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The politics and practicalities of universalism: towards a citizen-centred perspective on social protection

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Abstract

The long-standing divide between universal and residual approaches in the field of social policy is also evident in the emerging agenda around social protection. Underpinning this divide are contrasting worldviews. Arguments in favour of residual approaches are frequently couched in a market-centred discourse which stresses efficiency, incentives and a cost-benefit calculus while those advocating universalism favour a state-centred discourse and normative arguments. This article attempts to bridge the divide by offering a pragmatic argument for incremental universalism which stresses the responsibilities as well as rights associated with citizenship and suggest the need to factor in wider economic and social externalities in estimating both costs and benefits.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, a combination of factors have set in train the apparently inexorable integration of the world's economies (Standing, 1999; UNRISD, 1995). While these include a variety of economic and technological factors, politics have played a major role in shaping the character of this globalisation, with the ascendance of neo-liberal ideologies among the world's more powerful countries spearheading the move to market-led growth and the downsizing of the state in most regions of the world.

The scale of integration into the global economy has exposed many countries to the vagaries of the global capital markets, highlighting the downside of globalisation, the new forms of risk and periodic crises that have accompanied the emergence of new opportunities (World Bank, 2001; ILO, 2004). They have drawn attention to the need for social protection measures to be put in place on an ex ante basis rather than in the aftermath of crisis, paving the way for more institutionalised systems of social protection in place of ex-post responses of the past.

However, there is as yet little consensus on the basic principles that should inform the design of these systems. Instead debates on this issue appear to have reproduced the long-standing divide between universal and residual approaches that has characterised social policy debates more generally. Universal social protection, according to a recent UNRISD report (2010), 'covers the entire population with adequate benefits and is grounded in claimable entitlements, whether derived from rights or payments by institutions and individuals' (p. 135). Residual approaches, by contrast, target their efforts to those classified as 'deserving' or the 'needy'. Although the reality is closer to a continuum than a clear-cut divide, with many countries combining targeted and universal approaches, where a country lies on this continuum 'can be decisive in spelling out individuals' life chances and in characterizing the social order' (Mkandawire, 2005: p. iii).

The World Bank's early 'risk management framework' exemplified the residual approach (Holzmann and Jorgensen, 1999). It considered markets in credit and insurance to represent the optimal solution for providing protection against the various classes of risks to which individuals, households and communities are exposed, but recognised the absence or imperfections of these markets in many developing country contexts. It therefore accepted the need for the state to play a role in welfare provision - with two important caveats: that the state should not 'crowd out' private initiatives by markets, communities and households but should only intervene where these prove inadequate and that the development of markets-based arrangements should remain the long term goal.

By contrast, the ILO (2004) argued that the volatility of market forces and growth of 'precarious jobs' that had accompanied globalisation had highlighted the unreliability of markets as a source of social protection. Such volatility was not a class-specific phenomenon: it threatened both rich and poor. It therefore called for 'a commitment to shared universal values, and solidarity among peoples across the world' (p x) to shape a process of globalisation with a strong social dimension. A minimum level of social protection that could provide a 'socio-economic floor' to the global economy should form a central, undisputed aspect of this process.

It was cross-class solidarity around common concerns of this kind that had given rise to some of the universalistic welfare states in the European context (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The scale of recent financial crises would appear to have provided grounds for a similar consensus around the need for universalist approaches in developing countries. But this does not seem to have happened. While the World Bank has moved away from the privileged place assigned to markets in its earlier focus on social risk management in favour of the more interventionist approach embodied in Guhan's 'protection-prevention-promotion' framework and widely adopted by others in the field, it still falls short of any commitment to universalism or social justice.[1]

Research into the factors shaping patterns of social protection in different countries have drawn attention to the importance of prevailing norms and values as a major factor in determining whether there is broad-based support for redistributive policies. The significance of such findings is that, in democratic systems, it would be difficult to generate the revenue necessary to finance universal social protection without such support. This paper sets out to explore the possibility of building this broader based support for redistributive policies. The first sections of the paper examine the nature of the antipathy to ideas about universalism within national and international contexts. It finds that this antipathy appears to reflect two sets of considerations: normative considerations relating to the perceived fairness of universalism and practical considerations relating to its affordability. These are both valid concerns and need to be taken seriously by those advocating redistributive measures. The later sections of the paper therefore seeks to marshal arguments and evidence that do not necessarily reject these concerns but offer alternative perspectives on them which may be more conducive to universalist principles.

