

Emerging Trends in Social Policy from the South – Challenges and Innovations in Emerging Economies

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Main Features

Emerging Trends in Social Policy from the South – Challenges and Innovations in Emerging Economies, edited by Ilcheong Yi, Alexandra Kaasch and Kelly Stetter, is a significant contribution to an important current discourse on social policy in the Global South. The volume, which includes a collection of chapters by scholars and experts, offers a critical examination of the ways in which emerging economies are addressing and responding to the complex social challenges that characterise their landscapes. The book is not just a study of policy implementation, but a deep dive into the innovative strategies being developed in response to unique regional and global pressures. By placing the Global South at the centre of social policy discussions, this work challenges conventional narratives and offers a nuanced perspective that highlights the agency, creativity and resilience of these countries.

Before dealing with the main themes and concepts of the book, four of its important features are worth mentioning from the outset.

The first one has to do with the scope of the book. Most books that deal with social policy issues in the Global South focus on its leading economies. However, the Global South is not a homogeneous entity. It includes countries that are often emerging economies, but also others that are at a relatively lower stage of development. This book provides ideas that can be applied beyond economies such as China, India, South Africa and Russia to include countries of the Global South such as Tanzania, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Indonesia.

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The second important feature concerns the context. The book assumes that the emerging economies of the Global South are not merely passive recipients of global social policy models but are becoming active themselves. These countries have developed different social policy approaches that reflect their unique historical, cultural and economic contexts. Of course, the editors acknowledge the legacy of colonialism, the impact of globalisation and the continuing influence of international financial institutions. However, the central thesis of the book is that, despite these external influences, the countries of the Global South have forged their own path in social policy development. The focus is on how these countries are innovating in areas such as social protection, health, education and employment, often in ways that challenge Western models and assumptions of the North. The editors have compiled a series of case studies and thematic analyses that together illustrate the diversity and dynamics of social policy in these regions.

The third feature of the book is the attempt to view reality through a conceptually rigorous framework. The book refers to debates dealing with globalisation and institutional-evolutionary analyses, while at the same time addressing policy issues in the field of health, informal work, universal basic income, the functioning of international financial institutions (IFIs) and the like. Academics and researchers will find the book invaluable for its comprehensive analysis and cross-regional comparisons. It presents recent

research findings and case studies that can open up new avenues of enquiry and enrich existing scholarship. The book's interdisciplinary approach ensures that it will be an important reference work for understanding the complex interplay between social policy and economic, political and cultural factors.

A fourth feature is that the book helps to disseminate information for policy makers, and for those working in the not-for-profit sector and civil society, the book offers practical examples of how social policy can be designed and implemented to drive meaningful change. It highlights real-world applications and the impact of social policies on communities and provides inspiration and guidance for advocacy and programme development. This valuable collection of social policies can not only inspire other countries in the South. It is also relevant for the developed world. In a world facing complex social challenges, understanding and innovation in social policy is more important than ever. In doing so, this book offers a rich, nuanced examination of emerging trends in social policy from a global perspective, making it an indispensable resource for a wide range of stakeholders. It highlights innovative approaches that have proven successful in different contexts and offers potential templates for your own initiatives.

Key Themes and Concepts

If the book disseminates information about social policy in the context of countries in the Global South and identifies strategies that differ from traditional Western models, it is also

particularly helpful in further exploring a number of issues that are crucial in engaging with social policy and suggesting that others should be explored more broadly.

Rights-Based Approach to Social Development

One of the central themes of the book is the evolving role of the state in social policy in emerging economies. In many cases, the state has been a dominant force in the provision of social services in countries of the Global South, often as part of broader nation-building efforts. However, the rise of neoliberalism and the corresponding shift to market-based solutions has significantly altered the social policy landscape. India provides an interesting example. The analysis in different chapters of the book highlights the dual role of the state as a promoter of market reforms and as a provider of social protection, highlighting the tension between these roles. The rights-based framework of the right to food, labour, education and information is examined. The authors examine the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), digital public goods such as AADHAAR and other identity-based platforms that provide employment to millions of people and has become a cornerstone of Indian social policy. In short, India's experience with neoliberal reforms has led to significant economic expansion, but at the cost of increasing income inequality.

At the same time, the book highlights that judicial institutions such as constitutional courts are playing an

increasingly important role in creating the space for socio-political engagement and the implementation of programmes, especially those based on the new formulation of human rights. However, there are still many obstacles to overcome when it comes to translating these newly established norms, values and principles into a transformative outcome within a rights-based approach.

Innovations in Social Protection

A major focus of the book is on the innovative approaches to social protection that have emerged in the Global South. These innovations have often been born out of necessity, as governments in these regions must meet the needs of a large, diverse population with limited resources. Governments also have to deal with the impact of product and service innovations.¹ The book contains several examples of how countries have developed creative solutions to social challenges, often in ways that challenge traditional Western models of social policy. Let's take two examples.

The chapter on South Africa examines the country's efforts to build a comprehensive social protection system both in the post-apartheid era and in the face of high unemployment and persistent inequality, offering a critical perspective on the potential and limitations of such initiatives. Using the example of the mining sector, which forms the basis of the South African economy, it shows how social, economic and environmental policies interact and overlap with each other. It also highlights the role of civil society as a balancing influence between legitimacy

and sustainability. Authors Sophie Plageron and Lauren Stuart provide an excellent example of the emerging dynamics around the institutions and organisations that facilitate the integration of social development and environmental protection policies.

