UNU-CRIS Occasional Papers

0-2006/6

Globalism, Regionalism and Social Policy:
framing the debate *

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1. Globalisation: the challenge to social policy

First let us define social policy. Social policy may be defined in a number of ways that complement each other. Broadly speaking, it refers to "collective interventions directly affecting transformation in social welfare, social institutions and social relations" (Mkandawire 2001:1). At one level it is about policies and practices that support the means of social participation – typically those services in the domains of health and social care, income maintenance, employment (or livelihoods), housing and education. At another level social policy may be understood as those mechanisms, policies and procedures used by governments, working with other actors, to alter the distributive and social outcomes of economic activity. These mechanisms and policies may be conceptualised as being constituted of three strands: redistribution, regulation and rights. *Redistribution* mechanisms alter, usually in a way as to make more equal, the distributive outcomes of economic activity. *Regulatory* activity frames the activities of businesses and other private actors so that they take more account of social aims and impacts. The articulation of *social rights* leads to some (more or less) effective legislative and institutional mechanisms to ensure citizens access their rights. Social Policy within one country is made up, then, of Social Redistribution, Social Regulation and the promulgation of Social Rights.

Neo-liberal globalisation has generated a vigorous debate amongst scholars, policy-makers and activists about how to preserve existing, and develop new, social policies to provide for the social needs of populations. Much of this debate has focused on identifying appropriate national-level social policy responses and strategies in the context of increasing international mobility of people, finance and ideas and increasing global production and delivery of goods and services. This debate has particularly focused on the social impacts of reforms that are presently being made to national health, educational, employment and income maintenance institutions and arrangements as well as on those that ought to be made to them. A major concern is the negative consequences of 'free trade' and international competition on the funding and provision of public social provision on the one hand and on access to public services by citizens and residents on the other. Increasingly, attention is turning to address the kinds of policies necessary to achieve socially-equitable development under contemporary conditions of globalisation -- a socially-just globalisation (Yeates, 2001).

One response to this perceived threat to public social provision at the national level has been to argue for more coherent cooperation and coordination at the transnational level. The idea of a *transnational* social policy is increasingly taking hold among policy scholars and researchers, though it is not without historical precedent either in principle or in practice. What, however, is increasingly being pointed out is that contemporary globalisation processes require the need for social policies on *both national and transnational levels* (Yeates and Irving, 2005; Yeates, forthcoming). Furthermore, these policies need to be coherent and complementary to one another in order to maximise their effectiveness.

There are different expressions of transnational social policy. One expression is *bi-lateralism*, involving cross-border cooperation between two countries. There are numerous examples of such cooperation within social security and pensions, employment, and much of international aid is provided on a bi-lateral basis (Stubbs, 2003). A second expression of transnational social policy involves *global* redistribution, regulation and social rights (Deacon, 2005). A strengthened UN-based global social governance would be a part of this strategy (Deacon et al 2003). However, formidable obstacles to this are involved. Many governments and non-governmental bodies in the Global North and Global South alike are unsure about the appropriateness of a Northern-driven reformed globalisation imposing "inappropriate" global social and labour standards, while many actors in the South are reluctant to buy into even the more progressive forms of conditionality. A third expression is effective regional groupings of countries that develop cross-border *regional* redistribution, regulation and rights articulation mechanisms. This regionalism provides a constructive alternative to both the bi-lateral and global modes of international redistribution, rights and regulation.

This Briefing Paper sets out the case for a regional-based strategy to achieve a socially-just globalisation.
- It begins by reviewing some general advantages for countries to pursue their social policy objectives through regional formations and some challenges arising therefrom, including those from emerging mega-regionalism.
- It then sets out a principled case for regional social policy and illustrates this with current examples; here, we make the case for *regional social redistribution, regional social regulation and regional social rights.*
- The case for, and examples of, inter-regional dialogues on the social (policy) dimensions of regionalism is then explored.
- The paper concludes by drawing out the implications of these trends and issues for developing a strengthened social policy dimension of regional integration. This involves rethinking global social governance reform. Proposals for inter-regional dialogues and research are explicated.