2. **The fluctuating fortunes of universalism**

The idea of universalism was once central to the development agenda. Most post colonial governments embarked on the project of nation-building on the basis of state-led interventions which combined capital-intensive, import-substituting industrialisation with a commitment to universal social policies. While social security measures were initially confined to the groups most closely related to the nation-building project (civil servants, the military, industrial workers), the expectation was that industrialisation would gradually bring all workers into the formal labour force and within the orbit of formal social security –a process of progressive universalization 'from the strong to the weak' (Gough, 2000).

The results were rarely satisfactory, leading to systems of provision variously described as 'highly truncated' in Latin America (de Ferranti et al., 2000) and 'patently regressive' in India (Guhan, 1992). The power of vested interests within largely unaccountable state structures gave rise to highly bureaucratic and dualistic welfare systems which subsidized a privileged minority while leaving poor and socially excluded groups reliant on their own meagre resources or the patronage of the more powerful. Over time, other factors, including population growth, inflation, and unmanageable fiscal deficits further widened the gap between social provision and social need.

The ascendance of the neo-liberal paradigm within the international development community in the 1980s served to simultaneously frame the dominant critique of these 'old' social policies and to limit the range of conceivable solutions. The problem was articulated in terms of rent-seeking states, bloated bureaucracies, market distortions and inefficient and inequitable service delivery systems. The solution was therefore seen to lie in economic growth through liberalised market forces and the targeting of limited public resources to those in real need (World Bank, 1990). As Bienefeld (1997) has pointed out, the discourse of the 'new social policy' revolved around concepts that had been around for some time –decentralisation, self-reliance, popular participation, co-responsibility, sustainability. What was 'new' was the interpretation given to these concepts to ensure their fit with the market-led agenda.

The new social policy required both a reduction in the role of the state and a decentralisation of its functions to local level bodies and private institutions, including commercial providers and NGOs (Bienefeld, 1997; Tendler, 2000). It promised to empower the community by bringing design and implementation processes closer to the poor, replacing the old top-down, supply driven schemes with new, decentralised modalities, such as Social Funds. Social Funds were initially devised by the World Bank as a temporary safety net to ameliorate the harsh effects of structural adjustment on vulnerable groups but were subsequently adopted as providing a new community-driven model of service delivery to the poor (Fumo et al., 2000). Though part of the public sector, the Funds were usually managed by semi-autonomous entities, institutionally and organisationally distinct from government bureaucracies, in order to increase their flexibility and responsiveness to local demand.

Social Funds provided small-scale financing in response to proposals put forward by various intermediary organisations, including local government, private firms and NGOs. Principles of 'co-responsibility' were built into these schemes in order to strengthen the self-sufficiency of the poor and wean them away from dependency on government handouts. Cost recovery through user fees and co-financing were further common features intended to make social provision affordable. Finally the targeting of public provision to the poor would ensure that scarce resources were directed only to those in real need while simultaneously minimizing disincentive effects on the able-bodied.

However, the new social policies failed to counter, and often exacerbated, biases in the provision of social services. For instance, reviewing the evidence on the impact of user fees in health and education, Reddy and Vandemoortele (1996) found that, despite attempts to protect the poor through price discrimination and exemption schemes, there had been drastic declines in utilisation rates of health and educational services, discernible declines in child survival rates and a widening of both income and gender gaps in schooling. They concluded that while user financing of certain social services might be desirable in the name of effectiveness and efficiency, this was not case for basic social services: 'Services that generate strong positive externalities and whose beneficiaries are primarily the poor are not well suited for user financing' (p. 76).

Social Funds also came in for sharp criticism (Kanji, 2002; de Haan et al, 2002). Critics challenged claims that such schemes worked in a way that was 'decentralised, demand driven, participatory, low in costs and fast disbursing' (Tendler, 2000: p. 114). They pointed out that the 'demand-driven' focus of Social Funds tended to favour the better placed sections of the community who were in a position to articulate demand and to exclude the less articulate (de Haan et al., 2002). In many contexts, the old state-led, top-down and supply driven programmes appeared to have more discernible impacts on poverty reduction (Graham, 1996).

Tendler's conclusions on the basis of her review of the questionable impacts reported for Social Funds are worth highlighting . She pointed out that the recommendations put forward to address the weaknesses of the new social policies would require a significant increase in the finance, personnel, time and effort devoted to their administrative capacity, thereby compromising their acclaimed 'leanness' and lower administrative costs. If these resources had been devoted to institutional reform of public administration, they might have provided a more effective means of incorporating concerns with inclusiveness, accountability and equity than reliance on non-state organisations that were likely to be dominated by local elites or private contractors who had no mandate to consider the public interest.

