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**SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

**A HIGH LEVEL SYMPOSIUM**

**Organized by UNESCO, MERCOSUR, GASPP and UNU-CRIS**

**C o n c l u s i o n s**

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# **SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION.**

## **A HIGH LEVEL SYMPOSIUM.**

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Montevideo 21-23 February 2006.

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### **1. Introduction.**

The aim of this symposium was to analyse the social dimensions of regional integration policies. It was suggested that policy orientated social science could help identify the potential advantages for countries of taking further steps towards the development of regional social policies. Increasingly regions might be considered an emerging space between the national and the global for the formulation and implementation of such policies. The context of this focus on the regional level was the absence of a social clause in global economic and financial policies and disagreements between countries as to how to reconcile economic openness with social standards. One strategy to achieve a socially just globalization might be to enhance the role of regions. The symposium was contextualized by two background papers commissioned from the United Nations University (authored by Luk Van Langenhove) and the Globalism and Social Policy Programme (GASPP) authored by Nicola Yeates and Bob Deacon.

### **2. Report.**

The symposium consisted of three workshops, one round table brain-storming session and a concluding meeting at which the conclusions reported below were presented and endorsed. Ten papers were presented by scholars from Europe, North America, East Asia and Latin America and interventions were made by a number of regional integration bodies with different experiences of developing a social dimension to their regional formation. Accounts were provided in these papers and presentations of the regional social policies of ASEAN, MERCOSUR, EU, the

Andean Community, ECOWAS, the East African Community, SAARC, the Arab region, the Black Sea Economic Association and the Pacific Islands Forum.

It was clear that while a number of regional groupings had considerable experience of developing regional social policies others had given less attention to this aspect of regional integration. Among the achievements of note were the ASEAN Social Charter, the Social and Economic Council of MERCOSUR, the Integral Plan for Social Development of the Andean Community and the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund.

### **3. Conclusions**

Four conclusions were drawn and broadly agreed and one specific recommendation to UNESCO was agreed upon.

#### **a. REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICIES FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION.**

Regional groupings of countries would achieve a higher degree of regional integration and stability if they provided a) for the free movement of peoples within the region and b) policies to increase a sense of social solidarity within the region. Specifically regional integration is strengthened by cross border redistribution, cross border social regulations and the articulation of regional social rights. At the same time it is enhanced by cross border cooperation in health, education and social protection policies. Policies to address issues of cross border migrant labour are of particular importance. Regions may adopt a number of instruments to enhance the social dimension of their region including laws, funds, benchmarking and intra regional social policy dialogue. Regional civil society organizations are often allies in enhancing the social dimension of regionalism.

**b. REGIONAL MULTI-LATERALISM.**

A world of regions each with a strong social dimension might provide an alternative and more effective model for global social governance. Southern countries and regions would be more empowered and the threats posed to social solidarities by economic globalisation would be reduced. The case exists for exploring the feasibility of establishing a Standing Committee at UN level of all the Regional Officials responsible for the Social Dimension of regions together with the ILO, WHO, UNDP, UNDESA and the UN regional economic commissions. At the same time it is suggested that some regional associations in the Global South might act as transmission belts for ODA (and resources derived from new international taxes) to better set regional social standards and plan and monitor on a regional basis the meeting of the MDGs.

**c. INTER-REGIONAL DIALOGUES ON REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICY.**

Peer review mechanisms, lesson drawing and benchmarking are effective ways of enhancing governance at all levels. The same applies at the regional level. The case exists for more inter-regional dialogues in the sphere of regional social policies. Such a dialogue should be inclusive and involve regional officials, regional civil society organizations, regional parliamentarians and regional scientific communities.

**d. MORE COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS IS NEEDED.**

All of the above developments would be enhanced by a more effective engagement of social scientists and policy makers at the regional level.

***RECOMMENDATION TO UNESCO:***

It is proposed that UNESCO develop a:

REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH , POLICY ANALYSIS and POLICY DIALOGUE PROGRAMME.

The aims and objectives would be to:

- a) Map and provide a comparative evaluation of the extent to which regional associations of countries have developed a social policy dimension to their regional integration.
- b) Facilitate an inter-regional dialogue, policy learning and capacity building process between regions with regard to the social policy dimension of regionalism. This dialogue would be at a number of levels including regional officials, the social scientific community and civil society. The objective would be to advance the social policy dimension of regionalism.

This proposal is made by the organizers of the Symposium, Bob Deacon, Nicola Yeates and Luk Van Langenhove, taking account of the proceedings and was endorsed at a final meeting of the Symposium on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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