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# A Framework for Comparing Social Protection in Developing Countries with the Example of Child Benefits

**Ingrid Esser, Tommy Ferrarini, Kenneth Nelson, Ola Sjöberg**
Swedish Institute for Social Research
Stockholm University
S-106 91 Stockholm

**Abstract**

*Publicly provided social protection is increasingly seen as an important element in the transformation of developing countries. Yet systematic comparative institutional analyses of social protection in these countries are lacking. This paper outlines a conceptual and theoretical framework for the study of publicly provided social protection in developing countries, drawing on the tradition of comparative social policy studies in the longstanding welfare democracies. The empirical example of universal child benefit programs indicates that the differences between developed and developing countries should not be overly exaggerated. The existence of such programs in 52 Sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries in the early 21st century looks similar to the situation in the inter-war period in early-industrialized countries. Large differences between developing regions are evident in the institutional set up of other child benefits, but further analyses are required to disentangle the links between institutions and child poverty. An important part of the Institutional Regime Approach proposed in this paper is the establishment of comparable qualitative and quantitative indicators over social protection. It is in the paper emphasised that analyses of developing countries must be sensitive to the fact that these nations often have developed socio-political strategies alternative to the ones existing in developed nations.*

Publicly provided social protection is increasingly recognized as an important element in the transformation of developing societies (Wood and Gough, 2006; Gordon et al., 2003). Concerns about the achievement of traditional development policies to alleviate poverty have spurred new efforts to address economic deprivation, not least with regards to the widespread problem of child poverty. Various forms of arrangements are here believed to be central for both social and economic development. Particular emphasis has in the previous literature been placed on cash transfer programs that target benefits to poor households, but also other types of provisions may be vital in this respect. In fact, the concept of social risk, which is embodied in programs that aim to mitigate income shortfalls more generally, draws attention to the vulnerable but non-poor citizens and households who may be thrown into poverty when affected by changes in earnings potential or responsibilities for dependent household members.

The ways in which society arrange social protection are also intimately linked to equality of opportunity in a wider sense by allowing individuals and households to acquire financial resources necessary for human development. According to this perspective social protection can also stimulate economic growth, which has important long-term consequences for levels of living and social stratification. Cash transfers is one important component in the maintenance of a skilled and productive workforce (Institute for Future Studies, 2006) and policies of this kind may also contribute positively to levels of social cohesion necessary for long-term economic development (Mkandawire 2001; Schelkle and Mabbett, 2007). Such potential effects underscore the significance of devoting explicit attention to social protection arrangements in developing societies and to consider cash transfers as essential means to reduce or even alleviate global poverty. However, large-scale and systematic comparative studies on social protection in developing countries are lacking. How social protection in these societies relates to the redistributive strategies developed in the old capitalist democracies is even less clear.

Research on publicly provided social protection in developing countries has so far mainly focused on single programs in particular geographical areas, which obviously restrict the possibilities to identify policy patterns valid for more than a handful of countries and with limited relevance for policy evaluations. In the wake of rapid economic growth and social transformations, many developing countries are currently in the process of establishing more extensive systems of social protection. Some of these countries have already initiated social reforms, whereby new social protection arrangements are introduced or old ones re-arranged. In this situation, new and improved knowledge on the institutional design of social policy is urgently needed.

The purpose of this paper is to present a research framework that we believe would strengthen the analyses of social protection in developing countries. Social protection is defined as publicly provided cash and near-cash transfers and benefits that are provided to citizens in order to mitigate poverty or reduce shortfalls in work income.[1] An approach that successfully has been applied for the study of social protection in the old capitalist democracies involves a systematic collection of empirical indicators that measures the quality of social protection (see Korpi 1989). In this paper we propose this *Institutional Regime Approach* to analyses on developing countries. The theoretical discussion on the basic foundations of the Institutional Regime Approach is illustrated with an empirical example, where an implementation of the approach is initiated to the field of child benefits and structural pre-conditions for social reform in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.

By institutional we mean the formal rules that guide and shape the quality of social entitlements and correlative duties (Sjöberg, 1999). The regime concept is used to denote the way in which states, markets, families, and other societal actors interact in the provision of social protection and welfare (see Esping-Andersen, 1990). The multi-dimensional character of the Institutional Regime Approach makes the framework particularly suitable for analyses of social protection in developing societies, where non-state actors often are crucial for the provision of welfare. Non-state actors include for example the family, the wider community, religious organizations, and various NGO's. Although this paper is focused on publicly provided social protection, the Institutional Regime Approach concerns precisely the broader welfare mix in various countries, i.e. the relative role of different providers and arrangements in the area of social protection.

Benefits designed to cater for the needs of families with dependent children are subject to intense debate in the literature on global poverty. For example, there is a discussion whether benefits should be low-income targeted or universal and if they should be conditional or not (Townsend, 2004; Barrientos and DeJong, 2006; Soares et al. 2007). Child poverty is on top of the global development agenda. The improvements of children's life chances are fundamental for the UN Millenium Development Goals and for the UN Conventions of Human Rights. Still, improvements in child well-being are painfully slow. It is estimated that more than half of the world's children live in poverty; the absolute majority in developing countries (UNICEF, 2000). At the current speed of progression hardly any of the goals established by the Millennium Development Goals are expected to be fulfilled (Wolfensohn and Brown, 2004; Vandemoortele, 2003; Robinson, 2003).

Global child poverty is often viewed as the result of an overall lack of development. If societies are poor, children are poor. However, the history of the old capitalist democracies and recent experiences of developing countries show that child poverty is related both to economic development and to how resources are distributed, where effective redistribution also may stimulate economic growth (Mkandawire, 2001). In both Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, child poverty is still

[1] Generally, publicly provided social protection consists of two pillars; benefits and services. Although social service are central for the welfare states in the old capitalist democracies and probably are important for poverty and social stratification also in developing societies, we do not address such programs here.

widespread in spite of increased democratization and economic growth. In some countries, particularly Latin American, economic prosperity has even resulted in increased inequality. In many African countries with minimal systems of social protection, but also in some parts of East Asia, there is the additional problem of the rapid spreading of HIV and AIDS, which creates further needs of social protection. Particularly this concerns risks pertaining to orphan hood.

In all these scenarios family policy can make a difference, both by a horizontal redistribution of resources across the different stages of the life cycle and by a vertical redistribution of resources across socio-economic categories. In order to evaluate how effectively various institutional designs mitigate child poverty and create equal opportunity for all children, we have to know more about how family policy is organized. Benefits and transfers directed to families with dependent children are therefore an interesting test-case for the first efforts to adopt the Institutional Regime Approach to studies on social protection in developing societies.