Her arguments form part of a broader literature questioning the minimal role assigned to the state in the provision of social security and social services in the new social policy and the absence of a coherent and institutionalised strategy. While this literature recognises that many of the critiques of public sector provision under the 'old' social policies were well- founded, it argues that the possibilities for improving state capacity and responsiveness should have been explored more fully before embarking on privatized alternatives.

These critiques of the new social policy do not necessarily return us to the old state centred model of social provision. Harriss-White (1995), for instance, locates the role of the state within a framework of welfare pluralism. She notes the important role played in social provisioning by markets, community-based institutions and NGOS in the Indian context (and elsewhere) and argues for the necessity of a role for the state within these fields of multiple providers but also points to the limitations of states that are not democratically accountable:

> 'Markets exclude…Markets, even idealised, abstract, efficient ones, respond to demand rather than to human needs and guarantee neither life nor welfare. For these, the *state* is a necessary – but not sufficient – guarantor. The state is necessary because impoverished households by themselves also cannot guarantee life or welfare, and because institutions of civil society (like NGOs) are piecemeal in scope, under-resourced and imperfectly accountable. The state is not sufficient *not* because markets are necessary, but rather because the state's legitimacy does not currently rest in an important way on the guaranteeing of life and decent social welfare….. ' (p.143).

She concludes her comments with an important caveat: 'The state may be a flawed institution, but it is the only institution obliged to respond to claims for welfare entitlements. (p. 143)

3. Values and attitudes towards redistributive measures: survey data

Thus, while the emerging agenda around universalism reflects growing disenchantment with market-centred residualism, it is also mindful of the validity of many of the neo-liberal critiques of earlier models of state provision. Despite this more pluralist approach to universalism, progress has been slow. This is not surprising since universalism inevitably entails some degree of redistribution from the haves to the have-nots within a society. In the context of democratic societies, where such redistribution cannot be effected by state fiat, it requires a shared vision of the good society and the construction of a politically sustainable social contract which embodies this vision.

It follows from this that the argument for redistributive social policies has to be located in the sphere of politics and constituency building. It cannot be reduced – as the case for poverty reduction often is - to a series of 'moral precepts and a set of technical instruments' (Lautier, 2006, p. 77). As Graham (2002) emphasizes, values and attitudes matter for the kinds of social protection measures that can be sustained in a society. Differences in values and attitudes, as captured by various surveys and public opinion polls, certainly go some way towards explaining the residual place assigned to social welfare measures in the US compared to the more central place they occupy within European social democratic welfare regimes.

These surveys suggest that inequality has a significant negative effect on subjective well-being of *all* income groups in Europe, although most strongly among the poor. In the US, on the other hand, the only groups who are made unhappy by inequality are left-leaning wealthy people: they are most likely to believe that chances for upward mobility are restricted. Graham (2002) also notes that the size of the gap between different classes appears to have a bearing on support expressed for redistributive policies. The larger the gap between the poor and the middle classes, the weaker the basis for cross-class transfers. Among OECD countries, the US has one of the largest gaps between the middle classes and the poor as well as one of the most unequal income distributions (Graham, 2002; see also OECD, 2011[2]). It would appear, therefore, that neo-liberal solutions which view markets as the most efficient route to human wellbeing and assign a residual role to the state have emanated from a context with a very high level of tolerance for inequality.

Surveys from Latin America also suggest that support for policies which prioritise growth over redistribution is higher in its poorer and more unequal countries. These may be precisely the countries in which rent-seeking states and highly truncated welfare structures have led to considerable scepticism on the part of the average citizen as to whether redistributive policies can be either fair or efficient (Graham, p. 15). Within countries, however, the findings are more predictable, with the wealthy more likely on average to support growth over redistribution.

4. Normative and practical arguments against redistribution: debating the citizen's income grant

Other insights into public attitudes to redistribution are provided by debates over concrete proposals for some form of universal social protection that have taken place in a number of developing countries. One example of this is the basic income grant argued for by the Basic Income European Network. This would be a universal minimum income guarantee to *all* individuals in society, thereby dispensing with complex and costly measures to establish eligibility. It would cover basic needs and would be financed through a progressive income tax system. Interestingly, the idea has generated greatest interest in South Africa and Brazil: both have among the most unequal income distributions in the world but both are engaged in redefining their social contracts after prolonged periods of political struggle.