2. Regional cooperation and social policy: opportunities and challenges

Regional formations potentially offer a number of advantages. Since regional formations often entail groups of countries with similar (or at least less diverse) cultural, legal and political characteristics and legacies, agreement on the scope and nature of collaboration may be more feasible and progress can potentially be made more quickly compared with global multilateral negotiations involving a wide diversity of countries. Because of this greater similarity, regional formations can offer countries access to a broader menu of policy alternatives (Yeates, 2005).

Regional formations also offer a means of 'locking in' internationalising flows of finance and production and labour on a regional basis. Regionalist trading strategies are an effective means of protecting, promoting and reshaping a regional division of labour, trade and production. Nurturing and protecting internationalising trade flows enables fiscal resources to be generated for national and regional social policy purposes. Too often global trade comes with tax exemptions for local and global companies that erode such fiscal resources. At the same time Southern regional formations can become a 'transmission belt' that receives increased Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) or revenue from projected global taxes. In this way the social policy conditions placed upon countries in receipt of such global funds can be managed and determined through peer review mechanisms of countries within the same region. The offer by the African Union to manage the increased flows of ODA to Africa is one such example. Such strengthened regional formations can also provide a career move for Southern civil servants who might otherwise be lost to the World Bank or other Northern agencies.

For smaller and developing countries in particular regional formations offer enhanced access to and influence over policy developments (Yeates, 2005). In the EU, for example, small countries can have a strong blocking effect on the development of social policy. These national influences on regional formations are not necessarily negative: more socially-developed countries can force upwards social standards in the poorer members of that formation. Regional formations offer further advantages to countries within global multilateral negotiations and fora, namely amplifying their voicing of regional circumstances and positions. Finally, given the aforementioned difficulties involved in the forging of global multilateral standards, regional formations might give countries especially those in the South a stronger voice to advance their own social standards and at a faster rate than would be possible through global fora (Yeates, 2005).

Of course, these opportunities are not without their difficulties and challenges. For a start, there has been little popular demand for regionalist projects with the formations tending to originate in discussions and negotiations within restricted policy-making circles. This does not deny subsequent involvement

by labour organisations and development agencies in regionalist political processes, or the fact that such organisations and agencies can use these processes to demand a stronger social dimension to national and regional policies. However, it does mean that these formations mostly exist primarily as trade (or political) agreements of various kinds and that their purpose is not primarily a social developmental one. Moreover, most regional formations exist purely as inter-governmental trade agreements or semi-institutionalised regional fora and consequently have limited or no supranational-level political authority or set of institutions that many argue is necessary for a coherent, binding and effective regional social policy (Yeates, 2005).

At the same time in each region there are complicating factors associated with competition with more open trading arrangements that are affecting the pace of development of the social dimensions of the regions. This arises from the formation and existence of 'mega-regionalist' groups. One example of such a group is the EU: its membership has doubled over the last three decades and is set to expand further. This is putting a strain on its social dimension with some countries restricting access to labour markets and social services from even legal intra-EU migrant workers. Another example is the US-led Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA) associating North and South America and another example is APEC linking the Pacific economies. Given the free trade agenda of these mega-regional formations, one of the issues arising from these developments concerns the impact on regional social policies. To what extent are 'closed' regions that currently have, or which might develop, a social dimension cut across by 'open' regions that exist essentially as trading blocs which downplay these social equity and social policy dimensions?

