Bonilla 2018; Coster 2010), and face constant threats to their health and safety, from cave-ins to respiratory diseases like pneumoconiosis, or 'black lung.' *Peones* are embedded in a system that not only exploits their labour but legitimises their exploitation through the language of inclusion. Their incorporation into mining does not afford them upward mobility or secure livelihoods; instead, it reinforces structural poverty and perpetuates intergenerational cycles of deprivation.

Child labour and schooling expansion

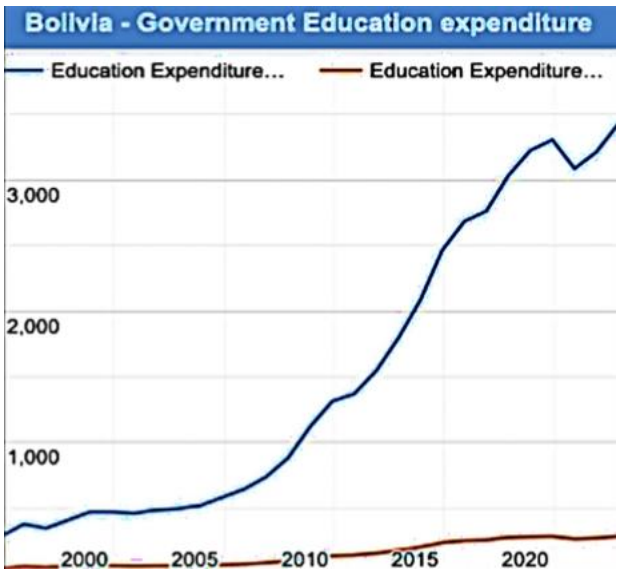
Child labour is a pervasive issue in Bolivia. It plays an enduring role in a national socio-economic fabric that is rooted in colonial exploitation of child labour in mining. It spans informal sectors such as shoe-shining, brick-making, and street vending (Lakdawala et al. 2022) and reaches its most acute form in mining (Castillo 2017). In 2014, the Bolivian government controversially lowered the legal working age from 14 to 10 (Lakdawala et al. 2022). By 2017, child labourers numbered approximately 850,000, many of whom were engaged in hazardous mining work (Steward, 2017; Slice 2023). This reflects more than a social anomaly— it signals the persistence of a structurally extractive economic model that perpetuates exploitation under the guise of national development.

Children in the mining industry are positioned at the lowest rung of an economic hierarchy controlled by *socios* and sanctioned by the state, are emblematic of adverse incorporation. Their formal inclusion—whether into cooperatives or school enrolment registers—masks the reality that their lived conditions remain unchanged or, in some cases, further entrenched. They are not beneficiaries of Bolivia's 'development'; rather, they constitute an expendable labour force that is used to sustain a political economy rooted in extractive dependence rather than productive diversification. As such, Bolivia's development model, while couched in the rhetoric of pluralism and decolonisation, ultimately fails to address the epistemological and ontological foundations of their exclusion. It maintains an extractivist logic of value exploitation rather than fostering value creation. Until inclusion is reimagined—not just expanded—adverse incorporation will persist, leaving child miners entrapped in a system that offers symbolic recognition without substantive change.

Bolivia began reforming its education system around a plurinational curriculum and Indigenous recognition at the turn of the 21st century. Yet persistent structural inequalities

remained stark, particularly between rural and urban populations. By the late 1990s, only 1% of rural children attended secondary school, compared to roughly 50% of their urban counterparts (Luykx and Lopez 2007)**.** By 2008, over half the population lived below the poverty line, with 31% experiencing destitution (de Cosio 2011). In response, Bolivia's *Vivir Bien* (Living Well) strategy emphasised rural education infrastructure (Cahuasa 2024), complemented by redistributive initiatives like the Bono Juancito Pinto (cash transfer scheme), launched in 2006, to improve school enrolment by subsidising costs such as transport and supplies (Navarro 2012). Law 070 (2010), following consultations begun in 2006, declared education a fundamental right and expanded subsidised, compulsory access to all educational levels.

