



# Operationalizing Social Cohesion

Patrick (Paddy) Barron

Global Lead for Social Cohesion and Resilience  
Acting Global Lead for Community and Local Development



**WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Social Sustainability & Inclusion

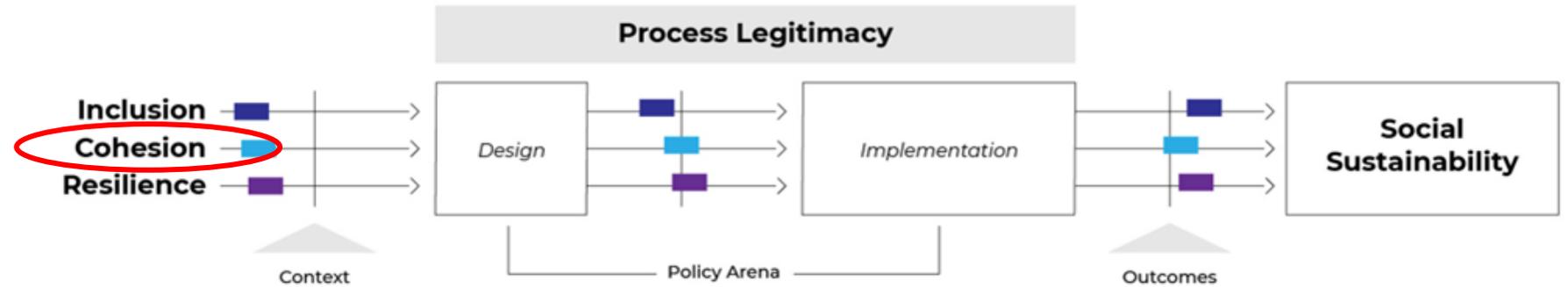
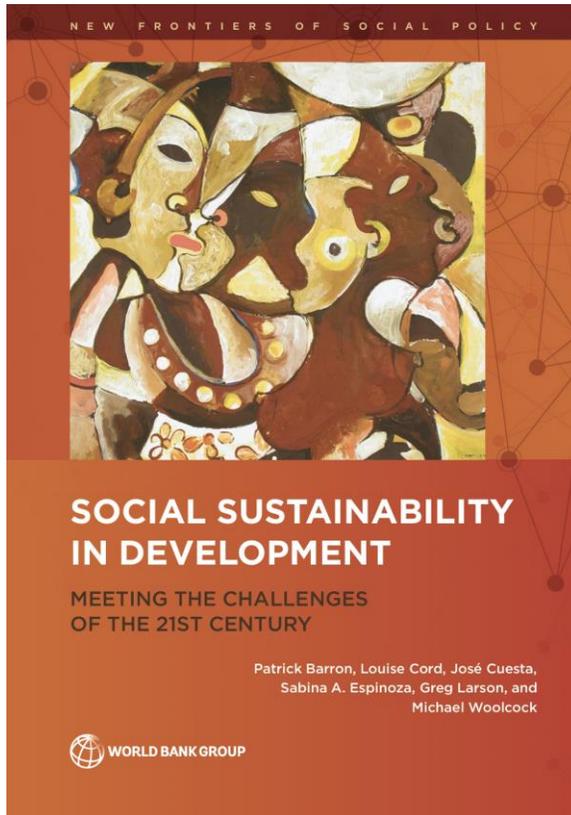
# Motivation

- **Lessons from ongoing crises and polarization** – including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Gaps in social cohesion exacerbate effects and undermine the effectiveness of responses.
- **Growing body of evidence** on the connections between different dimensions of social cohesion and conflict resilience.
  - Well-designed and well-targeted interventions can improve specific dimensions of social cohesion.



# Motivation

## Conceptual Framework of Social Sustainability



# Definition



Social cohesion is a sense of shared purpose, trust, and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state.

## Vertical social cohesion



**Linking** between citizens and people/structures in a position of power (formal or not, gov. or not).

## Horizontal social cohesion

**Bonding** among individuals within a given community.

**Bridging** between individuals across distinct communities.



**But social cohesion is not an unambiguous public “good”** – communities can be cohesive but inequitable; some forms of social cohesion can be at the expense of others.

# Operationalization Challenge 1



**Challenge:** Aligning interventions with clearly identified social cohesion problems.

**Why?** Social cohesion dynamics are complex, and it can be difficult to make reliable predictions about the impacts of project activities on different dimensions of social cohesion.