The paper is outlined in the following way. In the subsequent section a brief discussion is carried out on the development of social protection in developing countries. Thereafter some broad characteristics of the Institutional Regime Approach are provided. After these theoretical sections we move over to the empirical example of child benefits and the structural preconditions of social protection. The paper ends with a concluding discussion.

## Social Protection in Developing Countries

Even if the role of publicly provided social protection sometimes is small in developing countries, it is nevertheless important to study for a number of reasons. First, traditional forms of solidarity and informal protection in developing countries are increasingly eroded due to massive migration from rural to urban areas and as a result of the integration of local economies in market relations. Second, publicly provided social protection (although limited in scope) is important in shaping the institutional landscape and the relative role of non-state actors (such as voluntary organizations and families). Third, state-provided social protection often involves a high degree of path dependency, whereby social policy reform often is shaped by past and prevailing institutional and structural contexts. Fourth, there is a geographical element in the diffusion of publicly provided social protection, whereby institutions of one country may influence reforms in neighbouring countries.

There is a clear resemblance among both developing and developed countries in types of programs developed. Social protection concerns the needs of the poorest population segments and the demand for security against risks associated with the different stages of life. Thus, publicly provided social protection covers two main fields of policy responses with relevance for both the old capitalist democracies and developing societies: social assistance targeted to the most vulnerable families and social insurance aimed for economically active citizens, with the former being provided either as cash or in-kind benefits. Research on the old capitalist democracies shows that the institutional structure of social insurance and assistance is important for poverty alleviation, not only in the short-term perspective of reducing current poverty spells (Korpi and Palme, 1998; Nelson, 2004) but also in the long-term perspective of increasing living standards more generally (Kenworthy, 2004). Perhaps it is too early to observe any profound consequences of the latest policy reforms in the developing countries. Nevertheless, we believe that it is important also to map minor steps in the expansion of social protection and to monitor how these policies impact the distribution of financial resources in society. Such analyses may reveal less recognized albeit important changes in government policies that can be regarded as fruitful policy solutions in the fight against global poverty in the nearby future.

Central to the notion of institutional regimes is the concept of social risk, where social protection aims to secure the livelihood of citizens in periods of work incapacity, for example due to ill health, young or old age, unemployment or giving birth (e.g. Marshall, 1950). The notion of human rights is thereby not limited to civil and political rights only, but also comprise social protection and adequate living standards (Townsend and Gordon 2002). In order to successfully expand the Institutional Regime Approach beyond studies of the old capitalist democracies the particular risks and conditions of people in developing countries must be recognized. This involves, for example, the struggle to secure basic livelihoods, which nowadays is less of a problem in the long-standing welfare democracies. Wood (2003) emphasizes this necessity as follows, "when understanding the poor in a poor country context, the peasant is a stronger analogue that that of employed worker".

This recognition brings us over to a residual category of social interventions which are difficult to place in the above two social insurance and assistance categories. This residual group includes responses not necessarily considered as part of social protection in the old capitalist democracies. Among the most notable examples are various price and consumption subsidies, microfinance and employment support. For example, tax exemptions on food related consumption items, school materials and agricultural tools may in some low-income countries be important instruments for low-income households. Other residual measures that are central for social protection in the mature welfare states may be more or less absent in many developing countries. Universal child benefits are one example, as we shall see in the subsequent empirical sections of this paper.

In some areas where developing countries have not instituted any social policy programs, functional alternatives to Western style social protection may exist. For example, in Latin America both severance payments and policies stimulating personal savings may to some extent have the same objectives as social insurance in developed countries. Also some of the old capitalist democracies rely heavily on the latter type of policies, predominantly the English speaking liberal welfare democracies. In several Sub-Saharan countries various crop and weather insurances can serve equivalent purposes for farmers. This is not to say that these alternatives to traditional forms of social insurance are equally effective in reducing poverty and promote social equality. The point being made is more about comparability of social protection arrangements across countries and that researchers attempting to understand the organization of social policy in developing countries have to be open for alternative arrangements that not entirely coincide with the benefit and transfer package offered to citizens in developed countries.

## The Institutional Regime Approach

The Institutional Regime Approach provides a complement to various case studies detailing the functioning of social policy programs in single countries. It should also be distinct from highly aggregated social policy studies that aim more at system level descriptions involving multiple countries (e.g. Wood and Gough, 2006). The Institutional Regime Approach combines the advantages of the detailed programmatic focus of case-studies with the birds-eye view of large-scale analyses of system level characteristics. The approach can therefore be considered as a middle-range alternative to the study of social protection. Systems of social protection are here analytically and empirically disaggregated into smaller entities reflecting the various program areas of social protection.

The Institutional Regime Approach provides excellent opportunities to explain micro-level circumstances of poor people in terms of institutional performance. The particularities of social protection arrangements in one country are established with close reference to the organization of the same type of policies in other countries, which facilitates analyses on the consequences of alternative policy responses. Thus, the Institutional Regime Approach is comparative almost by nature, which strengthens the merit of policy evaluations. The Institutional Regime Approach reveals how similar institutions function in different economic, demographic and cultural contexts. The natural link to research and policy developments in long-standing welfare democracies is an additional benefit. It is striking how seldom cross-reference to the experience of the old capitalist democracies is made in social policy research on developing countries (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Palme, 1990; Kangas, 1991; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Carroll, 1999; Nelson, 2003; Ferrarini, 2006). Although highly demanding, comparisons between developing and developed countries are important for our understanding of social policy reform in low- to mid-income societies. The Institutional Regime Approach provides an appropriate tool for investments of this kind.

The approach also involves important political dimensions whereby social protection are not solely perceived as technical solutions to given problems, but as institutions in their own right with specific historical, political, and economic narratives (Rothstein, 1998). Institutional structures are also envisioned to reflect balances of power in society with important consequences for the distribution of welfare and social stratification (Korpi, 1983). Institutions should also be recognized for their influence on identities, interests and preferences among citizens (Baldwin, 1990; Svallfors, 1996) and in relation to both formal and informal cultural or religious traditions and practices (Kersbergen, 1991; Ebbinghaus, 1993). The importance of normative outcomes should not be devaluated in attempts to for example promote women's empowerment through the provision of family benefits and services, or for the functioning of sickness cash benefits in relation to the sometimes high prevalence of AIDS in some developing societies.

