

A Bibliometric Analysis of the Development of Research on Social and Economic Inequality in Developing Countries

Jan Horas Veryady Purba¹, Loso Judijanto², Dyah Ayu Dwi Kusumaningrum³, Ibadurrahman⁴

¹ Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kesatuan Bogor and janhorasvpurba@gmail.com

² IPOSS Jakarta, Indonesia and losojudijantobumn@gmail.com

³ Universitas Negeri Malang and dyah.ayu.2304138@students.um.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Indonesia Timur and ibadurrahman1990@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This bibliometric analysis explores the landscape of research on social and economic inequality in developing countries, employing a comprehensive approach that integrates co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence patterns, journal mapping, and geographical distribution maps. The study draws on a vast repository of scholarly publications, shedding light on key themes, influential authors, and global research trends. Co-authorship networks reveal collaborative patterns, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding inequality. Keyword co-occurrence patterns identify central themes, highlighting the multifaceted dimensions of social and economic disparities. Journal mapping showcases pivotal platforms shaping the discourse, aiding researchers in navigating the academic landscape. Geographical distribution maps unveil regional concentrations and gaps, prompting nuanced explorations of inequality within specific contexts. The synthesis of these results provides a comprehensive understanding of the field, guiding future research endeavors and informing evidence-based policy interventions for inclusive development.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Jan Horas Veryady Purba

Institution: Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kesatuan Bogor

Email: janhorasvpurba@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of social and economic inequality in developing countries has become a focal point of academic inquiry, policy discourse, and public attention. As these countries face the complexities of globalization, technological advances, and shifting demographics, understanding the nuances of inequality becomes critical [1]–[3]. Studies have shown that economic globalization, including factors such as FDI, trade openness, and ICT development, has had mixed effects on income inequality in developing countries [4]. Additionally, the level of inclusive development has been found to have a correlation with indicators of inequality, such as the Gini index and gender neutrality [5]. However, it is important to note that the impact of social investments launched by the EU on economic inequality in rich and poor regions has been limited [6]. Overall, further investigation is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between social and economic inequality in developing countries and the various factors that contribute to it.

Unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and access to basic services in the developing world can hinder sustainable development and exacerbate social tensions [7]–[9]. Academics, policymakers, and development practitioners are increasingly focusing on understanding the various dimensions of social and economic inequality in this context [10], [11]. Social and economic inequalities have been amplified by globalization, neoliberal policies, and the failure of the global economic model to account for environmental boundaries [4], [12]. These inequalities have adverse impacts on growth, poverty reduction, health, education, and democratic governance [13]. Marginalized groups, including low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, immigrants, and children with a history of adversity, are particularly affected by mental health symptoms during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic [14]. To address these challenges, there is a need for a new eco-social contract

that promotes social and environmental justice, sustainable development, economic equity, accessible healthcare, racial justice, child and family protection, and social cohesion [15].

The research landscape on this important subject has evolved rapidly over the years, reflecting the changing dynamics of global development. The intersection of various disciplines, including economics, sociology, political science and public health, has given rise to a rich and diverse literature that seeks to understand the intricacies of inequality. This paper seeks to contribute to this growing discourse through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, providing an in-depth examination of the trends, patterns and trajectories of research on social and economic inequality in developing countries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks in Social and Economic Inequality

Human capital theory suggests that investments in education and training are crucial for reducing social and economic disparities and promoting economic mobility and reduced income inequality [16], [17]. This perspective is supported by research on the interplay between segregation, education costs, and the evolution of group inequality [18]. Structuralist perspectives highlight the role of systemic factors, such as institutional arrangements and power structures, in perpetuating social and economic inequality [19]. Understanding these structural underpinnings is essential for developing effective policy interventions that address the root causes of inequality. Additionally, the intersectionality framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories, such as gender, race, and class, in shaping experiences of inequality [20]. This lens is particularly important in developing countries, where multiple dimensions of identity and disadvantage intersect to create unique forms of inequality [21], [22].

2.2 Key Themes in Social and Economic Inequality Research

Income inequality is a pervasive theme in social and economic inequality research, with scholars examining its drivers, consequences, and policy measures to address disparities [23]. The relationship between health and socio-economic status is another recurring focus, exploring unequal access to healthcare, the impact of socio-economic conditions on health outcomes, and the role of public health policies in reducing disparities [5]. Educational inequality is recognized as a significant issue, with research investigating disparities in access to quality education, the influence of socio-economic factors on academic achievement, and the potential of educational interventions to break the cycle of poverty [24]. Gender-based disparities are also prevalent, permeating various aspects of life, including labor markets and educational attainment. Scholars examine the intersection of gender with other forms of inequality and explore policies aimed at promoting gender equity [25].