Figure 2: Rising trends in national government expenditure on education, Bolivia



Source: https://countryeconomy.com/government/expenditure/education/bolivia

As Figure 2 shows, national education investment increased significantly—from €700 million in 2006 to €3.5 billion by 2022. However, per capita expenditure has remained relatively stagnant, indicating that access expanded without corresponding gains in investment per student. The Ministry of Education's branding of 'optimised quality education' (Ministry of Education 2021) was underpinned by the flawed assumption that greater investment alone ensures real outcomes. Furthermore, the emphasis on access over quality has created a misalignment between educational provision and labour market demands.

This disconnect between policy ambition and systemic realities has been particularly evident in the mining regions. In areas like Potosí, where extractivism defines local economies, this misalignment has perpetuated child labour and economic precarity. Castillo (2017, 50) for example critiques Bolivia's commitment to 'universal education' as fostering a 'bad education'—one focused on bureaucratic metrics over the lived experiences of students and argues that education without labour reform merely sustains systemic inequality. As Slice (2023) notes, Bolivia's education system has failed to confront the structural roots of child labour, which are embedded in an informal, extractive economy.

Terms of schooling inclusion in mining communities

The terms of schooling inclusion for child miners in Bolivia are shaped by a range of norms and practices that constitute individual and interconnected barriers to access and meaningful educational inclusion. Intersecting material deprivations constrain physical access include long distances between home and school, inadequate school infrastructure, unsafe school environments, and the economic pressures requiring children to contribute to household income; and these disproportionately affect mining communities, where socio-economic precarity is entrenched. But terms of schooling inclusion are also constituted in cultural, institutional and epistemic domains. They include linguistic alienation, where Spanish-dominant instruction marginalises indigenous and miner worldviews; irrelevance of the curriculum to mining life; and institutional constraints such as rigid age requirements, documentation demands, and inflexible timetables. These terms stem from centralised political logics and a bureaucratic understanding of inclusion based on administrative uniformity rather than lived experience.

While Bolivia's education reforms have made progress in addressing material and institutional barriers, particularly through infrastructure investment and conditional cash transfer programmes, they have paid limited attention to the epistemic and ontological conditions that determine whether schooling is meaningful. Access has improved, thus addressing some 'border checkpoints' (Dyer 2018), but without a corresponding transformation in the quality of engagement or cultural alignment. The ToSI framework helps to unpack these layered constraints by interrogating inclusion in light of conditionalities that are not only material, but extend to epistemic and ontological domains. It prompts critical engagement with the epistemological and ontological dimensions of schooling: asking not only whether inclusion happens, but how, under what terms, and for whom.

Child miners are, as we will show, still left facing terms of schooling inclusion that are not addressed by system expansion, and are drawn into systems that fail to reflect or support their lived realities. Bolivia's persistent policy emphasis on expanding access—rather than improving the quality or purpose of education—is underpinned by deeper epistemological and ontological misconceptions about what education is and what it should achieve. As a result, schools remain ill-equipped to deliver an education capable of enabling students to overcome systemic poverty or liberate themselves from the exploitative conditions of Bolivia's extractivist economy - despite measurable improvements in infrastructure and increased public investment in education.

As Zwirn (2007, 51–52) argues, 'every method (epistemology) presupposes some explicit or implicit conception of reality (ontology).' In this light, the methods used to conceptualise and implement educational policy—particularly those grounded in technocratic or access-driven logics—reflect narrow assumptions about the purpose of schooling. The ToSI framework's emphasis on *schooling* inclusion is important, as we noted in the Introduction, since 'schooling' is often conflated with 'education' more widely. In this vein, it is worth recalling Ivan Illich's objection to the state's reduction of education to a bureaucratised and institutionalised process and his argument (Illich 1971) that welfare bureaucracies come to dominate the 'social imagination,' substituting genuine educational empowerment with institutional inclusion.