Research on developing societies also raises questions on the moral foundations of social protection similar to the ones long discussed in the context of the old capitalist democracies (see Wilensky, 1975; Korpi, 1983; Rosenberry, 1982; Rothstein, 1998). For example, the low coverage of formal social protection schemes in developing countries has been shown to be closely linked not only to low and irregular earnings, but also to the unwillingness of many employees to contribute a relatively high percentage of their income to finance social protection that do not meet their priority needs. In general, workers in developing countries seem to prioritize immediate needs - such as health, shelter, food, clothing, and survival from natural disasters - rather than protection against future risks covered by traditional social insurance schemes, such as retirement benefits (Moore et. al., 1999). Thus, the legitimacy of social protection is intimately related to whether people believe there is a reasonable and fair relationship between contributions and the benefits they (and others) are getting in return. Here it does not seem to matter whether we speak of circumstances of developing nations or the old capitalist democracies. In fact, Moore and his colleagues (1996) show that dependence upon a broad revenue base in developing countries tends to reinforce the accountability and the quality of social protection, which accentuates the reciprocal relationships between state capacity, financing mechanisms and benefits delivered. Findings such as these emphasize the importance of more detailed studies of the institutional structure of social protection in developing countries.

## Social Policy Indicators

Analyses of social protection in developing countries are perhaps even more challenging than that of the old capitalist democracies. Limited comparable and high quality data on the organization of social protection is one reason. The broad range of social institutions and relationships that must be at focus is another. Cross-national and temporal data are a precondition for a successful implementation of the Institutional Regime Approach. In order to establish quantitative indicators on qualitative dimensions of social protection the Institutional Regime Approach involves two initial and integral steps. The first analytical task is to define and delimitate the number and types of programs analyzed. The second and perhaps even more challenging task is to identify important features in the organization of these programs and to compare institutional structures across countries and over time.

*Program Differentiation*

The definition of social protection programs often necessitates in-depth knowledge of the institutional landscape of investigated countries and it requires careful considerations on which programs to compare. There are many unfortunate examples where the analysis is not done properly in this respect and where the results have been used to "improperly" suggest a re-organization of existing policies. One of the most striking examples is the study of Mauritius commissioned by the World Bank. The main objective of this study was to analyze the basic universal retirement pension. Included in the expenditure estimate for the program was however other schemes, such as widow's and orphans pensions, all of which are offered to persons in pre-retirement ages. This flawed expenditure measure was subsequently used by the World Bank to advocate benefit reductions and targeted elements in the universal old-age pension scheme in Mauritius (Willmore, 2007).

Due to the great number of functional alternatives to Western-style social protection in developing countries, it is neither possible nor advisable here to determine which programs to investigate. This must, for example, be determined by the importance of each program in the overall design of social protection or depending on the research question.[2] In order to facilitate the selection process and to provide a solid platform for comparative analyses it can sometimes be necessary first to categorize benefits and transfers into mutually excluding categories based on the chief objective of respective program, such as accomplished in the taxonomy of means-tested benefits elaborated by Eardley et al. (1996). However, the greatest challenge of applying the Institutional Regime Approach to the study of social protection in developing countries occur once programs are selected and indicators on the institutional structure of benefits and transfers are to be established.

*Program Characteristics*

Despite differences in objectives among social benefits it is often useful to consider publicly provided social protection as being structured around at least four

[2] We do however not see any obvious reason why an investigation cannot start out from the familiar distinction between social insurance and social assistance above. It can be fruitful also to disaggregate social insurance and social assistance into even smaller entities of program types. For example, the social insurance programs conventionally considered in analysis of developed countries are unemployment benefits, worker's compensation, sickness benefit, parental leave, and retirement benefits. In many developing countries it is sometimes necessary to broaden the perspective and go beyond risks pertaining specifically to the formal labor market. This include for example social policy arrangements targeted to families and households whose livelihood is centered on agriculture and farming. Social assistance can involve both benefits (cash or in-kind) and services. Assistance may also be conditional, whereby receipt of benefit is not only determined by need, but also in relation to fulfillment of achievements on behalf on program participants. In many developing countries, social assistance is often also categorical in nature, whereby governments attempt to assist groups identified as having certain special needs, such as lone mothers and the elderly. Before many developed countries introduced general social assistance programs, categorical programs were also a frequent feature of anti-poverty policies in the industrial capitalist democracies.

dimensions: financing, administration, eligibility, and entitlements. For the study of social protection in developing countries we may also add implementation to this list. The implementation of social protection is an important dimension of social protection in low- to mid-income societies with obvious implications for the quality of social rights actually enjoyed by citizens.

The financing of social protection is a key issue in both developed and developing countries. Whereas the current debate in the industrialized countries largely focuses on the cost of aging societies and the challenges raised by increased economic globalization, the discussion in many developing countries is dominated by concerns related to benefit coverage and the need to develop financing mechanisms that enable expansion of social protection to broader segments of the population. Attempts have also been made to insulate financing of social protection from political interference.

The administration of social protection involves issues specifically related to the organizational body responsible for identification, delivery, and monitoring of benefits and recipients. Although problems associated with the administration of social protection in developing countries resemble those of the old capitalist democracies, government resources in low- and mid-income countries are often much smaller due to the limited tax base. State infrastructure also tends to be under-developed and state institutions less autonomous than in the old capitalist democracies. The two latter aspects can to some extent be related to the often low status of social policy within the central administration of developing societies. Many developing countries do not have government agencies with overarching responsibilities for social policy. Due to these circumstances, social protection often poses huge administrative challenges.

Benefit eligibility refers to the criteria used to determine access to social protection. Here it is advisable to distinguish between at least four qualitatively different eligibility criteria and construct empirical indicators of relevance thereof. The criteria are; need, financial contributions (via the insured and the employer), citizenship (or residence), and belongingness to a specified occupational category. In addition it is often useful to calculate various forms of coverage rates, which indicate how many citizens in relevant population categories that qualify for benefits.[3] Analyses of entitlements refer to the generosity of benefits, where it is relevant to establish if benefits aim to reduce poverty, replace lost income, or compensate households for increased living costs. This part of the analysis relates to the ongoing discussion about the intended and unintended consequences of social reform, which has been prominent in the old capitalist democracies (see Sjöberg, 2000; Bäckman and Sjöberg, 2001; Esser, 2005).

[3] Also the take-up rate of benefits may be important, particularly when means-tested benefits are concerned. The take-up rate refers to the share of beneficiaries in the eligible population.

*The Issue of Standardization*

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to provide a detailed discussion concerning the construction of the empirical indicators on the four institutional dimensions of social protection identified above. Some suggestions are made in another paper which deals specifically with indicator construction in the context of social policy research on developing countries (Sjöberg et al., 2007). Here, we would rather promote the so-called type-case approach, which has been successfully applied in research on the old capitalist democracies (see Korpi, 1989; Kemp, 1997; OECD, 2002; Scruggs and Alan, 2006). Besides using existing sources of social protection legislation and research to construct institutionally informed empirical indicators on social protection it is also possible to take advantage of the national informant (rapporteur) procedure (see Eardley et al., 1996; Bradshaw and Finch, 2002), whereby experts provide detailed information on important institutions. In this case, only financial restrictions limit the number of countries to be investigated.