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the wealth of research on social and economic inequality in developing countries, several gaps persist. These include a need for more intersectional analyses, a focus on the role of informal institutions, and an exploration of the dynamic interplay between globalization and inequality. Addressing these gaps is crucial for advancing the field and informing effective policy responses.

3. METHODS

To conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on social and economic inequality in developing countries, data were systematically collected from leading academic databases. Major databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, were searched using a carefully constructed set of keywords. The search strategy included terms related to social and economic inequality, developing countries, and synonymous phrases. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles, reviews and conference papers published in the last

two decades. A careful data extraction process will be conducted to gather relevant information from the selected publications. The extracted data includes title, authorship, year of publication, journal, keywords, abstract, and affiliations of the authors and their institutions. The data extraction process will be done with attention to detail to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the dataset. This process was conducted on September 23, 2023 through the Publish or Perish (PoP) tool, table 1 shows the research data metrics.

Table 1. Metric Data Research

Publication years	: 1965-2023
Citation years	: 58 (1965-2023)
Paper	: 980
Citations	: 474216
Cites/year	: 8176.14
Cites/paper	: 483.89
Cites/author	: 330446.47
Papers/author	: 619.85
Author/paper	: 2.05
h-index	: 332
g-index	: 677
hI,norm	: 257
hI,annual	: 4.43
hA-index	: 84
Papers with ACC	: 1,2,5,10,20:965,947,827,657,406

Data Analysis

VOSviewer software is a widely used bibliometric analysis tool that allows visualization and analysis of co-authorship networks and keyword co-occurrence, making it ideal for extracting insights from large datasets. Co-authorship analysis using VOSviewer helps understand collaboration networks within research communities, identify prolific authors, collaborative groups, and the overall structure of the research community. Keyword co-occurrence analysis with VOSviewer enables the identification of major themes and topics in the literature by visualizing the relationships between keywords. This analysis will be valuable for research on social and economic inequality in developing countries, as it will help uncover key themes of interest in this field.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

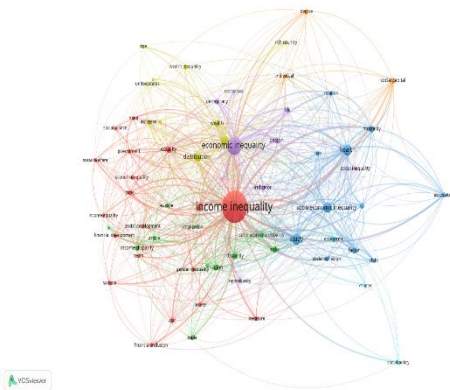


Figure 1. Mapping Cluster Destination

As the study of social and economic inequality in developing countries continues to evolve, several emerging research trends have garnered attention among scholars and policymakers. These trends reflect the dynamic nature of the field, responding to evolving societal challenges and the need for innovative solutions. The identification of these trends provides valuable insights into the future trajectory of research in this critical domain.

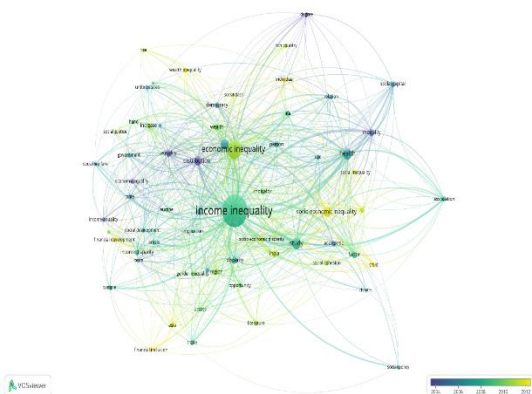


Figure 2. Trend Research

This emerging research trend highlights the evolving nature of the study of social and economic inequalities in developing countries. Researchers are increasingly adopting interdisciplinary approaches, capitalizing on technological advances, and addressing new challenges such as environmental justice and the impact of global crises. These trends offer a roadmap for future research and underscore the

importance of holistic and context-appropriate strategies to achieve more equitable and inclusive development.