In Brazil, the proposal for a 'citizens income' was put forward in the Congress in 1991 by a senator from the ruling Workers' Party. It suggested that all adults aged 25 or more who earned less than 2.5 times the prevailing minimum wage would receive a cash transfer initially equal to 30% and later to 50% of the difference between their income and the minimum level. One immediate source of resistance to the idea was its affordability. The proposal was modified to make it more feasible: the transfer would not exceed 30% but could be raised by the executive to 50% *when resources became* *available* and it would be phased in gradually, beginning with the 60+ cohort and gradually extended till it covered all adults aged 25+ by 2000 (Suplicy, 2002). The challenge of affordability was thus addressed through the idea of an incremental approach: gradual increases in the amounts of the transfer and in the constituencies covered at a pace that reflected the availability of resources.

A second source of resistance came from the public. The 1990s was a period when a series of conditional cash transfers aimed to promote children's health and education in poorer families had been introduced initially at the municipal level and then extended through federal support. When President Lula came to power, he launched the Bolsa Familia programme which unified the four main cash transfer programmes in the country and soon thereafter sanctioned the Law of Citizen's Basic Income which guaranteed the right of all Brazilians, regardless of socio-economic status, to receive an annual cash transfer.

However, attempts by the Ministry of Social Development to dispense with the need to monitor compliance with program conditionality and to treat the cash transfer as a citizen's income was met with strong public resistance (de Britto, 2005). When the media reported that the government was failing to verify that beneficiaries were sending their children to school and health centres, 'opponents from both the left and the right united to accuse the government of transforming a genuinely innovative intervention into an old-fashioned and paternalistic handout' (p. 187).

As de Britto comments, public attitudes in Brazil valued the idea of 'co-responsibility' embodied in conditional cash transfers over a policy which appeared to resemble paternalistic forms of social assistance from the past which they believed had created dependence among recipients. The conditionality appeared to have helped legitimize the programme in the eyes of middle class voters.

In South Africa, the idea of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) gained support as a means of overcoming the narrow reach of the existing social security system. The trickle-down effects of the post-apartheid government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy had not materialised, the extended public works programme put in place by the government had generated disappointingly few jobs and, despite expansions of social pensions and child support grants, around 60% of the poor did not get any social assistance (Hassim, 2006).

The idea of BIG was put forward by an alliance of civil society organisations led by the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the country's main trade union federation (Matisonn and Seeking, 2002) . It argued for a citizens' grant set at a level that would help to reduce the poverty gap by more than 80% and that would be financed progressively through new taxes so as not to encroach on other areas of expenditure. The Taylor Committee, set up by the government to come up with proposals for a comprehensive social security system, favoured the idea of a basic income grant. While accepting the need for a comprehensive approach to social protection, it emphasised the need to tackle income poverty *first* , arguing that medium and longer term programmes to address capability and asset deficits were being compromised by unsustainable levels of income poverty. Poor people could not access health care and primary education 'because they (did) not have even the most basic income for transport, food and basic clothing' (Taylor Committee, 2002, p. 56). Behind the Taylor Committee's recommendation was the belief that public works programmes could not create enough jobs, regardless of how 'massive' the expansion.

The negative response from the ANC government included a number of practical objections: that the country lacked the administrative capacity to take on the management of BIG and that fiscal targets had to be defended against 'reckless populism' that would deter foreign investors (Seeking and Matisonn, 2010). There were also strong normative objections. The chief spokesman for the government stated that the Cabinet's philosophy was that: 'Only the disabled or sick should receive "handouts", whilst the able-bodied adults should "enjoy the opportunity, the dignity and the rewards of work" (Meth, 2004, p. 10). The head of the ANC's social transformation department expressed concern about the values underpinning BIG and the likelihood it would create dependency. She suggested linking it to public works projects to provide the jobless with temporary employment so that the grant would not be a 'mere handout'.

5. Normative and practical arguments against redistribution: debating the universal employment guarantee

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India represents a different approach to universalism. The Indian constitution recognises the right to work. Article 39 of the constitution urges the state to ensure that 'citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood' while Article 41 stresses that the State 'within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work'. However, aside from the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme put in place in one state in the 1980s, India's public works programmes had not hitherto contained any guarantees.