The crucial point is that great efforts are placed on standardization, whereby each indicator is made comparable both across countries and over time. Few efforts to collect data on social policy organization in developing societies have been initiated. The Social Assistance in Developing Countries Database at the University of Sussex is one example (Barrientos and Rebecca Holmes, 2006). The usefulness of this data for comparative research is unfortunately limited, partly because the various indicators are not standardized to allow systematic and large-scale cross-national comparisons. For example in terms of benefit coverage it is essential that the same reference category is used throughout the data collection. This could be the labor force in relation to social insurance and low-income households in connection with social assistance. In terms of financing it can be fruitful not only to focus on how much of GDP that is actually devoted to social purposes, but also to give attention to how financing of social protection is divided between public authorities, the employer, and the injured. The size of benefits can be standardized by using wages, PPP's or various poverty thresholds. In cases where social benefits are subject to income and payroll taxes, the indicators should reflect both the gross and net amounts.

These initial remarks on indicator construction may seem obvious for researchers familiar with the comparative social policy literature on the old capitalist democracies. The challenge for researchers interested in large-scale comparative social policy analysis on developing countries is to identify fruitful denominators that can be used not only regionally but also globally. These denominators may not always equal the ones used in research on the old capitalist democracies, for example the frequent use of average earnings to standardize social benefits both temporally and cross-nationally (see Eardley, et al., 1996; Korpi and Palme, 2003: Bradshaw and Finch, 2002; OECD, 2002; Scruggs and Alan, 2006).

## The Institutional Example of Child Benefits

As mentioned above, childhood is the life stage where experienced poverty may have the most serious long term consequences for the individual as well as for the greater society. Partly for such reasons family policy benefits have frequently been introduced with the explicit purpose to alleviate child poverty both in developing and developed countries. One way to achieve this objective has been to introduce benefits that are specifically targeted to families with children. This section compares the existence of national child benefit systems in 52 Latin American and Sub-Saharan African countries.[4] Comparisons are also made between countries in these regions and the old capitalist democracies. Since it can be argued that differences in degrees of economic development makes comparisons of the current situation misleading, the existence and institutional characteristics of child benefits in the developing regions today will also be evaluated against the historical situation in the longstanding OECD-member countries. In the following analyses child benefits include universal and employment related programs as well as means-tested or conditional benefits targeted to specific population categories.

In the early 20th century family policy benefits in the industrialized countries were often targeted to the most vulnerable families, e.g. single parents with children or families with many children. The early benefits were also frequently subject to means-tests. Increasingly these programs were extended to cover the costs of children for all citizens, and today most advanced welfare democracies have introduced some type of universal cash child benefit, paid on the basis of citizenship (Wennemo, 1994). Institutional analyses of the longstanding OECD-countries show that the benefit levels of universal child benefits on average make up around 10 per cent of a net average wage by the end of the twentieth century (Montanari, 2000).

The recent literature on policies directed to families with children in the developing countries has to large extent been centred on conditional benefits (e.g. Das et al., 2005; Kakwani et al., 2005). Conditional benefits have the explicit motive to reduce poverty by providing a cash transfer to the poorest families conditioned on a particular behaviour, most often in the form of children's regular school attendance or as medical check-ups for pregnant women and children. The aim of conditional programs is thereby often to increase human capital investment besides providing direct financial support. Evaluations of conditional benefits indicate that they reduce poverty and income inequality, in particular where programs are sufficiently large (Soares et al., 2007). It has also been pointed out that conditional programmes through their design exclude large proportions of poor households, for example

[4] Of the 52 developing countries included in this study 21 are Latin American: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. The 31 Sub-Saharan African countries include: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Côte d'Ivoire, Etiopía, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Micro-states have been excluded in both developing regions.

families with pre-school children or individuals residing in geographical areas not covered by such transfer systems (Barrientos and DeJong, 2006).

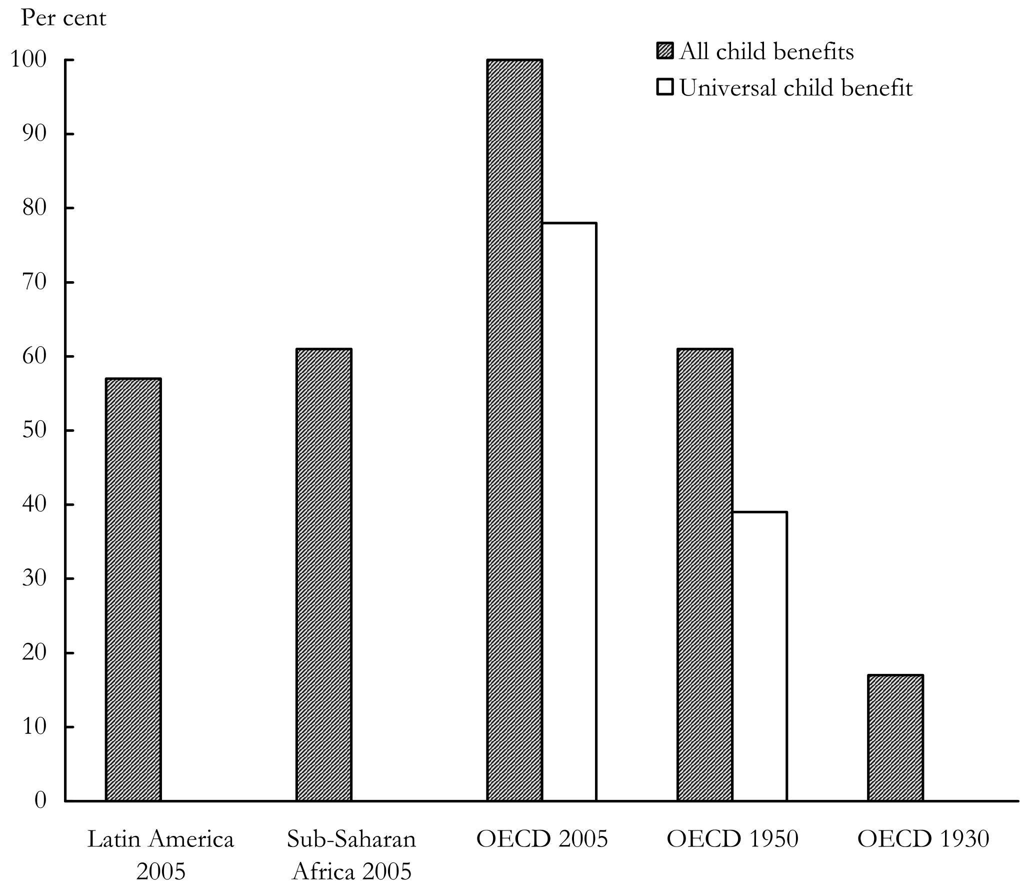
## *The Prevalence of Child Benefits in North and South*

