

Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Africa (GETSPA)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR ISSUES PAPERS

The Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana, with funding support from the Open Society Foundation, is calling for proposals for issues papers that investigate the potential for and challenges of transformative social policy in Africa.

Background

At present, the quest for transformative social policy approaches is hampered by the neoliberal foundations of traditional approaches and the patriarchal cultures of policymaking institutions, two problems that result in the lack of policy attention to inequalities related to gender, generation, location and dis/ability, among others. Social policies are invariably reduced to social protection and are rolled out through targeted rather than universal measures. Additionally, there is poor recognition of the interplay between social and economic policies, with economic policymaking given prominence and social policy seen as a way to mop-up those left behind in the quest for economic growth. Finally, there is a dearth of social policy academics in Africa, leading to the privileging of Western-based knowledge as the basis for social policy praxis. African scholars also lack opportunities and resources to undertake research into social policy in other global South contexts and are therefore unable to learn lessons that would enrich social policy in Africa. The GETSPA project is committed to contributing to addressing these obstacles to transformative social policy in Africa.

As an initial step in this transformative social policy agenda, the GETSPA project has undertaken research since November 2020 in thirty-one countries in Africa, to map the landscape and evolution of social policy approaches since the colonial period. These country studies have found that the importance placed on social policies in addressing the developmental needs of Africa has varied over the years. In the colonial period, social policy was pursued with a resource appropriation agenda which resulted in the creation and/or exacerbation of inequalities and structural dualities. The early independence period appears to have been the period of the greatest attention to social policy, when developmental states rolled out broad-based policies to simultaneously address the challenges of nation-building, social and economic citizenship, and economic growth. The devaluation of social policymaking began with the period of economic reforms prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s when public provisioning by the state was rolled back and the market logic was given prominence. While social policy has made something of a comeback in global discourses, it has been reduced to a question of social protection which narrowly focuses on remedial interventions for the “vulnerable”. These are not adequate to address important questions about rising inequalities including gender inequality (related to the gender segmentation of work, the gender pay gap, and the gender asset gap). The period of the pandemic highlighted the limits of the reductive version of social policy to address the crises of poverty, vulnerabilities and inequalities that were deepened during the pandemic, much less the goal of human well-being in its most positive and expansive sense. This realisation offers

an opportunity to rethink social policymaking, signalling an entry point for the transformative social policy agenda of GETSPA.

It is against this background that this call is being put out for issue papers that focus on promising initiatives that can lead to the realization of an agenda for transformative and gender equitable social policy for Africa's development.

Approach

The project takes as its starting point Mkandawire's expansive definition of social policy as the

“collective interventions to directly affect social welfare, social institutions and social relations.... concerned with the redistributive effects of economic policy, the protection of people from the vagaries of the market and the changing circumstances of age, the enhancement of the productive potential of members of society, and the reconciliation of the burden of reproduction with that of other social tasks. Successful societies have given social policies all these tasks, although the weighting of tasks has varied among countries and within each country, from period to period”.¹

Social policy is thus concerned with social welfare, social institutions, and social relations, and has both instrumental and intrinsic or normative value. This approach to social policy provides a framing for assessing social policy in Africa.

Furthermore, the project takes up gender equity and the transformation of gender hierarchies as an overarching concern. This is to address the lack of interest in the gendered nature of social policy regimes and the gender inequalities in social development across the spectrum of social policy regimes. Although there are increasingly social policy instruments that target women and from which they derive welfare benefits, these do not necessarily challenge gender hierarchies, and may actively reinforce them. The neglect of gender issues in social policy is manifested by unexamined assumptions about the family and household; and the lack of attention to the gender segmentation of employment and the problematic gender norms that underpin paid and unpaid care work and social reproduction. Addressing these gaps in policy making and the policy literature brings issues which are crucial to economic and social development into the conversation on social policy.

The overarching goal of this project is the transformation of the discourses, approaches to and cultures of social policy making and implementation to establish Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy approaches in Africa.

¹Mkandawire, T. (2011). Welfare regimes and economic development: Bridging the conceptual gap. In V. Fitzgerald, J. Heyer, and R. Thorp (Eds.), *Overcoming the Persistence of Poverty and Inequality*, Palgrave, pp. 149-171; See also Adesina, Jimi O. (2011), Beyond the social protection paradigm: social policy in Africa's development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 32(4), 454-470

THE ISSUES PAPERS

The issues papers are to complement or build on country and regional studies already carried out to provide pathways to transformative social policies by analyzing promising interventions or solutions for transformative social policy in Africa.

The project has provision for 9 issues. Below is a **non-exhaustive** list of possible issues for study:

- A. Interfaces and synergies of social and economic policy**
- B. Political and democratic underpinnings of social policy and citizenship**
- C. The influence of the SDGs on social policy in Africa**
- D. Financing social policy in Africa**
- E. Neglected areas of social policy**

As the themes for the issue papers are not exhaustive, responses to the call have the flexibility to propose important issues not reflected in the list of themes if they deem these to be critical for rethinking social policy. You are also encouraged to highlight relevant but muted aspect of a transformative social policy for consideration.