While Bolivia's reforms promise the removal of access barriers, they impose new standards that remain disconnected from the lived experiences, cultural values, and socio-economic

needs of marginalised communities. This political process masks the absence of a deeper, transformative reimagining of education's philosophical foundations and societal purpose. By focusing primarily on access and enrolment, without questioning the underlying assumptions that guide the educational model, current policy approaches risk reinforcing the very structures they seek to dismantle. A shift is thus required—away from institutional metrics and toward a redefined, emancipatory vision of education grounded in community agency, epistemic plurality, and locally determined goals.

This demand invites a deeper ontological account of education—one that moves beyond merely affirming its institutional existence to interrogating the assumptions underpinning its very constitution. It necessitates a distinction between the process of education and its substance: that is, the ultimate aims education ought to serve. A valuable contribution to this distinction comes from Lynch (1984, 228) in *Education in a Free Society*, where he contends that education should be centred on the integration of individual life experiences to develop personal faculties in line with learners' subjective aspirations. This, he argues, supports an 'individual education model' that is geared toward personal fulfilment, which in turn contributes to societal enrichment. Lynch's view aligns with the Austrian School's concept of methodological individualism—distinct from methodological atomism—as clarified by Zwirn (2007). Under this framework, individual aspirations and actions are always embedded within, and shaped by, relational structures. Extending this model to a societal level implies that education for personal fulfilment must sustain intersubjective bonds among individuals, whose overlapping experiences and capabilities create a cohesive system of development. Such a system would not only be ethically grounded but also resilient and socially sustainable. This vision calls for a departure from standardisation and technocratic efficiency metrics. Instead, it suggests the need for flexibility and responsiveness—conditions necessary for transforming rigid, formal educational systems into adaptive, contextualised and socially embedded provision. A transition to this 'individual-centred' conception of education, in a community orientation, has potential to enable communities such as those in Potosí to interrupt the cycles of intergenerational poverty and systemic marginalisation that currently prevail.

When complemented by ontological critique (here, as advanced by Illich) and an emancipatory vision (here, of Lynch), the ToSI framework expands to become a more robust approach to exploring education's epistemological dimensions. Together, these frameworks expose how mainstream schooling—especially within Bolivia's extractivist political economy—remains confined to a reformist paradigm that treats state-led, formal education as the normative model. Under this conception, economic stagnation, institutional dependency, or curricular irrelevance—are symptomatic of a broader philosophical crisis: one rooted in epistemological error and ontological misapprehension of what development and education genuinely require.

Concluding reflections on the Bolivia case study

The way forward, then, is not merely through reforming terms of inclusion but, applying a ToSI lens, through radically reimagining the architecture of formal education. The Bolivia case suggests that this would entail shifting from top-down institutional control to a pluralistic, decentralised, and community-grounded educational philosophy—one that privileges autonomy, local knowledge, and voluntary participation over alignment with the imperatives of the central state or global development agendas. The case has shown that when reform is

not accompanied by contextual sensitivity, curricular flexibility, and robust community-led participation, schooling 'inclusion' can be symbolic of adverse incorporation rather than empowerment. It calls for a reimagined educational paradigm rooted in decentralisation, local agency, and value creation, with community involvement being a key factor.

Case study 2 Tuareg tribes and ToSI in Libya

Introduction

Libya, like all other United Nations (UN) member states, adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda. In UNESCO's Dashboard of Country Commitments and Actions to Transform Education (2023), Libya is reported as a state that has committed to, and taken action on, several SDG 4 themes - particularly Inclusion, Equity & Gender Equality and Content and Methods. It has made primary education both compulsory and publicly funded, and plans to eliminate the minimal university education fees to reduce drop-out rates. Its 2023 Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.71 [1] includes an average of 12.92 years of schooling, which demonstrates a relatively strong commitment to compulsory education – yet as we will see, this national average does not capture the educational realities of all children, as some remain invisible to such quantitative measures due to lacking documentation and citizenship status.