The rising inequalities that accompanied the liberalisation of India's economy in the early 1990s generated growing hostility to the short-term, ad hoc and frequently stigmatising nature of state interventions to reduce poverty. The idea of a nation-wide universal guarantee of work brought together a broad-based movement of progressive political parties, academics, practitioners and activists, many of whom were involved in nationwide campaigns for the right to food, the right to information and the campaign for the unorganised sector. The abysmal failure of the BJP to garner electoral support around the slogan of 'India is Shining' in a context where larger numbers of poor people were going hungry and communal tensions were rising provided an important political opening (Chopra, 2009). The United Progressive Alliance which came to power in 2004 on a Common Minimum Platform was determined to take to heart the lessons of this failure.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2006) guarantees every household in rural India the right to at least 100 days of employment every year for at least one adult member. Employment would be in the form of casual manual labour at the statutory minimum wage. The Bill in principle entitles 40 million rural workers to employment for part of the year. The other key clauses of the Act embody responses to some of the positive and negative lessons learnt from past experience and can be regarded as practical elements to transform a formal right into a substantive one.

Opposition to the Bill was most vociferously articulated by a small but powerful section of the corporate sector and its allies within government. Their solutions expressed their scorn for the scheme. For instance, one suggested dropping cash from helicopters would be a more effective route to poverty reduction while another suggested that the 'first best option would be to do nothing' (Business Standard, 30th November, 2004). Surjit Bhalla put forward what appeared to be one of the more reasonable suggestions from the Bill's critics, proposing universal cash transfers (viz. citizen's income grant) as a preferable alternative to the Employment Guarantee Act. However, as Jean Drèze, a key proponent of the Act, commented: 'I leave the reader to guess whether this is a serious proposal or just another stick to beat the Act. Be that as it may, the proposal can be easily accommodated. All one has to do is to insert a clause in the Act stating that if the government prefers to pay the equivalent of 100 days' wages to every household in a particular district, instead of organising public works, it is free to do so' (Times of India, 12 August, 2005). It was clear that neither Drèze nor Bhalla believed that the government would take the option of a universal cash transfer seriously, suggesting that the policy environment for a citizen's income was not particularly favourable in the Indian context.

6. Addressing the normative objections to universalism: reconceptualising rights and obligations

These debates illustrate the point made earlier that a great deal of the resistance to universal measures appears to revolve around both normative and practical concerns. We address these concerns in the rest of this paper. The normative concerns relate to the creation of an unfair culture of handouts, 'something for nothing' and a dependency mentality on the part of recipients. Yet the idea of universalism itself has a strong normative foundation in ideas about citizenship that runs counter to this view. This section explores whether the normative underpinnings of universalism can be framed in ways that address the normative resistance to it.

Normative arguments in favour of universalism are generally grounded in some notion of rights. But what are these rights and who defines them? There are constitutions, of course, which commit countries to the principles of human rights. The American Declaration of Independence, for instance, declares: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights'. But these truths are clearly not self-evident to all while what counts as inalienable rights varies considerably between countries[3]. The right to a basic level of social security, while enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and acknowledged in the constitutions of many developing countries, is clearly not sufficiently grounded in their political cultures to command the broad-based support needed for the realisation of this right.

As Lautier (2006) argues, one way forward is to try and pin down what is received in exchange for citizen's rights in order to make sure they are neither handed out nor received as favours but as part of a politically sustainable social contract. As he points out, it may be far easier politically to guarantee the right to socio-economic security when something tangible is received in exchange than to guarantee it on the basis of some abstract moral imperative. This suggests the need for closer attention to the duties and obligations that the members of any polity must observe in order to ensure its stability, prosperity and reproduction over time.

Contribution to tax revenue, one of the basic obligations of citizenship, is also the most visible category of contribution in the social protection literature. Tax payers have been the primary beneficiaries of existing social security systems. It is also their perception of the balance between the costs and benefits of using tax revenue to finance social protection that is most likely to carry weight with the government. Such tax payers may be prepared to support the extension of social protection to those outside their circle if it rests on clearly recognised contributions.

Extending social protection beyond those who contribute to the public budget to those who are, or could become, economically active may be relatively easier to argue because of its productivity implications. The political acceptability of the employment guarantee scheme for a sizeable section of India's poor population reflects the fact that it is based on a perceived and familiar type of contract in which wages are guaranteed in exchange for the obligation to provide labour. The resistance expressed was not articulated as opposition to the idea of guaranteed employment, but to real or imagined fears about government corruption and inefficiency in carrying out the scheme. Equally, Bangladeshi elites who are highly resistant to the idea of state responsibility in relation to social protection are nevertheless open to the idea of provision of education for the masses: it is seen as a means of turning a 'burden' into an 'asset', enabling the poor to take advantage of economic opportunities (Hossain, 2005: p. 59).