The chapter on Tanzania describes the characteristics of employment and the need for social protection, especially in the informal sector. It examines the existing social protection framework in the country, including the successes and caveats of the main social assistance schemes, the informal social insurance arrangements that have appeared at the kinship and community levels, and the emergence of formal social insurance schemes for workers in the informal sector. The latter is the result of ground-breaking legislative reforms and constantly evolving insurance packages that are needed in the development context, as cash transfer programmes are still not sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood or serve as a stepping stone out of poverty. In general, the author argues for an expansion of the traditional scope of analysis, which is currently seen as one-sidedly focused on the history of the welfare state in industrialised countries. The author also underlines the new dynamics created by the organisation of informal workers in order to understand the changes in social policy in the Global South.

Addressing Inequality

Inequality is a recurring theme throughout the book, reflecting the fact that while many countries in the Global South have experienced rapid economic

growth in recent decades, this growth has often been accompanied by increasing inequality. The book examines how social policies have been used to address these inequalities - with varying degrees of success.

The case of China is particularly interesting in this respect. The book offers a comprehensive analysis of the country's efforts to reduce age-related inequalities through elderly care services and other targeted social investments. The chapter mentions that 18.7 per cent of China's population, or 264 million people, are aged 60 and over (2021 data). Initiatives such as the New Cooperative Medical Scheme, which aims to improve access to healthcare in rural areas, and the Dibao programme, which guarantees a minimum income for the urban poor, are discussed in detail. The chapter explains how the combination of state, family and market in the care system has come to grips with aspects of elderly care in China. The authors argue that while these programmes have achieved some success in reducing poverty, they have not sufficiently addressed the deeper structural inequalities in Chinese society. This discussion is particularly important given the rapid pace of economic change and the social challenges that accompany it.

Future Directions

Looking at further directions in the study of social policy in the Global South, the book directly or indirectly encourages a deeper examination of several key areas. "Emerging Trends in Social Policy from the South" not only offers a comprehensive overview of social

policy trends in the Global South, but also raises important questions about the future direction of social policy in these countries. The authors take a critical look at the limitations of current approaches and the need for a more inclusive and sustainable social policy. Some of the proposed future approaches are mentioned here.

Proactive strategies

First and foremost, the book calls for the development of more proactive social strategies tailored to the specific challenges of the Global South. One of the recurring criticisms is the tendency for social policy in the Global South to be reactive rather than proactive. Many case studies emphasise that social policies are often introduced in response to economic, social or environmental crises. While these measures have proven effective in addressing immediate needs, they may not be sufficient to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality. The authors call for a more holistic approach that incorporates social, economic and environmental dimensions into integrated strategies and is based on a long-term vision of sustainable development.

Participatory approaches

The book also emphasises the importance of civil society and participatory approaches as crucial components for social policy and thus for future research in this area. Several chapters emphasise the importance of involving civil society organisations, community groups and

social movements in the design and implementation of social policy. These actors are essential to ensure that social policy is responsive to the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations and is therefore effective. In order to reconcile economic prosperity with social and environmental prosperity, the “voices” of civil society and the intelligence of the different social actors must be taken into account. There is no doubt that those who are affected by a policy should be involved in shaping the measures that affect them.

In different chapters, the book deals with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the context of social services. An interesting example is Russia, where Socially Oriented Non-Profit Organisations (SONPOs) have played an important role in filling the gaps left by the state during the period of economic transition. Given the far-reaching changes in the structure of social services, where the state has reduced its direct involvement in many areas, NGOs have often been instrumental in providing services that the state was unable or unwilling to provide. This includes supporting vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the disabled, children and the homeless. NGOs have also campaigned for the rights of these groups and influenced policy changes. Another interesting example is China, with the different roles at different levels of government and an emerging new relationship between the bureaucracy and civil society organisations leading to improvements in public sector

service delivery. Further analyses and experiments in participatory approaches are undoubtedly welcome.

“Recipients” Voice

Finally, the principle of participation for which those affected by a policy should be involved in shaping the policies applies of course to development cooperation as well. But do the recipients have a decisive role in shaping the policy that affects them? Is there an in-depth assessment of the practical implementation of this principle? The chapter on Indonesia lies at the intersection of social policy and development cooperation. It examines the country’s health sector since the 1950s and the role of external organisations in this sector, followed by an examination of the relationships between agencies and actors in the development and reform of social and health policy. It examines the involvement of key external organisations

in Indonesia’s social policy development and the principle of country ownership in social policy development. This line of research is important and defines an area ripe for further investigation after years of little or no debate on ‘aid effectiveness’. As the ‘tables’ on which aid is defined are still essentially limited to donors, further work is needed and proposals for change need to be considered.

Endnote

¹ Innovations in health technology significantly affect the supply chains of health services. Innovations in pharmaceuticals, vaccines, medical services, diagnostics and surgical techniques affect the institutions and organizations of health service delivery, and consequently the health system as a whole, through cost to patient considerations, pricing, state procurement, reimbursements, generics availability, and prescription and treatment choices.