In line with the LNOB principle, the Libyan Ministry of Education has developed an Inclusivity and Diversity Policy to ensure that all children have equal access to education, regardless of gender, religion, or social background. Nevertheless, this policy is undermined by school admission policy, particularly a documentation requirement which excludes children and youth who are stateless from accessing education. The case study we present here, which focuses on the Tuareg nomadic tribes, reveals inconsistencies between policy goals and the realities of formal education, and changes that fall short of being transformative. As Dyer (2006) argues, educational provision for nomadic people is highly complex and controversial. Its complexity extends beyond the logistical difficulties of delivering education to mobile populations to encompass issues of recognition and legitimacy. For many Tuareg, this complexity is exacerbated by their statelessness.

The Tuareg are one of Libya's non-Arab minorities, residing primarily in the country's southern region—a context marked by economic fragility and its proximity to the Sahel, a region characterised by transnational informal economic activities, including smuggling and trafficking. Categorised as one of the least 'educated' groups in Libya, Tuareg tribes exemplify a case of a 'left behind' community that has historically negotiated the imposed mainstream formal education model and continues to experience educational disparities. Their migratory way of life, centred on pastoralism, results in a transnational ancestry that prevents the majority of Tuareg from securing citizenship rights. In Libya, citizenship is a rigid prerequisite for accessing formal schooling; and in the ToSI framework, access is a key 'term of inclusion'. Although the Tuareg's language—Tamasheq— is legally recognized as a component of

[1] We use the HDI as there are no available data for Libya in SDG 4 indicators.

Libyan's linguistic diversity, the formal educational content and methods do not reflect this acknowledgment.

This case of a 'left behind' community cannot be understood through simplistic black-and-white narratives of exclusion and inclusion in education, where education is viewed as neutral and depoliticised. To meaningfully understand why and how communities like the Tuareg are marginalised in formal education, it is essential to engage with epistemological and ontological perspectives that challenge the dominant model of formal schooling and expose the underlying assumptions that sustain their marginalisation. The ToSI framework, which underscores the conditional nature of the schooling system, enables us to highlight that even when the Tuareg are included, they may experience adverse effects through formal and informal norms, regulations, and expectations embedded within the system. This case study highlights the significant consequences of conditional inclusion in schooling, illustrating how it increases the vulnerability of the Tuareg people to exploitation and drives them toward the precarious informal economy as a means of survival. The analysis we offer here extends the ToSI framework, going beyond examining barriers to access to include a critical focus on the quality of education and the extent to which proposed reforms and solutions align with the core principles guiding the implementation of Agenda 2030, which include respecting the dignity and agency of communities while promoting transformative change.

Paperless and rightless

The Tuareg have deep roots in Libya, yet the majority of them remain stateless. While there is no definite number of stateless Tuareg in Libya, their citizenship issues —which restrict access to public services— are repeatedly emphasised in academic and grey literature (de Lange 2023; Kohl 2014; Taha 2017; Minority Rights Group 2018). Their lack of citizenship is largely because they do not fulfil the citizenship or naturalisation requirements set forth by Libyan law, which mandates that applicants must be born to a Libyan parent or grandparent. Because the Tuareg's historical migratory patterns have resulted in a social fabric that is woven across the borders of various Sahelian countries, many Tuareg cannot provide such proof. Even those who do have Libyan origins may lack the necessary documentation to verify their ancestral roots (Kohl 2014). As a result, the Tuareg continue to be in a vulnerable legal condition that makes them mostly invisible in national systems, and measurements such as Libya's HDI and comparatively high rate of nearly 13 expected years of schooling (UNDP 2024). However, these statistics do not reflect the socio-economic realities of stateless persons, such as the Tuareg.

Under the former regime, during Gaddafi's leadership, there was no public discourse on ethnic or linguistic minority rights nor formal recognition of them. Although the government followed a 'Tuareg-friendly' policy, this approach was superficial, exemplified in the recognition of Tuareg's culture in a folklorist manner (Kohl 2014). The government classified the Tuareg language – Tamasheq- as a dialect of Arabic and referred to them as 'Arabs of the desert', reflecting the state's assimilative strategy to maintain national unity. Its 'friendly' policy towards the Tuareg included facilitating their entry into Libya from Mali and Niger, as well as encouraging them to join the military. In return, they were granted Libyan citizenship. However, citizenship was not as accessible for civilian Tuaregs, those who did not join the Libyan military (Kohl 2014).