The following are brief discussions of possible directions for papers under the proposed themes.

A. The interfaces and synergies of social and economic policy

In its foundational stages, the concept of the economy was understood as “political economy” - the site for social struggles for distributive fairness in the benefits of the collectively-created value. In effect, the economic and the social were two sides of the same coin. By contrast, the economics discipline since the late 18th century has been dominated by the normative premise that actions directed purely by self-interest and mediated by the “invisible hand” of the market ultimately produce common welfare in the most efficient manner. In the conception, social welfare is a by-product of efficient markets rather than the normative basis of the economy. It is claimed that unlimited markets, free trade, limited government involvement in the supply and regulation of goods and services will ultimately lead to an increase in wealth and welfare. Among others, this liberal orthodoxy does not take account the economic value created in the care of the household and the community, which is carried out predominantly by women. This exclusion not only negates the claims of efficiency of the market as an allocative instrument but, moreover, makes the welfare consequences inherently gender inequitable. Furthermore, the unseen-hand conception contradicts heterodox approaches that see markets as political and social institutions with highly unequalising tendencies that require attention by policy makers. It also makes it difficult to fully account for the role and the limitations of different institutional arrangements (involving states, markets, and “communities”) for the management of economic and social issues.

The issues paper will examine how the evolution of economic thought and practices have affected social policies, paying greater attention to how current economic orthodoxy undermine gender equitable transformative social policies. The paper will explore alternative economic paradigms and policies that are consistent with values of equity and social justice and will also discuss how progressive economic policies in turn produce transformative social outcomes.

The issues paper could address the following themes:

- The evolution of economic thought and the implications for gender equitable transformative social policy.
- How the main pillars of current economic orthodoxy have impacted social policies and how alternative economic policies could shape social policies in equitable directions.
- The implications of alternative conceptions of the markets, and their implications for the roles of economic and social policy.
- In view of the current economic difficulties and consequent restructuring across the continent, how transformative social policies could provide a solution for sustainable economic development.

B. The politics and democratic underpinnings of social policy

In the 1980s, countries in the region were compelled to implement neoliberalism economic policies that neglected social policies. Consequently, social policies introduced in the early postcolonial era, primarily to promote inclusion and to enhance the productive capabilities of the citizenry, were dismantled through privatisation and other mechanisms designed to roll back the state and individualise social and economic risks. The 1990s witnessed the transition from military and other authoritarian political regimes in Africa to democracies based on competitive partisan elections. Since the return of democracy, social policies have become major issues in political campaigns and debates, especially in the areas of healthcare, education, child support, old age income support, labour market conditions, housing, access to portable water, gender equality, social protection. This is not surprising given the fundamental role of social policy in promoting human wellbeing through redistribution, production, reproduction, protection, and social cohesion. These roles of social policy reinforce the argument that the dichotomy between social and economic policies is artificial, and that the social and the economic are symbiotic and inseparable.

Within the context of Africa's democracies, social policy discourses are taking place at a political interface occupied by both domestic and transnational actors. This raises questions about actor constellations and interests, the mediating role of institutions, power and positionings, policy design and delivery, as well as resource capabilities. This paper is expected to provide a conceptual and theoretical analysis of social policy in Africa's contemporary democratic politics. It will draw on examples and illustration from countries in the region to suggest a transformative agenda for social policy within democratic contexts. The issues paper could address the following themes:

- Social policy and democratic politics in Africa
- The politics of social policy (interests, agenda setting, positioning; debates)
- Normative and human rights perspectives for transformative social policy
- Global governance institutions and social policy

C. The influence of the SDGs on social policy in Africa

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) with support from other multilateral institutions. The SDGs were designed to address challenges associated with three areas of growth: economic growth, social inclusiveness, and protection of the environment. The SDGs aim to eliminate or reduce poverty within the human family, end hunger through safeguarding food security, improve the quality of human life and livelihoods through better prioritization of healthcare investments, ensure empowerment of women and promote equality, improve on the supply of potable water and sanitation, focus on providing enabling environment for decent work and employment opportunities and aggressively address the underlining causes of climate change among others. The SDGs have become the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for measuring progress in countries, especially in Africa and the developing world. In Africa, one report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the SDGs noted that progress has been slow. For instance, although there has been some progress on school enrollment, the report noted that about 288 million school-age children are not in school, and this is most prevalent in conflict-ridden countries on the continent. The report further cautions that approximately 350 million Africans will be affected by abject poverty by 2050 unless more significant progress is made on the SDGs. Although the goals remain a useful blueprint for guiding policymakers about their policy priorities, there are worries that most countries on the continent suffer developmental issues--including unemployment, insecurity, insurgencies, political upheavals, ballooning debts, mismanagement of funds--that were not specifically analyzed and factored into the overall framework of the SDGs. Thus, although in their broad framing, the SDGs directly fall within concerns of social policy, the history of interventionist policy approaches in Africa teaches us that when context is not properly accounted for in problem definition and the design of solutions, the chances of success are minimal. In addition, the challenges to human well-being in most African countries demand multiple innovations, smart policy thinking, and creative designs at the conceptual, institutional, social, and technological levels.