**So, what?** Follow the process for setting priorities, selecting interventions, and crafting indicators:

Identify the most significant social cohesion problem(s) that the project should address

Design interventions that respond to this problem and support a clear theory of change

Align indicators with the problem(s) and response(s) identified, focusing on outcomes and attribution to project activities

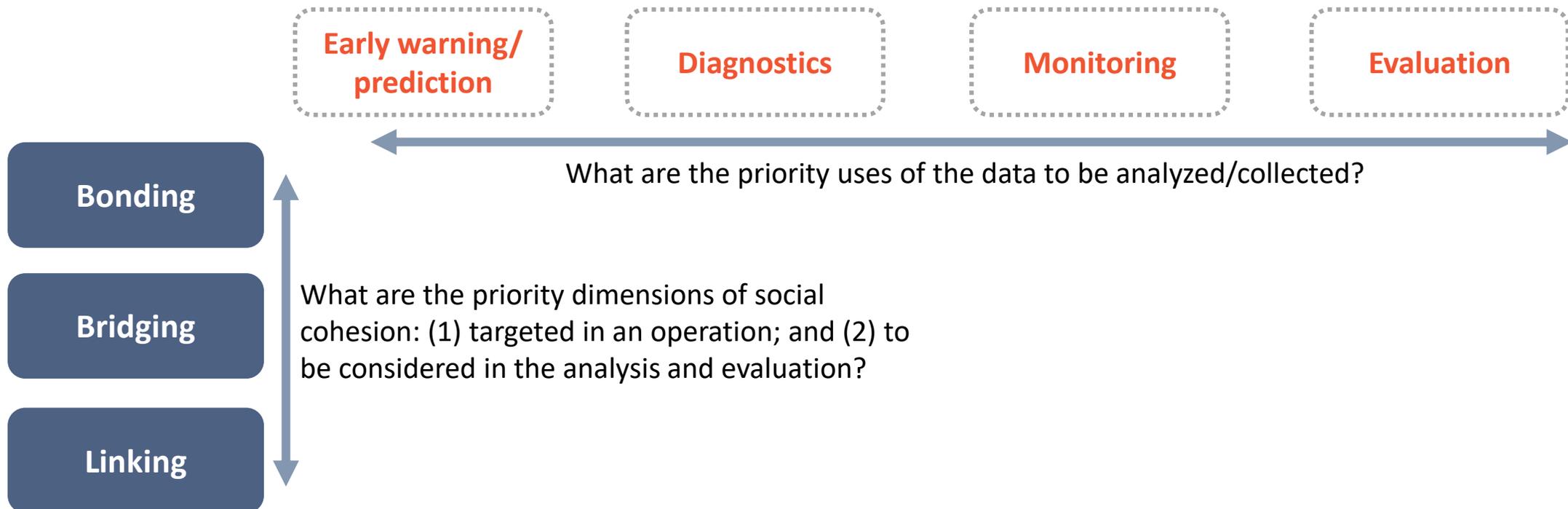
Plan the data collection mechanisms to determine the values of the indicators

# Operationalization Challenge 2

**Challenge 2.1.:** Reliable measurement.

**Why?** Sound measurement matters for tracking trends, for diagnostics and program design, as well as for monitoring and evaluations

**So, what?** Measurement strategies should be informed by a **clear purpose** and a **specific understanding of the dimensions of social cohesion** that the data collected is meant to track.



# Operationalization Challenge 2 (continued)



**Challenge 2.2.:** Generating meaningful variation around measures of social cohesion using existing tools and indices has at times proven difficult.

**Why?** Causes are multiple and include: (1) lack of clarity around the construct to be measured; (2) social desirability and other forms of biases shaping respondents' answers; and (3) short timeframe for tracking changes

**So, what?**

1. Mobilize different approaches to data collection (quantitative and qualitative);
2. Ensure that the design of quantitative instruments is informed by an in-depth understanding of the local context;
3. Ensure that evaluation tools capture plausible changes in behaviors, practices, norms, and attitudes. This requires specific theories of change;
4. Involve participating communities in the design of indicators of social cohesion to ensure that they are locally meaningful;
5. Extend the timeline for measurement to track the evolution of 'slow moving' norms or behaviors;
6. Consider using survey experiments and innovative approach to overcome some of the biases, particularly if 'socially costly' attitudes or behaviors are to be tracked.

# Next steps in addressing these challenges

- Growing evidence base on what works (and does not work) to repair or promote social cohesion.

**Participatory  
approaches & CDD**

**Mediation &  
Dispute resolution  
skills**

**Intergroup  
collaboration &  
dialogue**

**Pedagogical/  
Perspective taking**

LEVERAGING SOCIAL COHESION  
FOR DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

FRAMING PAPER

World Bank

- Innovative approaches to measurement.