The extension of the right to social protection to the more generalized circle of citizens beyond workers becomes more difficult, the more tenuous their link with the productive economy. It requires an expansion of the notion of 'contribution' from primarily market-based or monetized categories to other less tangible but arguably equally vital forms of contribution. The most obvious of these is the daily care work that is carried out, mainly by women and girls, on an unpaid basis in the domestic domain. Such work has been persistently sidelined in mainstream analysis of the productive economy, despite its centrality to the functioning of markets and economic growth.

However, extending the entitlement to social protection to economically inactive women on the basis of their unpaid care contributions poses what Lister (1994) describes as 'the contemporary variant of Wollstonecraft's dilemma': 'we are torn between wanting to validate and support, through some form of income maintenance provision, the caring work for which women still take the responsibility in the "private" sphere and to liberate them from this responsibility so that they can achieve economic and political autonomy in the public sphere' (p. 54).

We see versions of this dilemma play out in the some of the discussion of cash transfers, mainly in Latin America, which target mothers conditional on their fulfilment of certain obligations with regard to the health and education of their children. While, in many contexts, these transfers have represented the first time that women from marginalized groups have been acknowledged by the state and while some see it as recognition of their unpaid contributions (Suarez et al, 2006), this is not the ethos behind the programmes. Instead the programmes reflect a largely instrumental approach to breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty by investing in the human capital of the next generation of workers. They target mothers because such investment is seen to lie within their sphere of responsibility (Molyneux, 2007). However, the sums of money are extremely small and, combined with the failure to provide women with any support in their economic roles, reinforce a very traditional gender division of labour.

Such critiques highlight the importance of finding ways of acknowledging the value of women's unpaid care contributions that do not stand in the way of their ability to exercise the full rights of economic, social and political citizenship. One way to do this would be to move from privatized to collective responsibility for care work. While conditions in themselves can help to legitimize programmes in the eyes of the tax-paying public (as is the case with conditions attached to public works programmes), such conditions should not curtail women's life chances and life options. In this case, they should be seen as a stepping stone to the provision of affordable child care which would expand the livelihood options of women from *all* income groups as well as allowing them to participate actively in the life of the community and polity.

Moving even further away from any direct relationship between rights and contributions is a third and more diffuse category of contributions. The duties and obligations specified by eighteenth century theories of political rights, such as defending the nation, participating in political life, paying taxes, defines what can be termed a 'vertical' model of citizenship, one organised around the relationship between state and society. By contrast, as Lautier points out, the fact of 'being a citizen' in today's world implies a much wider range of obligations – 'socially necessary activities', including among other things, 'the duty to educate one's children, to engage in activities for the elderly, to participate in associative or community activities that affect society as a whole and that may or may not (sports, culture) be related to the economy, to continue one's studies or receive further training, to preserve the natural environment' (p. 93). This feeds into what we might term a 'horizontal model' of citizenship, the rights and obligations that citizens have with regard to each other (Kabeer, 2004).

Furthermore, along with the positive duties that Lautier spells out, duties which permit or require action, we can also add equally important 'negative' duties which permit or require inaction: these include the social obligation to refrain from words and deeds which express disrespect for others, which deny their humanity and cause harm to their life and property.

Most societies today are at some stage of the transition from older face-to-face communities based on acknowledged bonds forged over many lifetimes to the larger 'imagined' communities of the modern nation state. The expanded notion of citizenship is a critical recognition of the politics of interdependence that characterizes this increasingly impersonal world. It suggests that each and every member of this imagined community has a role to play in shaping the fate of their community: each has a contribution to make that goes beyond paid work and each has a claim on others by virtue of that contribution.

Acknowledging the claims and contributions of some sections of the community to the exclusion of others denies the latter a stake in the prosperity and progress of that community with consequences that can reverberate across the entire community. Crime, gang warfare, riots, insurgency and civil war are increasingly recognised as some of the negative externalities generated by exclusion and alienation (World Bank, 2011).

Some of the attitudes expressed by marginalised groups in micro-level studies help explain why this might be the case. For instance, Lister's research into how citizenship was understood in the UK found that those who saw themselves as 'outsiders' defined their obligations in extremely narrow terms, encompassing only themselves or their immediate families. They were also more likely to believe it was justifiable to break the law. In research carried out by Kabeer in one of the more remote areas of northern Punjab in Pakistan (Kabeer et al. 2010), marginalised ethnic groups explained the high level of lawlessness and disorder in the area in term of the exclusion of people like themselves from more legitimate ways of earning a living: *'The people who are wanted by the police, they come from our families. We are the people who become thieves because we are facing scarcity. The thieves do not come from somewhere else, they come from here'.*

To sum up, all 'imagined' societies face the challenge of constructing a sufficiently strong sense of belonging among citizens who are strangers to each other to give them a stake in their collective future, the willingness to observe those basic duties that are the other side of the coin to basic rights. Those who are most excluded from the circle of citizenship express the greatest alienation from its values and have least stake in the flourishing of the communities in which they live. It is both just and reasonable to argue that the extension of rights to those who have been thus historically marginalised must precede expectations of contributions.