In 2012, after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the General National Congress (GNC) suspended all pending naturalisation requests and ceased accepting new applications. The following

year, it created a new standard for citizenship by introducing a 'national number' system that assigned every Libyan a unique personal identification number. In response, stateless groups, including the Tuareg, organised protests, including sit-ins at oil facilities. To provide some relief, the GNC introduced *raqam idari* (administrative numbers), which allowed *registered* Tuareg to access public services including education (European Institute of Peace 2019). However, this measure failed to resolve the fundamental issues of legal citizenship and historical exclusion, leaving many stateless Tuareg in legal limbo.

In 2013, languages of non-Arab minorities—Amazigh, Tuareg, and Tebu— were legally recognised by law no. 18 as integral to Libya's cultural landscape, allowing individuals to learn these languages in local educational institutions (Baldinetti 2018; UNESCO 2021). While the Libyan Ministry of Education developed a curriculum for teaching Tamazight—the language of the Amazigh people, no similar efforts were made for Tamasheq, the Tuareg language.

Terms of Schooling Inclusion for the Tuareg

For Tuareg, educational disparities contribute significantly to their status in official discourses as one of the least educated groups in Libya (Taha 2017). However, the lack of recognition of local indigenous knowledge passed down from elders to children (UNESCO 2021) complicates perceptions of education. Tuareg are often labelled as 'uneducated' simply because they have not been schooled or have not completed the years of mandatory schooling —up to year 9 according to Libyan law (NRC 2023). This perspective is rooted in ontological structures that shape what forms of education are visible and legitimate.

Tuareg individuals face numerous barriers in accessing education. They must navigate a series of checkpoints (Dyer 2018) that require them to conform to external expectations, often at the expense of a social identity that integrates their particular lifestyle, livelihood, culture and aspirations. For example, to enrol children in school, the Libyan Ministry of Education requires mandatory documentation such as parents' birth certificates and national IDs (Ministry of Education, 2024): stateless Tuareg individuals cannot provide such documentation. Although specific statistics on out-of-school Tuareg children are unavailable, their exclusion is highlighted in various reports and research (Institute of Development Studies 2018). The 2023-2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Libya, guided by the LNOB principle, acknowledges the restriction of the Tuaregs' cultural, economic, and social rights and suggests reconciliation initiatives and advocacy to enhance political participation for ethnic minorities (United Nations in Libya 2022). It does not, however, provide recommendations to address Tuareg exclusion from formal education. Instead, it offers vulnerable children non-formal education opportunities provided by non-state actors, which it describes as 'equivalent' to formal education (United Nations in Libya 2022). However, there is no indication of such non-formal education opportunities in the academic literature or in the Sustainable Development Goals publications for Libya.

The education system's terms of inclusion extend beyond the documented citizenship checkpoint. They also require compatibility with an image of what a civilised and 'modern' citizen is, and which is embedded in a sedentary normativity. For the nomadic Tuareg, this means confronting the dominant culture and adapting to a sedentary lifestyle. Making 'inclusion' the would-be learner's obligation, rather than the system's responsibility, highlights another problematic aspect of school inclusion that resonates with the notion of

adverse incorporation. It also often undermines the dignity and agency of communities, contradicting a key principle of Agenda 2030.

Many Tuareg individuals have migrated to urban areas for education and economic opportunities, facing a dilemma between preserving their mobile identities and accessing formal education that is seen as a route to socio-economic advancement. Moreover, little recognition of Tuareg culture and history is offered in educational materials. The impacts of these terms of schooling inclusion are well illustrated in the trend of the Kel Ajjer Tuareg tribe, originally from the region between the Libyan and Algerian borders, to adopt sedentary living in pursuit of education and public services (Kohl 2014). Sedentarisation facilitates Tuareg assimilation into an Arabic-centred society, where Arabic is the primary language of instruction, and thus once they have become 'legitimised' citizens, Tuareg individuals are expected to adapt to the education system – which marks irreversible changes to the Kel Ajjer Tuaregs' identity. UNESCO (2021: 26) describes this change as a violation of cultural rights, thereby placing ethical accountability on the formal education system. More critically, UNESCO classified Tamasheq as a 'definitely endangered' language in 2010 (Kohl 2014), placing the Tuaregs' language at the risk of erasure.