Even if much research effort so far has been concentrated on conditional programs there is no doubt that other types of benefits directed to families with children can play an important role in the alleviation of poverty also in developing countries. Increasingly the focus has been directed towards universal child benefits as a way to reach wider groups of poor children and to reduce child poverty more generally (Gordon et al., 2003; Townsend, 2007). Nevertheless, large-scale comparative, systematic and institutional analyses of the broad range of social protection programs in the developing countries are lacking, including child benefits.

*Figure 1* shows the existence of state legislated cash child benefits in the Latin American, Sub-Saharan African and the longstanding OECD countries in 2005. For the latter countries, two points in time have been added to reflect the early situation of welfare state building in the interwar and immediate post-war period.[5] As can be seen from the shaded bars in the figure, in 2005 a majority of countries in all regions had introduced some type of child benefit, including means-tested benefits targeted to families with children and benefits directed to more narrowly defined categories of recipients, such as single parent families. In Latin America, almost three out of five countries have such benefits, whereas the share of countries that have introduced some type of child benefit is slightly higher among Sub-Saharan African countries. All OECD countries have some type of child benefit in the early years of the 21st century.

A comparison between the developing countries and the OECD-countries in a younger stage of economic and welfare state development shows a different picture. When it comes to the mere prevalence of child benefits, the situation in the 1950s in the OECD countries is similar to the current situation in Latin America and Sub-Saharan countries with around 60 percent of countries having introduced some type of child benefit. Two decades earlier, in 1930, less than a fifth of the current OECD-member nations had introduced child benefits of some kind.

[5] Data for the developing countries is from Social Security Programs Through out the World 2005, while child benefit data for the longstanding OECD-countries is from the Social Citizenship Indicator Program (SCIP), which is under construction at the Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University. The following 18 countries are included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zeeland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. SCIP data will be publicly available in 2008.




*Sources: SCIP, SSPTW 2005*

**Figure 1** *Program Existence of Child Benefits in 70 Developing Countries and Old Capitalist Democracies.*[6] *Percent of Countries that have Introduced Different Child Benefits.*

The picture changes when attention is directed to the existence of universal child benefits, as shown by the pale bars of Figure 1. Universal child benefits are paid in flat rate amounts to all citizens regardless of need, occupation or labour market status. In some instances there are also supplements related to the family's need as represented by the child's age or the number of dependent children living in the family. None of the countries in Latin America or Sub-Saharan Africa had introduced universal child benefits in 2005. At the same time in the longstanding OECD-countries, three out of four countries operate state-legislated universal child benefits.[7] A comparison with the earliest phase of welfare state development shows that none of the latter countries had universal child benefits in 1930, a figure that increased to two out of five in the early post-war period. The developing countries

[6] The 18 longstanding OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

[7] The countries that do not operate universal cash child benefit systems include Canada, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Both Germany and Canada have replaced universal child benefits with refundable tax credits.

thereby do not in this respect deviate in relation to the early policy developments in the old capitalist democracies.

*Characteristics of Child Benefits in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa*

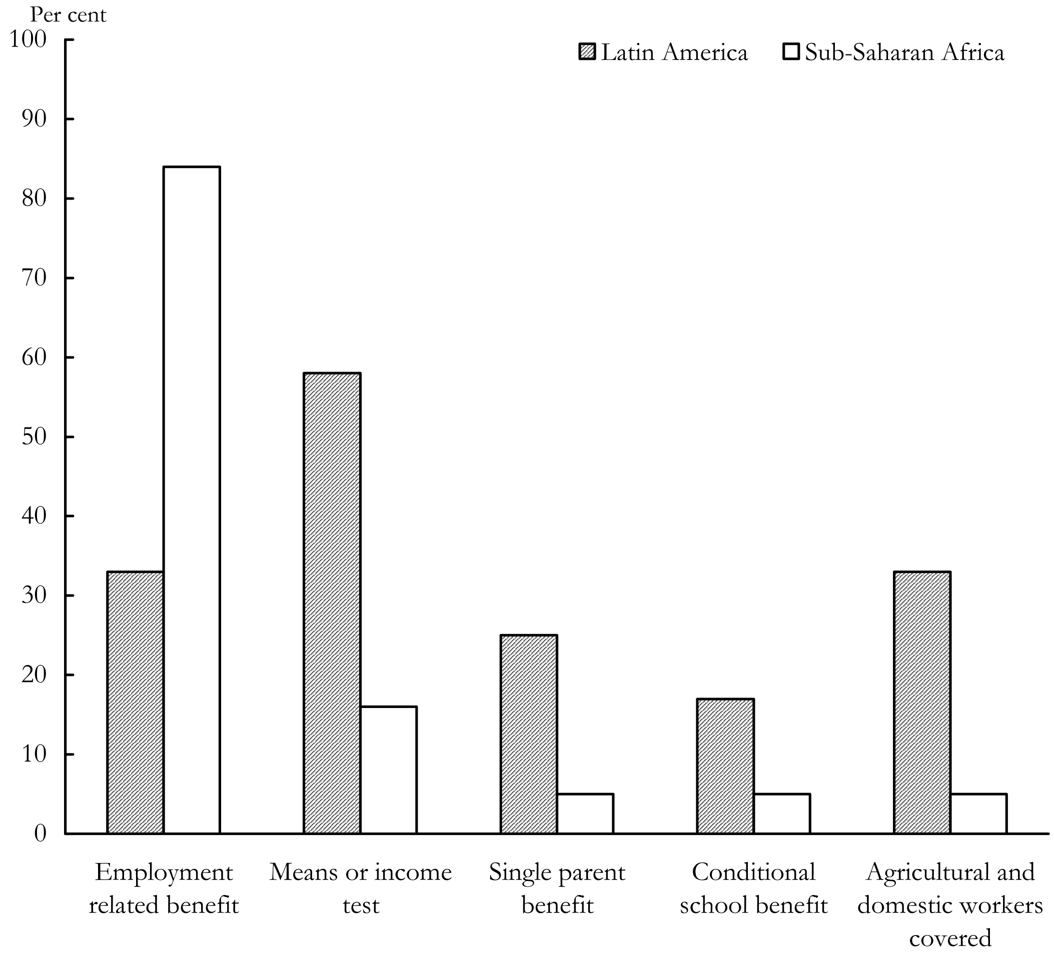
Although none of the developing societies analyzed here have introduced universal child benefits they do in some occasions rely on other means to distribute resources to families with children. *Figure 2* shows institutional characteristics of child benefits among the developing countries that have introduced such benefits.[8] Substantial differences can be found between Latin America and the Sub Saharan countries. The first notable difference is that the Sub-Saharan countries mainly rely on employment related systems. Such benefits are conditional upon employment of one of the parents, in practice most often the father.[9] Five out of six of the African countries have implemented employment based child benefits, whereas only every third country in Latin America has similar benefits.

