

The Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Africa (GETSPA) Project

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR RESEARCH PAPERS ON TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY EXPERIENCES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

This call for proposals for research on Transformative Social Policy Experiences of the Global South is part of a collaboration between the GETSPA Project, which is based at the Institute of African Studies (IAS), University of Ghana, and the Department of Development Studies at SOAS, University of London. The initiative seeks to shed light on old and new models of equitable and transformative social policy.

We invite scholars and researchers from around the world to submit proposals to examine the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from examples of transformative social policy within the Global South. This is your opportunity to contribute to a critical dialogue that has the power to reshape social progress on a global scale.

1. Background

The GETSPA project, which is supported by the Open Society Foundations (OSF), is animated by the concern that the neoliberal foundations of current approaches to social policy and the patriarchal cultures of policymaking have resulted in social policy regimes that pay scant attention to structural transformation of economies and societies and fail to address rising inequalities related to gender, class, generation, location, and dis/ability, among others. Current approaches do not recognise the interplay of social and economic policies and, instead, give prominence to economic policymaking and reduce social policy to a safety net for those left behind by neo-liberal economic policies. Our interest in a transformative social policy approach stems from evidence from Africa and other regions in the global South about the critical role of social policy in structural transformation, economic development, and the building of more equitable societies. The overarching goal of GETSPA is the transformation of the discourses, approaches to and cultures of social policy making to establish Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy approaches in Africa.

2. The GETSPA 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... Social policy is thus concerned with social welfare, social institutions, and social relations, and has both instrumental and intrinsic or

normative value”.¹ By transformative social policies, we are referring to approaches that address one or several of the five functions of social policy - strengthening productive capacities and production, supporting social reproduction, effecting redistribution of produced value, protecting the vulnerable, and building national cohesion. This approach to social policy provides a framing for analysing and assessing social policy instruments, regimes, and institutions.

The project also 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 certain social policy instruments have targeted women, these do not necessarily challenge gender hierarchies, and may actively reinforce them. The neglect of gender issues in social policy is demonstrated in unexamined assumptions about the family and household behind policy interventions; 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 GETSPA project, in fulfilment of its mandate to contribute to addressing obstacles to transformative social policy in Africa, commissioned research in thirty-one countries in Africa, to map the landscape and evolution of social policy approaches since the colonial period, between November 2020 and December 2022. These country studies found that the importance placed on social policies in addressing the developmental needs of Africa has varied over the years and within countries. 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.”

Yet significant progress has been made in social policy regimes in other parts of the Global South. Some countries in Asia and Latin America have been prime movers in social policy innovations that have contributed to transforming economies and societies. While these experiences provide opportunities for policy learning, it would require carefully contextualised and critical studies that dig behind the headlines and the facile claims of universal relevance. Only then would policy makers find the appropriate mix of policy interventions that deploy the

¹ Mkandawire, 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

multi-tasking capabilities of social policy to advance structural transformation, effective climate change mitigation and adaptation and a just and healthy society.

3. The Call for Research Papers

In a world shaken to its core by COVID-19, we stand at a crossroads where traditional social policies have proven inadequate in the face of mounting global challenges. As poverty deepens, inequalities widen, and climate threats intensify, the need for revolutionary social policy has never been more urgent. While Africa's social policy landscape has been shaped by external influences, Africa's rich heritage of social solidarity and innovative welfare systems has long influenced global practices. Drawing from groundbreaking GETSPA research across thirty-one nations, we now have compelling evidence that challenges the misguided notion of Africa as merely a recipient of foreign social policy models. The time has come to reimagine social policy through a new lens – one that honours local wisdom while embracing global innovation. As we navigate unprecedented challenges, we must move beyond simplistic policy transplants and develop nuanced approaches that respect regional distinctiveness and cultural contexts.

This research initiative seeks to identify and examine transformative social policy solutions from across the Global South. We invite scholarly contributions that explore groundbreaking approaches at every level – from global frameworks to local innovations, from regional solutions to national programs.

Our mission is to illuminate innovative social policy strategies from the Global South that can inform and inspire Africa's path forward, while offering valuable lessons for the entire world. Whether through comparative analyses or focused country or regional case studies, your research can help shape the future of social policy in an increasingly interconnected world.

The call is guided by the following broad research questions:

- How and under what circumstances have social policy regimes and instruments been gender equitable and transformative?
- Which country contexts, societal conditions, and pressures, what kinds of states and state society relations have catalysed and supported transformative and gender equitable social policies?
- Which social policy regimes and instruments have been most effective at addressing more of the functions of social policy and catalysing structural transformation?
- Which economic and social policy regimes and instruments are mutually reinforcing, and which are contradictory for the achievement of transformative social policy?
- What kinds of policy processes (problem definition, policy justifications, policy development and implementation) have characterised gender equitable and transformative social policy regimes?
What have been the successes and failures of gender equitable and transformative social policy regimes and instruments and what factors account for their durability and sustainability or otherwise?

4. Format and Content of Applications

We invite you to submit the following documentation:

1. A curriculum vitae (CV) of not more than three pages that includes a list of recent publications.
2. A copy of two most recently published peer-reviewed academic journal articles.
3. A concept note or brief proposal of not more than 2,500 words (excluding references and footnotes), with the following sections:
 - background
 - key features and achievements of the social policy regime, policy or policy instruments or programme under study and its importance for understanding gender equitable and transformative social policy
 - current academic and policy debates on the topic under study
 - theoretical or conceptual approach to the study
 - scope of study
 - 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 qualifications and skills.
 - examples of similar reports/papers, with a few links to published work.

5. Language

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

6. Timelines and Resources

Deadline for applications: **15th February 2025**

Notification to successful applicants: **15th March 2025**

Contracting: **30th April 2025**

Duration of contract: 12 months from the date of signed contract

Remuneration: £6,000 to be paid in two (2) tranches

Research costs of up to £2,000 (to cover travel and other research costs).

7. Submission and enquiries

Email applications and/or enquiries to mm199@soas.ac.uk and getsipa.ias@ug.edu.gh