On the matter of culture, further, the Libyan state demonstrates a conflict between its economic growth strategy, which includes revitalising the tourism sector, particularly desert tourism (The Libyan Observer 2024), and the educational policies that fail to preserve the cultural heritage of the Tuareg people, who play a significant role in attracting tourists. The mainstream schooling model requires children to be available at a fixed place and time every day, which often conflicts with the situated learning that the Tuareg deploy to pass on the socially embedded practices of navigating the desert, animal husbandry and resource management (see Dyer 2012). Without it, there can be no sustainable desert livelihood; and this affects not only individuals and their families, but also the state ambition for tourism development which provides the Tuareg with a certain, albeit constrained, recognition. The risk of erasure of Tuareg culture and knowledge persists as long as formal education and situated knowledge do not complement each other - which reflects a significant inconsistency with elements of acceptability and adaptability of quality education that Tomasevski (2001) underlines as key elements of education as a human right.

Historical fear of the loss of their cultural heritage and the pressures associated with enforced sedentarisation have often resulted in Tuareg rejection of education delivered via the schooling system. Such education was not regarded as necessary for a people who relied on their herds and enjoyed the freedom of unrestricted movement, utilising their indigenous knowledge. Increasingly constrained mobility and climate change have depleted the resources on which their pastoralist livelihood depends. The potential value of a modern education as the pathway to an alternative livelihood is thus demonstrated, while the ability to read and comprehend government documents is also increasingly important.

According to De Lange (2023), Libyan Tuareg who do possess *raqam idari* (administrative number), career prospects provided by the government are restricted, primarily to opportunities in teaching or military service. Such restrictions in formal employment for those who have completed formal education compromise the value of academic qualifications, a situation that may inhibit Tuareg agency to pursue individual and community aspirations and signals a form of unfreedom (Sen 1999). While the terms of schooling inclusion remain unchanged, shifting circumstances have changed how acceptable these terms feel to Tuareg

communities. However, there remains a disconnect between educational outcomes and the aspirations of many Tuareg families and individual learners.

In its publications on the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2017; 2018; 2024). UNESCO repeatedly addresses the relationship between educational disparity and poverty perpetuation, explained that a lack of education allows limited room for developing skills required in the labour market. From an AISE perspective, denial of access to resources and opportunities available to others is an aspect of social exclusion (Hickey and du Toit 2007). For Tuareg communities, one aspect of social exclusion is the denial of culturally relevant education – a denial that is institutionalised through the policies governing formal education. This form of institutionalised social exclusion limits Tuaregs' economic opportunities and participation in the formal economy and contributes to their persistent poverty and economic marginalisation. This highlights the intersecting (and intersectoral) nature of social exclusion, where the Tuareg's economic and formal education exclusions intersect with their lack of political representation and participation, experience of cultural repression, and local geo-politics.

Southwestern Libya, where the majority of Tuaregs reside, is the country's least developed region, and highly affected by the drought and desertification that climate change triggers (UNDP 2024; MPI 2013). This undermines their primary livelihood as pastoralists, and the economic opportunities that this livelihood provides. Economic restrictions and involvement in high-risk informal livelihoods are strongly linked (Taha 2017; Herbert 2017); for Tuareg, this link is compounded by proximity to the Sahel region—a known hub for illegal activities, including drug and weapon smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal mining (Becheikh 2023; Gallien 2020). In the absence of legitimate local alternatives, Tuaregs are pushed into precarious livelihoods, such as smuggling and cross-border transportation of African migrants (Taha 2017; Kohl 2014). These illegal activities serve as a means of survival for Tuaregs and exploit their knowledge of desert terrain to navigate and control smuggling routes (Taha 2017). Considering the notably rigid, conditional schooling system, such precarious informal economies are effectively supplied by children and youth who are excluded and marginalised by formal education. The implications of this situation of social exclusion are profound, posing risks not only to the Tuareg but also to the state and other populations; and may increase their vulnerability to exploitation by extremist groups (Becheikh 2023).