Regarding the presence of a means-test attached to child benefits, the opposite pattern is found. In this case a majority of Latin American countries with child benefits operate some type of means- or income-test, whereas only one out of six of the Sub-Saharan African countries do so. Three Latin American countries have child benefits that primarily are targeted to single parent households or orphans whereas only one country in Sub Saharan Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS, has similar targeted benefits. The coverage in the population for several of these programs may be even further restricted since many agricultural or domestic workers are ineligible for benefit. Thereby many children in population groups with high poverty risks are likely to be excluded from benefits.

The current structure of benefits is to certain extent a product of the colonial histories of developing countries (Maclean, 2002). It does perhaps not come as a surprise that the African countries that are former colonies of Continental European countries still have employment related systems of social protection – something that may be assumed to be path dependent on previous forms of colonial administration. To what extent such benefit administrations may have hindered (or facilitated) the implementation of child benefits that cover a larger part of the population is an empirical question. Evidence from the OECD countries indicates that the occupationally segmented systems of social protection are most difficult to change (Korpi, 2001).

[8] The bars add up to over 100 per cent since the categories are not mutually exclusive, and some countries thus may combine two or more characteristics in their child benefit systems, most typically by having employment related benefits that exclude agricultural or domestic workers.

[9] In countries where universal child benefits have been introduced benefits are most often paid directly to the mother. Thereby choices around the design of family benefits have clear gender profiles.




*Source: SSPTW 2005.*

**Figure 2** *Type of Child Benefits in 12 Latin American and 19 Sub Saharan African Countries 2005. Percent of Countries with Different Types of Benefits.*

## *Ventures for Further Research*

To map the existence of different types of child benefit systems is of course only the first step when applying an Institutional Regime Approach to developing countries. It is equally important to include different indicators on actual benefit coverage and generosity as well as to collect information on administration and financing. In addition, studies on the old capitalist democracies emphasise the need to analyse gender structures of family policy transfers, for example whether it is the mother or the father who is the recipient of child benefits (Wennemo, 1994). This is not least important since it has been shown that women's more than men's consumption patterns benefit children (UNICEF, 2006). As discussed above the need to analyze actual benefit take-up rates of certain programs in developing countries may also be greater than in the northern industrial democracies, since problems often exist with the actual implementation of legislated reforms.

Previous sections indicate that it may be of interest to widen the scope of social protection programs included for comparison since several other policy measures may work as functional equivalents to child benefits and hence structure the capabilities and well-being of the youngest individuals in society and their parents. Tax systems constitute one such alternative or complementary strategy which frequently has been used in the old welfare democracies (Wennemo, 1994) and increasingly so in the most recent years (Ferrarini, 2006). Other social protection programs include general means-tested schemes as well as social insurance programs that protect the individual and indirectly the family against income losses during unemployment, sickness or old age. In developing regions with high prevalence of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa, the existence of orphan benefits may furthermore be crucial for the structuring of child poverty risks, particularly since loss of one or both parents dramatically may enhance poverty risks.

The relatively straight-forward comparative overview of child benefit systems presented above has provided several interesting results. It is evident that large differences seem to exist in the structure of child benefit programs both within the developing regions studied here and as compared to the old capitalist democracies. Whereas a majority of the latter countries have introduced universal systems no country in Latin America or Sub Saharan Africa have universal state-legislated child benefits in 2005. Child benefits are in these countries instead designed to exclude large parts of the population working in agriculture or domestic work, population groups that often have less educational resources and high poverty risks. In Africa child benefit systems are typically employment-related, while in Latin America benefits mostly are operated on the basis of a means-test.

Another interesting result is found when comparing the current child benefit systems in the developing regions with the historical situation in the old capitalist democracies. It seems as if child benefits were not more common among the longstanding OECD-member countries in their early phase of welfare state building than in developing countries today. The obvious implication of this is of course a comparison between countries and the extension of the Institutional Regime Approach need to take into account differences in social, political and economic development. The upcoming section will discuss such factors in greater detail.

## Demographic and Economical (Pre)Conditional Factors

Family policy and child benefits differ greatly across the countries of interest and are also related and integrated with important structural preconditions that need to be brought into the analyses for realistic evaluations of social protection. Attempts to alleviate poverty depend also on demographic factors, productivity and state capacity to administrate social protection. It has been argued that structural differences of this sort are too large for any meaningful comparisons between developing and developed countries. The traditional so-called variable centred analysis may not be relevant in the same way as it has proved to be for analyses on the old capitalist democracies. Yet, as we shall see, rather simple comparative statistics may fruitfully enhance our understanding of these differences. Comparisons of only current developments in the old capitalist democracies may have limited value for analyses of social protection in developing countries. A more interesting point of departure for social policy discussion is perhaps comparisons with the old capitalist democracies half a century ago, when the welfare state in many of these countries was still in its infancy.

### *Demographic factors*

Demographic factors are relevant for social policy since they define the needy populations and the pressure placed on redistributive policies, not only in the present but also in the longer perspective. Central aspects relate to age dispersion, birth and death rates, life expectancy and infant mortality. Also the prevalence of infectious diseases, such as HIV, needs to be considered. Although prosperity and the wealth of nations is important for the development of redistributive policies, state productivity should be regarded as a necessary but not sufficient means, since the intent of policy makers to redistribute public goods vary.

State capacity to administrate social protection also may profoundly determine redistributive efficiency and fairness. Measures of corruption is here used as a proxy for this feature, since it is often held to reflect "the legal, economic, cultural and political institutions in society" (Svensson, 2005). Corruption may also arise due to institutional flaws.[10] One example is given by the study of public education programs in Uganda, where a per-student grant was offered to cover non-wage expenditure in primary schools. Survey data from 250 schools on the actual receipts of cash and in-kind school material showed that schools received only 13 percent of central government spending on the program (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004).