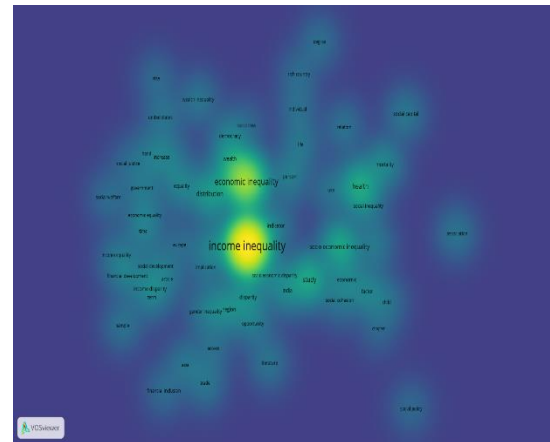


Figure 3. Cluster Identifications

The clusters identified in Figure 3 reveal cross-cutting themes such as "gender inequality", "governance", and "reviews" that are present across clusters. These themes show the interconnectedness of various factors that contribute to social and economic inequality. Future research could explore these cross-cutting themes in more detail to uncover their specific role in shaping inequality.

Trend 3. Destiny visualization

Cluster	Total Items	Most frequent keywords (occurrences)	Keyword
1	13	Economy equality (20), Financial Inclusion (25), Social Development (15)	Access, economy equality, equality, financial development, financial inclusion, gender inequality, government, income equality, income inequality, social development, social

			justice, social welfare, woman
2	8	Social capital (15), social economic inequality (25)	Association, child, health, review, social capital, social cohesion, social economic inequality
3	7	Corruption (25) Income disparity (20)	Corruption, disparity, economic disparity, implication, income disparity, region, socio economic disparity
4	6	Life (20), social class (25)	Democracy, economic inequality, increase, life, person, social class
5	3	Social inequality (20)	Economic, opportunity, social inequality
6	3	Rise (20)	Global income inequality, individual, rise
7	3	Wealth (25)	Distribution, wealth, wealth inequality
8	1	Social Policy (20)	Social policy

Cluster 1 focuses on the interplay between economic equality, financial inclusion, and social development. It explores policies and initiatives aimed at reducing economic disparities and highlights the importance of inclusive financial practices in promoting overall societal development. Future research within this cluster could delve into the effectiveness of specific financial inclusion strategies in addressing income disparities and explore the role of

gender and government policies in shaping economic equality within developing countries. Cluster 2 examines the relationship between social capital and social economic inequality. It explores the role of social networks and community ties in mitigating or exacerbating economic disparities, with a potential impact on well-being. Future research within this cluster could investigate the mechanisms through which social capital influences economic outcomes, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children, and explore the potential of social cohesion as a tool for reducing economic inequality. Cluster 3 focuses on the nexus between corruption and income disparity. It explores how corruption within regions contributes to economic disparities and the implications of corruption on income disparity. Future research within this cluster could delve into specific case studies or regions to uncover the mechanisms through which corruption exacerbates income disparities and explore the socio-economic implications of anti-corruption measures in reducing income disparity. Cluster 4 centers on the intersection of life, democracy, and social class. It examines how societal structures and political systems impact economic inequality and the potential consequences of social class disparities on individuals' quality of life. Future research within this cluster could explore the dynamics of social class and democracy, investigating how political structures contribute to or alleviate economic inequality, and analyze the long-term effects of social class disparities on individuals' lives.

Social inequality is a complex issue that encompasses various dimensions beyond just economic disparities. Research within this cluster explores the multifaceted nature of social inequality, including factors such as educational opportunities, access to healthcare, and the impact of social policies. Understanding the rise in global income inequality is another important area of investigation, considering factors such as technological advancements, globalization, and individual choices. Exploring the distribution of wealth within societies and its implications for economic disparities is also a

key focus, with research examining factors such as inheritance, taxation policies, and access to economic opportunities. The role of social policies in addressing social and economic inequality is another significant aspect, with research exploring the effectiveness of different policy interventions in reducing economic disparities. Overall, these clusters highlight the need for comprehensive research that considers the interconnectedness of economic and non-economic factors in perpetuating social inequality and informs policies aimed at creating more equitable societies.

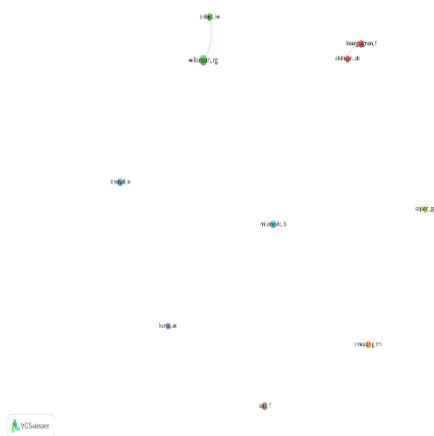


Figure 4. Author’s Collaboration

The examination of co-authorship networks revealed intricate patterns of collaboration within the research community focused on social and economic inequality in developing countries. Prolific authors emerged as central nodes, signifying their significant contributions to the field. Collaborative clusters showcased diverse groups of researchers, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach to understanding inequality. This network analysis underscores the importance of collaboration in advancing knowledge and fostering a holistic understanding of the complexities inherent in inequality. The identification of central authors and collaborative hubs provides a roadmap for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to engage with the latest developments in the field. Collaborative networks are essential for knowledge exchange, fostering innovative research, and

addressing the multifaceted nature of social and economic disparities.