The issue paper can consider these and other questions:

- To what extent has there been a fit between the SDGs and local realities in African countries as far as social policy is concerned, and what has been the influence of the SDGs on social policy politics in the region?
- In what ways can the SDGs support or serve as inspirations for promoting and designing creative social policies with multifaceted problem-solving capabilities, without compromising the promises of economic growth in Africa?
- How and to what extent are the SDGs tackling—or capable of tackling—issues of gender inequality in a manner that dislodges deeply embedded norms and taken-for-granted practices that inhibit efforts to promote gender equity?

D. Financing social policy

Financing social policy has long been a vexed question. While there is increasing recognition of the value of social policy as an investment in socio-economic development, the question of the affordability of social policy remains a critical issue in policy and scholarly debates; building social policy programmes on financial arrangements that are sustainable, equitable and conducive to economic development remains a central concern. Often the focus on the cost of social policy has been used as justification for targeted and market based social policy instruments.

The focus on the financial dimension of social policy is deemed necessary for the avoidance of policy extremes of either austerity or expansionary social policies that are unsustainable.² A set of studies of the sustainable financing of social policy from a broad developmental perspective have identified different sources of revenue for social policy such as taxation, insurance contributions, pension funds, rents from natural resources, development aid as well as remittance. Different countries use different combinations of these instruments based on their resource endowments and economic policy trajectories.³

Researching the economic, social, and political implications of each revenue source enables an appreciation of the importance of balancing the economic, social, and political goals associated with each revenue arrangement. Secondly, a critical interrogation of combinations of these instruments points to their varying effects on macro-economic stability, citizens' ability to demand accountability, and the functions of social policy and state society relations (production, reproduction, protection, redistribution, and social cohesion).

Financing social policy involves questions of resource mobilisation and allocation, as well the actors and institutions involved in these processes. In looking at these issues, there is the need to move beyond a micro-perspective on how best to allocate a given number of resources to examining the impact of welfare arrangements on economic development and vice versa. A related question is how social policy can support an accumulation process that generates income that can be used by different social policy instruments.⁴

The focus on sources of revenue for social policy enables researchers to focus on both the constraints as well as opportunities for developing countries to put together effective strategies for financing social policies that advance the development agenda.

The paper will examine issues such as:

- The evolution of social policy financing
- Changing notions of the costs and benefits of social policy and their implications for effective social policy.
- Private investments in and provisioning of social policy.

² Mkandawire, T. (2009). Preface. In K. Hujo, and S. McClanahan (Eds.), *Financing social policy mobilizing resources for social development*, UNRISD and Palgrave Macmillan.

³ Hujo, K. and McClanahan, S. (2009) "Introduction and Overview. In K. Hujo and S. McClanahan (Eds.), *Financing social policy, mobilizing resources for social development*, UNRISD and Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ Abdikani, H.I. (2021) *Social policy as a tool for reducing poverty in Africa: Exploring ways and mechanisms*, ILA.

- Comparative analysis of current dominant approaches to financing social policy and financing arrangements and their implications for gender equitable and transformative social policy.
- Promising approaches to social policy financing that promote transformative and gender equitable social policy.

E. Neglected dimensions of social policy

Influential academics on social policy in Africa have conceived of social policy as encompassing production, protection, redistribution, reproduction, and social cohesion, and having the capacity to generate multi-dimensional and multi-faceted transformation. This expansive definition of social policy suggests important dimensions of social policy that have not received sufficient research attention, whether these are sectors, actors, processes or phenomena.

We welcome, for instance, proposals for issue papers that

- take up a social policy perspective on public goods and services that support human flourishing such as housing, public transportation, clean air, urban planning, recreational facilities, public broadcasting, consumer protection, law enforcement and postal service;
- discuss the social policy implications of areas of leisure, creative expression, philanthropy and volunteerism, and un/paid care work;
- examine the nature, operations and influence of less-visible or less-researched social policy actors such as the military or regional bodies such as ECOWAS.

FORMAT OF APPLICATIONS

Content of application

Applicants must submit the following documentations:

1. a CV
2. A concept note of not more than 2,500 words (excluding references and footnotes), with the following sections:
 - Background
 - Nature of the issue and importance of the topic for social policy
 - Current academic and policy debates on topic in Africa
 - Theoretical or conceptual approach to the paper
 - Scope of the paper
 - Research questions/objectives
 - Data sources and analysis
 - Outline of paper
 - A professional profile section with

- a brief description of the experience/background of the researcher(s) that illustrates relevant qualification and skills,
- examples of similar reports/papers, with a few links to published work.

****We accept proposals in English, French or Portuguese.****

Timelines and fees

- Deadline for applications: **15 February 2025**
- Notification to successful applicants: **31 March 2025**
- Contracting: **15 April 2025**
- Duration on contract: **6 months** from date of signed contract
- Fees: **\$6,000** per paper

Submission and enquiries

Email applications and/or enquiries to ro.getspa.ias@ug.edu.gh with a copy to pis.getspa.ias@ug.edu.gh

