



# 2019 Social Policy in Africa Conference

**2019 SOCIAL POLICY IN AFRICA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**THEME:**

**GOVERNANCE OF AFRICA'S SOCIAL POLICY: SUBVERTING DEVELOPMENT AND  
DEMOCRACY?**

**DATE: 25-27 NOVEMBER 2019**

**VENUE: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA, CITY OF TSHWANE, SOUTH AFRICA**

## THEME OF THE 2019 SOCIAL POLICY IN AFRICA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The paradox of liberal democracy in much of Africa since the 1990s has been, on the one hand, the narrowing of the policy space in development and modes of securing the wellbeing of citizens, and on the other hand, the stabilization of electoral modes of governance. If the mass protests that in many countries saw the end of authoritarian single-party state and military rule were triggered by the mass entitlement failures imposed by the orthodox stabilizations policies of the 1980s, the electoral polity that emerged in the aftermath has not ensured the flourishing of wellbeing, significant reduction in poverty, reduced wealth inequality, and employment. Much of this is linked to the politics of neoliberal orthodoxy which locked out many policy instruments necessary for enhanced human wellbeing. The 'good policies' that are locked in are those that are framed by market-centric logic. The space for wellbeing enhancing policy instruments are further constrained by restraints and blockages imposed by extra-territorial forces, not the least in forms of 'donor' conditionalities.

If in the early phases of liberal democracy in Africa, the challenge was one of absence of policy choices (alternative to neoliberal orthodoxy)—what Mkandawire refers to as “choiceless democracy.” The challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the hegemony of market transactional logic and aversion for encompassing public provisioning among most African public authorities. The gap between choice over which politicians rule your state and which economic policy prevails is reflected in the dissonance between 'constitutionalism' and 'popular sovereignty'; a gap between democracy as formal equality as distinct from substantive equality. The dominance of the conception and articulation of democracy, as 'universal suffrage, regular elections and basic civil rights' (Rudebeck), is held separate from 'equality in actual practice' in which popular pressure secures socio-economic rights and human flourishing. Also, there has been a shift in the mode of politics for the framing of popular sovereignty—a shift from organised, membership-based social movements, as mediating institutions between the individuals and the state, to non-membership based non-governmental organisations and middle-class driven advocacy organisations.

The significant reduction in poverty and employment elasticity of growth between 1960 and 1980, on the one hand, and after 2000, on the other hand, illustrates the point. The social dislocations and citizens' diswelfares, even in the context of improved growth on the back of commodity super cycle, have not shown commensurate reduction. In most instances, the diswelfares have deepened. Wealth-based inequality has worsened, and poverty rate (measured at \$3.10 PPP/day) is above 70% of the population in several countries.

From the idea of a state that 'thinks' in terms of a comprehensive obligation for securing long-term national wellbeing and development and politics organised around securing such wellbeing and development, what emerged was a 'night-watchman' state, more recently recast in the language of the 'capable state'—one more focused on securing the space for private investors than the wellbeing of its citizens. Economic policy became increasingly disconnected from social policy, with a public policy orientation that is averse to socialised provisioning, solidaristic risk pooling, (inter-class) redistribution, and universalism. Social policy became largely residual.

Social policy has always been shaped by two broad contending forces. On the one hand, are those who see its objectives as mopping up the diswelfares of market and institutional failure. On the other hand, are those who see social policy as having an encompassing reach and coverage, integrated with economic policy, and driven by norms of equality and solidarity. The former takes a residual approach, with market as the first port of call in social provisioning and public welfare as port of last resort focused on the deserving poor who are not able to meet their own social provisioning. The latter addresses diswelfares in both the ways we pursue development and design production activities and respond to needs at various stages of the life-cycle.