Mercosur provides one illustration of this issue, and the question is whether its social dimension survive the creation of the mega-regionalist free trade project of the FTAA. While both Mercosur and the FTAA aim to promote international trade, the model of economic integration underpinning these formations is quite different (Yeates, 2005). Thus, whereas Mercosur aims at the free movement of production factors, the FTAA is concerned with market access (goods, services and investment) and seeks to internationalise the NAFTA model across the Americas (Vaz n.d.; Anderson 2001). The FTAA's absence of a social agenda that would advance the public interest has not gone unchallenged. Indeed, the FTAA process has generated the mobilisation of social forces nationally and trans-nationally to oppose the FTAA (Anderson 2001; Hemispheric Social Alliance 2002). The accomplishment of a social agenda within the FTAA (or its derailment in favour of a Latin American only trading bloc) hinges on the ability of these forces to forge "multilateralism from below" (Vaz n.d.:12; from Yeates 2005). More generally, recent developments within Latin America indicate the increased awareness of the limitations of pursuing free trade policies through mega-regionalist mechanisms. Indeed, there has been a strategic resurgence of affiliation with existing regional groupings (Mercosur combining with the Andean

Community?) as a means through which to pursue regionalist internationalisation (including social policy) strategies.

Related to this is the tension that often arises between a country's 'responsibility' to promote stronger social policy within its own regional groupings and its own external relations with other groupings. At issue here are the overall coherence of the multi-level strategies that governments pursue, operating on bi-lateral and global levels as well as at the regional level. Thus, global and bi-lateral strategies can potentially undermine the achievements made at regional level. For example there is a concern that the separate trade deal between South Africa and the EU might undermine regional solidarity within SADC. The USA'a Africa Opportunity Act encouraging bilateral deals between African countries and the USA may have such an effect too. Indeed the multiplicity of bilateral trade deals cuts in a bewildering way across systematic attempts to develop a strong social dimension to regional formations, and the evidence that regions (and countries within them) will choose to open themselves up rapidly to global markets is there. In a major review of Southern Regionalism Page (2000: 290) concluded that:

> "So far … regions have moved more in the direction of extending their liberalization to the rest of the world than finding ways of discriminating more tightly".

3. The case for, and the content of, regional cooperation and social policy in principle

Despite these obstacles several emerging trading blocks and other regional associations of countries in the South are beginning to confront the questions of how to forge an appropriately balanced relationship between trade and labour, social and health standards and how to maintain levels of taxation in the face of competition to attract inward capital investment. In this context the potential advantage for developing countries of building a social dimension to regional groupings of countries have been commented upon by policy analysts (Deacon 2001; Room 2004; Yeates, 2005) and is being acted upon within several world regions. Advantages for countries of developing such an approach may be regarded as having *external and internal dimensions*.

In relation to the rest of the world, as we suggested above such an approach affords protection from global market forces that might erode national social entitlements and can create the possibility of such grouped countries having a louder voice in the global discourse on economic and social policy in UN and other fora.

Internally through intergovernmental agreements, regionalism would make possible the development of
- regional social *redistribution* mechanisms,

These can take several forms ranging from regionally-financed funds to target particularly depressed localities or to tackle particularly significant health or food shortage issues or to stimulate cross-border cooperation. Capacity-building of weaker governments by stronger ones is another approach. If such mechanisms are in place then North-South transfers either funded by ODA or global taxes could be transmitted to specific localities via the regional structure.

- regional social, health and labour *regulations*,

These can include standardised health and safety regulations to combat an intra -regional 'race to the bottom'. Food production and handling standards could also be included. Agreements on the equal treatment of men and women, majority and minority (including indigenous) groups could also be included.

- regional mechanisms that give citizens a voice to challenge their governmentsin terms of social *rights*.

Principles of social policy and levels of social provision could be articulated and used as benchmarks for countries to aspire to. In the long term the EU's European Court of Justice or the Council of Europe's Court of Human Rights could serve as useful models of mechanisms by which citizens can be empowered to challenge the perceived failures to fulfil such rights.

- regional intergovernmental co-operation in social policy in terms of health, migration, education, food, livelihood and social security.

The possibilities for the sharing of specialist health services are countless. Cross-border agreements on education mobility can foster regional identity. Cross-border labour mobility issues can be managed more effectively and with greater justice if there are regional mutual recognition agreements and portable social security and pension entitlements.