Concluding reflections on the Libya case study

This case study has revealed that the nomadic Tuareg tribes in Libya —grappling with political marginalisation and statelessness—are at a disadvantage in formal education, not only because of their distinct cultural differences, but also due to inflexible schooling conditions that lack adaptability and scope for universality. It has evidenced the serious implications of conditional school inclusion, demonstrated by the limited economic opportunities available to Tuareg children and youth, which in turn increases their vulnerability to exploitation and the likelihood of engaging in precarious livelihoods in the Sahel region, such as smuggling. At the same time, we have shown that inclusion is problematic: those who do gain access to schooling are not necessarily better off, as they risk losing their language, cultural practices, and local knowledge.

Alongside evidencing the need for the state to address the anomalous situation surrounding citizenship rights, the case calls for serious attention to addressing exclusions in the linguistic and curricular materials of schooling and promoting multi-lingual pedagogic training for

teachers, to ameliorate the currently unfavourable 'terms of schooling inclusion' for the Tuareg. Such measures have limitations, however, and are insufficient to tackle the fundamental exclusions for the Tuareg that are imposed by the unfavourable epistemological and ontological orientations of formal education.

Conclusion

The two cases we have presented show a range of terms of inclusion imposed by the formal schooling systems of Bolivia and Libya that perpetuate the marginalization of certain children and youth. We have shown that the rigid and unaccommodating structures of both national education systems contribute towards sustaining risky and exploitive informal economies, and help to ensure a continuous supply of vulnerable workers. Child miners in Bolivia are stuck in a cycle of exploitive dependency whereas Tuareg children and youth are pushed towards illicit income generating activities. We have also found that in both national contexts, affirmative solutions are weak: actions taken by the state have failed to recognize and address communities' needs and fall far short of what a 'transformative' change must include.

The ToSI perspective we have adopted here shifts the analytical focus towards a questioning of the system's 'inclusivity'. We suggest that these two cases are examples of a wider trend where, despite the pledges that are made to LNOB in education, schooling systems remain unchanged or undergo only superficial reforms in the light of Agenda 2030. That is: they operate on the assumption that it is communities who must adapt and conform, rather than vice versa, in the search for 'universal' schooling systems. In this way, prevailing power dynamics remain unaddressed, and perpetuate unfavourable terms of schooling inclusion; and indeed, they often do so in efforts to help communities adapt to prevailing terms, rather than challenge them.

In this paper, we extended the scope of the ToSI framework, going beyond its initial focus on access to consider terms of inclusion in light of the core principles of respect for the dignity and agency of individuals and communities that are meant to guide progress towards SDG 4, and underpin the rights-based approach to education that Agenda 2030 espouses. The ToSI framework complements the rights-based approach and the SDG 4 quality education action frameworks by offering a critical lens through which to examine schooling's 'acceptability' and 'adaptability'. We saw in the cases the neglect of 'acceptability' and 'adaptability' that a rights-based perspective on education identifies, and which are essential to ensuring that schooling is inclusive and responsive: this neglect is inconsistent with advancing the concept of quality education that is articulated for SDG 4. We also showed that unfavourable terms of school inclusion limit the agency of communities, an important consideration in relation to whether education reforms that target inclusion are genuinely transformative for 'excluded' learners.

Agenda 2030's search for transformative approaches that respect the dignity of communities and individuals suggests that educational modalities should be tailored to respect diversity and avoid resorting to homogenising in order to enable 'inclusion'. The ToSI lens we have applied analytically here challenges binary narratives of inclusion and exclusion in education, with their attendant judgement of inclusion as benign and desirable, and exclusion as the opposite. This binary perspective tends to depoliticise formal education, overlooking the political, structural, and systemic inequalities that shape the institutions, policies, and

narratives of formal education systems and enabling ‘education inclusion’ to be presented as neutral and straightforward - when it is not.

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