Table 3. Citations Analysis

Citations	Authors and year	Title
20439	S Kuznets (2019)	Economic growth and income inequality
16895	MP Todaro (1977)	Economic Development in the World: An introduction to problems and policies in a global perspective
11120	E Boserup, N Kan (2013)	Woman’s role in economic development
10014	AB Atkinson (1970)	On the measurement of inequality
8997	World Bank (2012)	World development indicators 2012
8037	F Ellis (2000)	Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries
7604	A Sen (1997)	On economic inequality
7050	R Wilkinson, K Pickett (2010)	The spirit level
6835	RG Wilkinson (2002)	Unhealthy societies: the afflictions of inequality
6015	T Persson, G Tabellini (1991)	Is Inequality harmful for growth? Theory and evidence

The list of key citations in the field of social and economic inequality in developing countries represents a snapshot of influential works that have significantly shaped scholarly discourse. Simon Kuznets' seminal work, "Economic Growth and Income Inequality", laid the foundation for understanding the relationship between economic growth and income inequality. Michael Todaro's "Economic Development in the World" provides a comprehensive

introduction to the challenges and policies associated with global economic development. Ester Boserup and Nirmala Kan's "Woman's Role in Economic Development" highlights the crucial role of women in economic growth. Anthony Atkinson's "On the Measurement of Inequality" offers valuable tools for quantifying and comparing income distributions. The World Bank's "World Development Indicators 2012" serves as a crucial reference for understanding social and economic inequalities on a global scale. Frank Ellis' "Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries" explores the dynamics of rural livelihoods and their impact on economic inequality. Amartya Sen's "On Economic Inequality" delves into the ethical dimensions of economic inequality. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's "The Spirit Level" examines the relationship between income inequality and societal well-being. Richard G. Wilkinson's "Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality" investigates the health implications of social and economic inequality. Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini's "Is Inequality Harmful for Growth? Theory and Evidence" addresses the complex relationship between income inequality and economic growth.

Table 4. Keywords Analysis

Most occurrences		Fewer occurrences	
Occurrences	Term	Occurrences	Term
836	Income inequality	20	Economic equality
278	Economic inequality	20	Economic disparity
102	Health	20	Child
92	Socio economic inequality	20	Government
70	Distribution	18	Financial development
42	Disparity	18	Social cohesion

41	Wealth	17	Individual
41	Mortality	16	Social welfare
36	Equality	15	Income equality
34	Woman	14	Social development
30	Region	13	Social policy
30	Person	13	Corruption
26	Income disparity	11	Social justice
26	Review	10	Social class

The analysis of term occurrences provides valuable insights into the thematic priorities and focal points within the literature on social and economic inequality in developing countries. The prominence of terms such as "Income Inequality," "Economic Inequality," and "Health" reflects the foundational nature of these concepts within the discourse. Additionally, the identification of terms occurring less frequently, such as "Economic Equality" and "Social Justice," suggests potential areas for further exploration and the need for a more nuanced understanding of specific dimensions of inequality. Researchers and policymakers can leverage these insights to guide future investigations, interventions, and policy formulations aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by social and economic disparities.

Implications for Future Research and Policy

The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer valuable insights with implications for future research and policy. The identification of key themes, influential authors, and prominent journals can guide researchers in identifying gaps and potential areas for further exploration. The geographical distribution maps highlight regions where research efforts have been concentrated, signaling opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange.

For policymakers, the synthesis of results provides evidence-based insights into the diverse dimensions of social and economic inequality. The identification of regional emphases and gaps can inform targeted policy interventions that are contextually relevant. The interdisciplinary nature of the field suggests the importance of holistic approaches to addressing inequality, recognizing the interconnectedness of various socio-economic factors.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this bibliometric analysis contributes valuable insights into the development of research on social and economic inequality in developing countries. The examination of co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence patterns, journal

mapping, and geographical distribution maps reveals a dynamic and interconnected field with diverse themes and global contributions. Prolific authors, influential journals, and regional clusters emerge as focal points, shaping the discourse on inequality. The interdisciplinary nature of the research underscores the need for holistic approaches to address the complex challenges posed by social and economic disparities. These findings offer a roadmap for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, guiding future investigations, collaborations, and interventions aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable development. As the field continues to evolve, this analysis provides a foundation for ongoing discussions and actions to mitigate the impact of inequality on diverse populations in developing countries.

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