- regional regulation of the de-facto private regional social policies of health, education, utilities and social protection companies.

Regional formations may in principle be in a stronger position in relation to private suppliers to set, monitor and enforce cross-border rules regarding, for example, access rights to commercial services.

4. Track record of emerging regional social policy in some regions

The European Union in the Global North represents the most advanced form of such regional integration. In terms of supranational social policy it can be said that the EU has an embryonic social policy in all the three fields of social redistribution, social regulation and social rights. The structural fund is the mechanism whereby the EU's funds (which are contributed to approximately according to country GNP and population size) are allocated to the development of impoverished or economically underdeveloped areas within the EU Member States. There are a range of regulations in the fields of occupational health and safety, health services, equal opportunities, labour law, and social security and pensions schemes, together with social dialogue mechanisms that apply to all countries, including those that are about to join the EU (Threlfall, 2002). In terms of regional social rights the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers was established at an earlier stage and was added to in 2000 with the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Additionally, the idea that the EU Commission should have more powers in the social field also gradually gained ground so that now there is in place the Open Method of Coordination (de la Porte and Pochet, 2002). The OMC in the fight against social exclusion was introduced in March 2000; in the area of pensions it was introduced in March 2001 and in the area of health care it was introduced in June 2001. As a mechanism whereby national civil servants are encouraged to ratchet up their polices against agreed EU-wide benchmarks and through policy learning processes, it has its champions (de la Porte and Nanz, 2004; Chalmers and Lodge, 2003).

There are some signs of such a regional approach to social policy emerging in the Global South. Earlier one of us (Deacon, 2001) reviewed developments in a selection of regions in Africa, Latin America and East Asia and demonstrated some progress, as summarised in the table below. Subsequent research will enable this summary table to be updated and expanded to include many more regions.

REGIONAL SOCIAL POLICY	SADC	MERCOSUR	ASEAN
Regional Redistribution	Customs duties in SACU eroding so less prospect for a regional fund.	Proposals for a regional social fund. A few regionally funded projects in border areas.	Nothing significant. Some capacity building for new members.
Regional Social and Labour Regulation	Not yet agreed but campaigned for by COSATU.	Important labour and social declaration. Some reciprocal	Declaration on ASEAN and Caring Societies.

		social security entitlement. Joint health and safety inspection.	No legal force.
Regional Health Policy	In existence and recently strengthened with equity concerns.	Little documented.	Yes but dependent on external funds. Recent trade and health initiative.
Regional Education Policy	Recent capacity review. Quality assurance and other measures.	Mutual recognition of qualifications.	ASEAN university scholarships and exchanges. Curricula design in schools.
De facto Private Regionalism	New initiatives by regional private health care companies.	Beginnings of cross-border private provision.	Major lobbying of international health insurance companies.
Cross-border Learning from Best Practice.	Yes, especially pensions and conditional grants to school children.	Cuts both ways re Chile argued for by Bank and Uruguay seen as alternative approach.	Recently through safety-net working party.
Human including Social Rights Moves.	SADC Gender Unit as model. Call for SADC court of rights.	Civil society lobby with regional focus. Possible new MERCOSUR Working Group.	Policy of strict non-interference. Regional lobbies, are developing

Additionally, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has included social issues on the agendas of its summits. In 2002 SAARC signed a regional convention for the promotion of child welfare and a regional convention on the prevention of trafficking of women and children for prostitution. Earlier in 1997 a regional food security reserve was established while in 2002 the SAARC tuberculosis centre was established in Kathmandu to coordinate national programmes (ICSW, 2003). The twice-postponed 13th summit of SAARC was held in November 2005. Highlights of the Summit Declaration are: the SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation; a regional food bank, a Poverty Alleviation Fund, and new resolves to address problems of natural disasters and pandemics and the trafficking of women and children (http://www.hindu.com/2005/11/14/stories/2005111408251400.htm).