In *Table 1* central demographic characteristics for Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the long-standing members of OECD are shown for the years 1950 and 2005.[11] Although marked differences between the developing countries and the OECD countries exist today, there is a clear resemblance between the current situation in Latin America and the OECD countries half a century ago. In some respects the situation in Latin America is even more promising than that of the OECD countries at the outset of welfare state expansion in the 1950s. For example, death rates are lower, life expectancy is longer and infant mortality is much lower in Latin America today than in early Post-War OECD countries.

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[10] There are several measures of corruption. The measures used here more closely reflect public corruption and the simple correlation between the two most commonly used indices is 0.97. Main differences relate to which countries and years are covered.

[11] The 18 longstanding OECD member countries are the same as in the above analyses of child benefits.

**Table 1** *Demographic and Health Characteristics in 70 Developing Countries and Old Capitalist Democracies. Regional Averages for 1950 and 2005 (Standard Deviation within Parenthesis).*[1]

| | *Median Age* | *Population Age <15 (%)* | *Population Age >64 (%)* | *Birth Rate (Crude)* | *Death Rate (Crude)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Latin America 2005** | 24.9<br>*(4.2)* | 31.9<br>*(5.6)* | 6.3<br>*(2.4)* | 23.6<br>*(1.6)* | 6.3<br>*(1.6)* |
| **Sub-Saharan Africa 2005** | 18.0<br>*(1.0)* | 43.4<br>*(1.04)* | 3.1<br>*(1.63)* | 40.6<br>*(0.30)* | 15.7<br>*(1.44)* |
| **OECD 2005** | 39.1<br>*(2.38)* | 17.8<br>*(2.19)* | 15.5<br>*(2.45)* | 11.5<br>*(1.82)* | 9.0<br>*(1.24)* |
| **OECD 1950** | 31.2<br>*(3.5)* | 26.2<br>*(3.6)* | 9.1<br>*(1.6)* | 20.1<br>*(3.8)* | 10.2<br>*(1.5)* |

| | *Fertility* | *Life Expectancy* | *Infant Mortality* | *HIV 15-49 Years* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Latin America 2005** | 2.8<br>*(0.7)* | 71.7<br>*(4.5)* | 25.6<br>*(13.2)* | 0.76<br>*(0.42)*[2] |
| **Sub-Saharan Africa 2005** | 5.48<br>*(0.04)* | 48.8<br>*(6.95)* | 99.8<br>*(1.38)* | 5.98<br>*(6.24)* |
| **OECD 2005** | 1.7<br>*(0.23)* | 79.2<br>*(1.16)* | 4.7<br>*(0.83)* | 0.25<br>*(0.15)* |
| **OECD 1950** | 2.8<br>*(0.5)* | 68.1<br>*(2.3)* | 35.7<br>*(11.7)* | n.a<br>- |

*Sources:* UN World Population Prospects (UNWPP, 2007).

*Notes*: [1]Latin America and Sub-Saharan African country clusters refer to UNWPP definitions where no standard deviation measures have been calculated/or nothing else is stated. The 18 longstanding OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. For birth rate (crude), death rate (crude), fertility, life expectancy, infant mortality and infant mortality below age of 5, the year time point 1950 refers to 1950-1955 and 2005 to 2000-2005. [2]Excluding outlier case (Haiti 3.81).

In contrast the development in the Sub-Saharan African region is still lagging, for example the median age is still very low (18 years) and the proportion of population below 15 years is very high. Almost every second person is a child. Birth and death rates as well as fertility rates are high, while average life-expectancy is very low (below 50 years). Also infant mortality is very high by international standards.

Another striking difference is the much more widely spreading of HIV in Africa. Today, in six of the African countries double digit percentages (10-25 percent) of the population aged 15-49 are infected.[12]

### *Economic Factors*

*Table 2* shows statistics on productivity, rural population, female labour force participation and state capacity (as measured by the corruption index) that largely repeat the demographic patterns discerned above. Once again the Latin American countries show distinct similarities with the OECD countries in 1950. Although the African countries have a much lower economic productivity, growth today is quite high by historical standards for this region. Still very large shares of the population live in rural areas in Africa. This result is interesting in light of the findings presented in the section above on child benefits. Since child benefits in these regions often exclude agricultural and domestic workers, large parts of the population are excluded from the programs. Obviously this property lowers the coverage rate of child benefits in these countries. The African women take part in paid work to quite a similar extent as in the Latin American countries. A rather low standard deviation also indicates that most of the developing countries are quite similar in this respect. On average around 40 percent of all women in the developing countries are in the labour force and in none of the countries is the proportion above 51 percent.

One major obstacle against an effective redistribution of financial resources in developing countries is corruption, which is on a much higher level in both Latin America and the Sub-Saharan Africa as compared to the OECD countries. Unfortunately there is no historical data available, which means that comparisons with the OECD countries in earlier phases of welfare state development cannot be made. Today, corruption is much lower across the OECD area (i.e. higher CPI-scores), whereas countries in both Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa on average score well below the mid-score and as such may be regarded as highly corrupt regions. By far the lowest scores (i.e. highest corruption) are found in Africa, with only slight variation around the average.[13] The relatively high dispersion among OECD countries is mainly due to higher corruption in Italy and the United States (if these two countries are excluded the dispersion around the mean is reduced to 0.78).

The data presented in this section indicate that significant differences do exist today between the old capitalist democracies and developing countries. Yet, these differences should not be exaggerated. To the contrary there are striking similarities between the Latin American region and the OECD half a century ago, where Latin America today in certain respects even appears to be in a stronger position. State

[12] These are Botswana, the Central African Republic, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
[13] Only two countries, Botswana and South Africa, score higher than the Latin American average (3.5).

capacity in combination with more globalized labour markets may of course still constitute different preconditions as compared to the situation when welfare state expansion occurred across the OECD in the 1950s. Sub-Saharan African countries are however still lagging in most respects. As such there still appears to be some major structural obstacles that aggravate the possibilities for social reform, even though governments may be interested in implementing effective institutions to combat poverty. Nevertheless, the experiences of the old capitalist democracies show that not all structural preconditions need to be present or determinant for social policy expansion to take place.