7. Addressing the practical objections to universalism: reconceptualising costs and benefits

The second strand of resistance to the idea of universality rests on the practical grounds of affordability. As Mkandawire points out, there is a taken-for-granted assumption among neo-liberal advocates of residual social policies that governments are confronted with an exogenously given fiscal constraint and must allocate scarce resources within the limits that this imposes. The targeting of public provision to the needy or deserving poor offers the possibility of combining greater poverty reduction with fewer public resources.

These practical objections can be addressed on equally practical grounds but once again, it requires a reframing of what is at issue. In this case, we need to challenge the narrow and static conceptualisation of costs and benefits that characterises this strand of the social protection literature and to reconceptualise the relationship between them. We begin by considering the issue of benefits in relation to social protection, both universal and targeted, and then go on to consider the costs of universality versus targeting.

Reconceptualising benefits

The equation of social assistance to the poor with a narrowly defined 'safety net' function has led policy makers to view public funding for social protection as 'at best a short-term palliative and at worst a waste of money' (Ravallion, 2003). Underpinning this view is a particular model of the economy as constituted by representative economic agents, driven by self-interest, engaged in an unending competition for scarce resources in the face of market-determined set of prices and opportunities. Economic behaviour in this model tends to be characterised by constant trade-offs; welfare handouts would distort these tradeoffs and dampen the incentive to work.

Such models do not, however, describe real world economies which are characterised by deficits, discontinuities, interdependencies and indivisibilities, all of which have varying implications for how different groups and individuals survive the present and plan for the future. The persistence of 'poverty traps', often over generations, is evidence that growth patterns have failed to generate the livelihood opportunities that allow poor people to escape poverty. The levels and precariousness of incomes earned may mean that they simply do not have the 'effective' demand to fulfil their basic needs on a predictable basis, undermining their own productivity as a result of under-nutrition and ill-health. Nor are they able to afford the kind of 'lumpy' investments that might help them raise their future productivity. Location in remote rural areas or poorly served urban ones can drive a further wedge between market incentives and the capacity to respond.

A growing body of evidence suggest that social protection not only helps to address some of the critical demand deficiencies associated with poverty, but can also correct for these various manifestations of market failure (for reviews of this evidence, see Devereux and Coll-Black, 2007; Barrientos and Scott, 2008; and Kabeer, 2009). It shows that while part of the social transfers to poor people have been used to improve nutrition levels and food security within households, with possible impacts on labour productivity, even the poorest families have invested part of their transfers in productive assets, rather than consuming it all (Schubert, 2005). Evidence of the use of transfers to invest in productive assets has been documented in other contexts as well while the ability to demonstrate the receipt of predictable and regular flows of income for an extended period of time, most concretely embodied in the possession of magnetic smart cards, has extended recipients' access to credit sources (Barrientos and Scott, 2008).

Social protection schemes have also enabled greater engagement with labour markets, not only directly through the jobs created by public works programmes, but also in unanticipated ways that illuminate the nature of the hidden constraints that had hitherto curtailed such engagement. For instance, in India, the provision of mid-day meals in government schools allowed female heads of low income households to work longer and on a less interrupted basis since they no longer had to come home to cook the afternoon meal for their children Drèze and Goyal (2003). In Brazil and South Africa, social pensions to the elderly helped to finance the costs of job search including migration in search of jobs (Soares et al. 2007; Posel et al. 2004). In other contexts, it reduced the need to engage in hazardous, demeaning or illegal activities to earn a living: to engage in transactional sex on the part of young girls and women in Malawi, Kenya and Namibia (Baird et al 2011; Onyango-Oumaand and Samuels, 2012; Namibia NGO Forum, 2008); to take up ganyu or casual agricultural wage work, considered to be among the worst paid and least desirable occupation in Malawi (Covarrubias et al. 2012); to engage in criminal activities in Namibia (Namibia NGO forum, 2008) and to reduce reliance on demeaning patron client relations in India (Echeverri-Gent, 1988).