The Andean Community (www.comunidandina.org) agreed in 2004 (Cucalon, 2006, this workshop) a regional Integral Plan for Social Development (PIDS) that involves technical cooperation on social policy among Andean countries

including the exchange of good practice, regional monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and a number of regional social projects. An issue here is the relationship between the Andean community, Mercosur and, of course, the FTAA.

5. Inter-regional policy dialogue and cooperation

Progress in the development of strengthened regionalism with a social dimension will be influenced by two kinds of global dialogue: a North-South one and a South-South one. The North-South dialogue comprises two strands. The first strand is the USA-South 'dialogue' which is being driven by the USA to open up all world regions to either broader trading blocs that involve the USA (APEC, FTAA) or to bilateral trade deals with the USA as we discussed earlier. This way spells disaster for regional social protectionism in the South. The second strand is the EU-Southern Regionalism dialogue that is a little more complex. On the one hand it contains features present in the USA-South dialogue where a southern regionalism is being encouraged to open up trade links with the EU to its advantage (Keet and Bello, 2004); on the other hand it involves an inter-regional policy dialogue that seems to be motivated to spread the message of the importance of developing a social dimension to regional trading arrangements. For example, one of the aims of the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) Trust Fund that was established with EU and Asian funding and managed by the World Bank was to expand the dialogue between these two regions. Amongst the activities of this programme featured a series of social policy conferences involving European and Asian scholars and policy-makers. The volume arising from this series (Marshall and Butzbach, 2003) retierates the case for inter-regional exchanges to promote understanding on the importance of implementing social standards in the context of globalisation. Similarly, the EU missions inside SADC and MERCOSUR have capacity-building and training elements to them that do not seem primarily motivated by protecting the trading interests of the EU (Farrell, 2004). The EU-CARICOM health partnership entails the provision of services and technical assistance by the EU to strengthen institutional responses to HIV/AIDS amongst CARICOM member states (Yeates, 2005).

In part, this conumdrum reflects the ambiguity of the role of the EU on the world stage in relation to globalisation. Is it possible to characterise the response of the EU as a whole as a reaction to the pressures of a liberalising globalisation? To what extent has the EU used its position as a globally powerful player to push for socially-responsible globalisation? One of us argued elsewhere (Deacon, 1999) that the response of the EU to neo-liberal globalisation in terms of both its internal and its external social policy has been variable over time and between component parts of the EU system. Certainly if the EU wishes to extend its influence to help construct a world of regions with a strong social dimension in order to counter global neo-liberalism then it will

have to put its social development policy before its trade interests and it will have to match its moralising about rights with resource transfers to enable these rights to be realised in practice.

This brings us back again to the importance of a South-South policy space and dialogue on Southern Regionalism. Within this context countries in the Global South have themselves developed mechanisms for inter-regional dialogue and cooperation and their regional groupings have become global actors. Among the North-South processes are the European Union's engagement via the EC-Gulf Cooperation Council, EU-MERCOSUR, EU-SAARC, EU-CARICOM and EU-SACU (South African Customs Union). The EU also engages with Asian countries (ASEAN 7 plus China, Japan and South Korea) through ASEM (the Asia-Europe Meeting). But other Southern regional formations are also engaging in similar ways. Examples here are cooperation between MERCOSUR and the Southern African Customs Union, and between SAARC and ASEAN (Yeates, 2005). What part such inter-regional dialogues could play in strengthening the social dimension of regionalism is a salient issue.

Experience suggests that inter-governmental or inter-regional collaboration at government level alone does not necessarily result in a stronger social dimension to regional formations. Such inter-regional dialogues are likely to reflect the trade/commercial orientation and interests of the regional formations engaged in that dialogue (Yeates, 2005). Even those regional formations with a strong internal social policy may place trade interests above those of social development when it comes to engaging with other regional formations. Given the centrality of the EU to the development of many of these trans-regional collaborative ventures, it is in a prime leadership position to push for a stronger social dimension in these negotiations. But even here the EU is often placing its regional commercial interests above social developmental ones (Deacon 1999).