**Table 2** *Economic Structural Factors in 70 Developing Countries and Old Capitalist Democracies. Regional averages for 1950 and 2005 (Standard Deviation within Parenthesis).*[1]

| | GDP/Capita[4] | Rural Population | Female Labour Force Participation | State Capacity/ Corruption[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Latin America 2005 | 5,6<br>*(2,7)* | 31.7<br>*(15.1)* | 37.2<br>*(5.3)* | 3.5<br>*(1.3)* |
| Sub-Sah. Africa 2005 | 1,7<br>*(1,63)* | 64.0<br>*(13.8)* | 44.1<br>*(4.3)* | 2.7<br>*(0.59)* |
| OECD 2005 | 23,5<br>*(6,10)* | 40.1<br>*(11.7)* | 67.9<br>*(6.8)* | 8.3<br>*(1.1)* |
| OECD 1950 | 6,9<br>*(2,56)* | 22.4<br>*(15.3)* | 43.9[3]<br>*(10)* | n.a.<br>- |

*Sources:* Rural population (UNWPP, 2007), State Capacity/Corruption (Transparency International, 2005), GDP-data is available for 17 of 21 Latin American countries and 16 of 31 Sub-Saharan African countries. Data for OECD excludes Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden in 1950 and the Netherlands in 2005 (Center for International Comparisons of Production, 2007), female labour force participation aged 15-64 in OECD countries (OECD, 2007), Sub-Saharan Africa in 2004 (African Development Bank, 2007). In Latin America data refers to the percentage of population aged 10 years and over, excluding Jamaica (ECLAC, 2006, p. 39).

*Notes*: [1]Latin America and Sub-Saharan African country clusters refer to UNWPP definitions where no standard deviation measures have been calculated/or nothing else is stated. The 18 longstanding OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. [2]The Corruption Perception Index 2005 (CPI) takes values 0-10, with higher scores indicating lower corruption. [3]Data refers to 1965. [4]GDP/capita in /1000 and at constant prices, chain-estimates 1950 and 2002.

## Discussion

There are obviously major structural economic and socio-political differences between the developing and the old capitalist democracies. Social policy strategies that have proved successful to alleviate poverty in the mature welfare states may not always apply to developing societies. On the other hand, differences between north and south does not down play the meaningfulness of global comparisons of social protection. However, comparisons of the current situation in different parts of the world may not always be the most fruitful alternative if we aim to identify new solutions to alleviate global poverty. A more appropriate comparison might be to relate the experience of developing countries with the past history of the old capitalist democracies.

One frequent argument in the literature on social developments in low- and mid-income countries centers on the idea that one key problem for the extension of social security to the majority of citizens is insufficient financial and administrative capacities. To some extent this may be an oversimplification. Many of the developing countries, especially in Latin America, are on a similar level of economic and demographic development as the old capitalist democracies were about half a century ago, at the outset of what has been labeled as the "golden age" of welfare state development (see Huber and Stephens, 2001). Hence, some of the pre-conditions for an expansion of social protection in the developing countries seem to exist. Countries in these regions are increasingly being democratized and economic performance in terms of changes in the size of GDP have improved considerable over the last decades. For example Africa has experienced its best economic performance in many years (OECD 2004/2005), although there are some major differences between countries in this region. Latin America have had a longer period of economic growth, although the trends over the last 20 years are somewhat mixed also among these countries (Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 2003). Extreme poverty is increasingly being eradicated (World Bank, 2000) and also the demographic trends tend to narrow the gap to the old capitalist democracies.

If we compare the current situation of Latin America and Africa with the OECD countries in the 1950s there is also some resemblance in the institutional set-up of certain parts of social protection. The majority of the Latin American and African countries have some form of child benefit, although they are not of a universal character. Here, the future raises some interesting questions. How do these child benefits relate to other parts of the social protection system? Will the developing countries follow the example of the OECD countries to implement also universal child benefits? If so, would these benefits contribute significantly to the alleviation of global child poverty? How about other social protection programs? Are the developing countries able and willing also to implement and extend social insurance in the same way as the OECD countries did half a century ago?

The discussion above indicates that many developing countries are at a distinct phase in social and economic development where important decisions can be made as regards poverty alleviation and the prevalence of comprehensive social protection systems. Which path or redistributive strategy that these countries will follow is of course difficult to assess here. Nevertheless it is an important question that has to be paid increased attention in the comparative social policy literature. It is also a question that requires the establishment of new data on institutional structures that hitherto are largely missing on the research agenda of the developing countries. The Institutional Regime Approach sketched in this paper can here be a valuable tool for investments of this kind. At the core of this framework is data collection and preparation, where indicators on the organization and quality of distinct social protection arrangements are at focus.

We fully recognize that the indicators proposed in this paper have to be complemented with other forms of variables capturing not only formal institutional arrangements but also informal social relationships and the role of private actors in the provision of welfare. Yet, the important issue is to develop a set of indicators that allow for comparisons of institutional structures across both time and space. This approach offers possibilities for comparative research not only within the group of developing countries, but also between developing countries and the old capitalist democracies. The framework proposed in this paper bears strong similarities with the longstanding tradition of institutionally informed studies on social protection in the more developed industrialized welfare democracies and thus facilitates such comparisons.

This being said, it is nevertheless of crucial importance that careful consideration is paid to the particularities of developing countries. Political and policy history, political institutions, the attitudes of elites as well as the public and administrative capacity are the initially identified important factors that should be considered in analyses of social protection in developing countries. Although the Institutional Regime Approach places close focus on formal regulations and legislation, also other welfare providers that are particularly important in developing countries must be taken into account. It should also be recognized that formal regulations and legislation of developing societies do not always translate into social rights actually enjoyed by citizens of these countries. Sometimes there may be substantial gaps between the introduction and implementation of social protection. Aspects related to the delivery of social benefits should therefore be of primary concern in the collection and processing of good quality data on the structure of social protection in developing countries.

Without denying that these aspects are crucial, we would also like to draw attention to the political economy of social protection reform. A focus on institutional structures is particularly valuable for analyzes of the political economy of social protection reform, as well as for investigations of the linkages between social policy organization and outcomes, such as the relationship between child benefits and child poverty. In this vein, social policy institutions can be seen as "intervening variables" (Korpi and Palme 1998), on the one hand reflecting causal factors such as actions by political and social actors and various interests groups, and on the other hand having effects on distributive processes and outcomes such as poverty. Also in this context the Institutional Regime Approach may provide a suitable middle-range alternative. As argued by Casamatta et al (2000), most analyses that have analyzed the political economy of social protection reform have tended to focus on how political factors affect the size rather than the type of the system.

Many of the studies on social protection in developing countries are case-studies restricted in both time and space. This orientation can be seen both as a natural response to how social policy typically is arranged in developing countries and as a consequence of the type of information readily available for researcher to analyse. The main drawback of this focus is that it fails to identify common factors that account for institutional variation among the developing countries and in a more global perspective. Here, we identify a need for an alternative institutional approach to the study on social protection in developing countries which includes more programs and countries in successful comparisons.

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