Over the last forty years, in response to Africa's development challenges and diswelfares that its citizens face, a more residual take on social policy has become largely hegemonic, with powerful external and local actors using the continent as site of a range of social experiments. Much of this has been driven by an anti-development thinking that imagines the solution to poverty as largely a matter of "just give money to the poor"—even as the 'poor' are defined in highly restrictive fashion to cover a smaller proportion of the population experiencing severe entitlement failure—or a direct distribution of earnings from mineral wealth to citizens (a question of 'oil to cash'). Development is conceptualised more as the relief of chronic poverty and less as the structural transformation of economy, society, and social institutions. Quantitative measures of the multiplier effects of cash transfers on local economy becomes an indicator of economic growth. Social assistance instruments are deemed transformative when households can afford to pay school fees or healthcare, increase household assets in livestock. Claims of the ending of intergenerational poverty are made on, at best, very thin evidence. Increasingly, what we have is a public policy regime sustained by an alliance of domestic and external actors—the NGO format of the former sometimes created at the behest of the latter. If we understand the relations between state and citizens as a web of rights and obligations, the retreat of the state from socialised and universal social provisioning undermines the legitimacy of the state, weakens citizen-state social compact, reinforces the more coercive face of the state in its engagements with citizens, and undermines social cohesion. Leaving citizens to fend for themselves in the market place subjects them to the vagaries of the market. Neither is there evidence that reducing social policy to social assistance, which is narrowly focused on the deserving poor in increasingly dualistic social policy regimes, eliminates poverty or ensures quality services for the poor.

Progressive social policy is fundamentally about ensuring human flourishing. It does this by enhancing the productive capacity of citizens through public investment in education, healthcare, housing, etc.; reconciling 'the burden of reproduction with that of other social tasks' (Mkandawire); it is about protecting people from the vagaries of life throughout the life-cycle; it pays attention to the distributive outcome of economic performance; and it should advance social cohesion (and achieving the nation-building objectives) so vital in the African context. Progressive social policy does all these more efficiently through a 'prophylactic' approach of preventing vulnerability rather than waiting to attend to it after people have fallen through the cracks. It is a social policy approach that seeks to be transformative. A transformative social policy approach does these by creating a synergy between economic and social policies and addressing the structural bases of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability. It seeks to enhance human flourishing through the

transformation of the economy, social relations (including perhaps most importantly gender relations), social institution, and deepening ‘public reasoning.’

For the 2019 2<sup>nd</sup> Social Policy in Africa International Conference we invite abstracts and papers on the theme of the conference. The papers at the conference should address the dynamics of social policymaking in Africa, identify the drivers of policies and their policy preferences, address the issue of the nature of politics and the constitution of the public sphere necessary for enhanced economic transformation, human flourishing, and new forms of social compact—in other words, issues of inclusive development. Paper presenters are invited to engage with these issues and explore the different national and regional experiences of modes of governance of the African social policy space, the drivers of public policy, and explore the modes of governance and politics necessary for enhanced human wellbeing and development.

The conference also invites papers in the broad areas of social policy not directly concerned with the theme of the 2019 conference

We invite abstracts and papers in the following thematic areas:

1. Governance of Africa’s Social Policy
2. Democracy and the Governance of Africa’s Social Policy
3. Social Policymaking in Africa: actors, agency, and policy space.
4. Poverty and Inequality in Africa.
5. Redressing Health Inequalities: ensuring access to quality healthcare.
6. Pension Systems Reform and Income Security in Old Age.
7. Critical Perspectives on Social Protection.
8. Non-Formal Social Provisioning: the African Experiences.
9. Land and Agrarian Reform: the social policy perspectives.

***Deadlines:***

Deadline for Abstracts: Friday, 30 August 2019. Authors of accepted abstracts will be informed by Friday, 06 September 2019.

Deadline for full papers of accepted abstracts: Friday, 25 October 2019

***Submission of Abstracts:***

Click [here](#) to access the abstracts submission page.

***Travel Support Grants:***

A very limited number of travel support grants is available for accepted paper presenters. We cannot guarantee that authors of accepted papers will receive full sponsorship for the conference.

Please direct all enquiries to:

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Administrator

2019 Social Policy in Africa Conference

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