

The Institutional Regime Approach: A Framework for the Study of Social Protection in Developing Countries

Publicly provided social protection is increasingly recognized as an important element in the transformation of developing countries. Yet, we only have vague ideas concerning the organization of social protection in these countries and how responsibilities for welfare provision are divided between the state, market and the family. Typically, studies on social protection in developing countries focus on single programs in particular geographical areas, which obviously restrict the potential to identify policy patterns valid for more than a handful of countries and with limited relevance for policy evaluations. In this paper we outline a framework for the study of publicly provided social protection in developing countries suitable for large scale cross-national comparisons of social reform. It is also specifically designed to facilitate policy evaluations and establish important linkages between institutional structures and distributive outcomes. Based on the long tradition of comparative social policy analysis on capitalist industrialized societies, we argue that the “institutional regime approach” provides excellent opportunities for comparative research also on developing countries. The essential ingredient of this approach is the close focus on social rights manifested in formal rules that determine the content and quality of social entitlements and correlative duties. The failure of traditional development policies to alleviate poverty has spurred new efforts to address economic deprivation through human rights strategies. Essentially, the rights-based analysis embodied in the institutional regime approach integrates standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of social development. Central in this context is the notion that human rights are not limited to civil and political rights only, but also include social rights. Besides explaining the theoretical foundations of this approach we offer some empirical examples to demonstrate the applicability of the institutional welfare regime approach in practical research.

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