One issue, then, concerns modes of democratic representation in and governance of regional formations and the trans-regional structures that subsequently develop. This is a question around which civil society groups have mobilised in the ASEM context (Yeates, forthcoming). The challenge for civil society groups is to forge trans-national alliances that succeed in integrating social development issues onto trans-regional political agendas. The Transnational Institute is currently facilitating, with the support of the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) in South Africa, Focus on the Global South in Thailand, the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE) and Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC), a South-South dialogue on Alternative Regionalisms within which trans-border civil society movements are paying a significant part (TNI, 2004; see also Keet and Bello, 2004).

6. Conclusions.

First, some conclusions on the growth of the social policy dimensions of regionalism:

- There is a tangible social policy dimension to several regional groupings.
- Regional civil society and, to some extent, the regional secretariats are often more focussed on advancing this dimension of regional cooperation and integration than are governments or business groups.
- Emerging region-wide social problems are stimulating further intergovernmental co-operation. These include cross-border labour migration, and people trafficking, cross-border infectious and transmitted diseases and cross-border problems arising from food shortages.
- The development of 'free trade' arrangements within some regions is likely to lead to increased concern with differential labour, social and health standards and other aspects of regional social policy.
- In most regions the political choice between either strengthening the existing regions (together with their emerging social policy dimension) or dissolving the existing regions in favour entering neo-liberal inspired mega-trading blocks will need to be faced.

Second, a conclusion regarding the implications for global social governance reform and the architecture of North-South aid flows.

While there are ongoing proposals being progressed within the UN to reform the architecture of global social governance (strengthening ECOSOC) and at the same time innovative ideas emerging regarding the increase of international resources (thorough supranational taxation, philanthropy and public-private partnerships for global public goods) too little attention is given within these reform ideas to the strengthening of their regional component. Empowering Southern Regional Groupings of countries both as agencies to set regional social and labour standards and as agencies to handle aid flows form North to South would cut through the current North-South impasse in such reform discussions and supranational social policy making. Such regional groupings could work with strengthened regional development banks controlled by countries within those regions. If such groupings could be represented on the Canadian-led G20 as regions rather than by means of big countries that happen to be in regions further progress towards a more balanced system of global governance might ensue. A case exists for UNESCO or another agency to convene a meeting of all those who are players in the global social governance reform discussions to consider this point. Such players include OECD:DAC, ECOSOC, UNDESA, ILO, WHO, World Bank, the Canadian-led G20, the EU and key Southern Regions.

Third, conclusions regarding on-going inter-regional policy dialogues.

For the social policy dimension of regionalism agenda to be developed there is a need for UNESCO or other agency to bring into being a formal and regular series of policy dialogues between the Southern Regional Officials concerned with the social dimension of their region together with key government Ministries of Social Affairs/Social Development. Such meetings should be informed by selected social policy scholars.

At the same time, through initiatives such as that shown by the TNI social policy and development issues need to be given high priority on the agenda of regional civil society meetings both with their own regions (such as the European Social Forum, Asian Social Forum, African Social Forum etc) and meetings held the context of trans-regional fora such as the World Social Forum.

Fourth, conclusions about future research.

Further research on the social policy dimension of regionalism needs to be facilitated urgently. Funding is needed to enable a social policy research institute specialising in issues of globalism and transnationalism such as GASPP working with one that specialises in regionalism such as UNU-CRIS to instigate a comprehensive research programme on the social policy dimensions of regional integration. This social policy-oriented research could feed into one or more Southern-based think tanks explicitly concerned with these issues. The UNESCO-Most programme and/or UNRISD might provide an umbrella for such work. Some years ago the UNTCDC section initiated a South-South dialogue on social policy but did not have then have funds to develop the work (Deacon 2001a). Now might an opportunity to re-involve them?

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