While this body of evidence relates to the direct benefits to those in receipt of transfers, other studies have documented some of the positive externalities and spill-over effects that can be generated by expanding access to social protection. Reddy and Vandemoortele (1996) have documented some of this evidence in relation to investments in health, education and sanitation. A myopic time frame may lead to an underestimation of these externalities because of the time lag involved. On the basis of simulation exercises using African data, Appiah and McMahon (2002) show that investments in education had important impacts on economic growth. While some of these are apparent in the short term, such as employment, earnings and better health, there are longer term indirect effects in terms of investment rates, reduction in crime rates and greater stability: 'cumulative effects large enough to affect the nation significantly cannot reasonably be expected for 25 years or more, and even a longer 40 or 45 years before it is reasonable to expect that stagnant economies or chaotic conditions in the poorest countries to begin to turn around'.

Examples of other externalities relate to investments in durable infrastructure through public works programmes. One of the few studies that attempted a holistic evaluation of the impacts of Bangladesh's Food for Work programme was carried out in 1985 and hence somewhat dated but it is worth citing nevertheless. It found that participants on the programme used their wages to hire others to work on their farms as well as increasing their demand for goods and services provided by the local economy, generating income for farmers and traders. The building of feeder roads helped to link isolated communities with towns and markets, enhancing their access to input and output markets and lowering transaction costs. It estimated that agricultural production increased by an average of 27% and per capita household income by about 10% as a result of the direct and indirect effects of the project (WFP/BIDS/IFPRI, 1985
cited in Devereux and Solomon, 2006).

Stepping back from these various categories of impacts and considering them in the aggregate, they suggest that well designed social protection programmes help to build more interconnected economies of the kind in which market forces are likely to generate more equitable outcomes. By connecting up people, places and opportunities, a broad-based social protection strategy can contribute to the inclusiveness of growth – allowing all sections of society to engage in saving and investments, to take risks and access credit, to equip themselves for work, to finance the costs of finding work, to creating the incentives for local trade to flourish and easing mobility across occupations and locations in an era of constant change. The possibility that social protection programmes can yield 'double dividends' (Barrientos, 2007), meeting both their immediate safety net objectives as well as generating wider developmental impacts, challenges the assumption of an exogenously determined fiscal constraint on the use of public revenue for such programmes. It suggests that investment in such programmes can offset at least some of their costs and may, in the long run, serve to ease this fiscal constraint.

Reconceptualizing costs

The view that extending public provision to those who are unable to protect themselves is a welfare handout has logically led to its conceptualisation as pure cost. If the costs of such provision, whether targeted or universal approaches, is equated with the value of the transfers distributed, universal programmes would appear obviously to cost more, given their wider coverage. By contrast, targeted approaches offer the promise of achieving the goal of protecting the poor at far less cost.

However, targeting itself, whether individual means-testing, the use of conditionalities, self-targeting or the targeting of disadvantaged groups or locations, carries costs which have to be factored into the calculus. There are the obvious administrative costs with ensuring that the eligible are reached and the ineligible excluded: this includes gathering information, enforcing eligibility criteria, monitoring conditions, updating information and so on. Then there are the costs imposed on poor people to prove their eligibility and claim transfer, costs that can be exacerbated by the stigma often attached to participating in programmes specifically meant for the poor and by the discretionary power exercised by the 'minor potentates' responsible for determining eligibility. Thus there is the effort involved in providing the right documentation, the need to visit different offices, the queuing, the travel time, delays in disbursement, the demands for bribes or sexual favours. All this can introduce a degree of unpredictability to targeted benefits that makes it difficult for poor and vulnerable groups to take risks and plan for the future, undermining their developmental impact (a less visible cost).

Furthermore, given the costs associated with ensuring that only the poor will benefit from social assistance, the evidence that it achieves its intended goal is not overwhelming. A World Bank study of 85 targeted anti-poverty interventions in 36 low and middle income countries found that while the median programme transferred 25% more to individuals than would have been the case with universal programmes, a 'staggering' 25% of these programs were regressive in that the poor were disproportionately disadvantaged (Coady et al., 2004). The best performing programmes were in higher income countries, suggesting that some minimum level of administrative capacity is needed for such programmes to work. And finally, the costlier the form of targeting adopted, the more accurate it was: thus individual means testing performed better than self targeting.

Finally, there are the political costs of targeting in terms of public support foregone. While a purely technocratic calculus takes into account the financial, informational and administrative costs of different approaches, it fails to recognize the redistributive politics at the heart of these decisions. Put very simply, targeted programmes benefit those who do not have to pay for them at the expense of those who do; they exclude those with political clout in favour of those with none.

The result is, as has been pointed out by various authors over time, that programmes intended for the poor tend to be very poor quality programmes. The most widely cited example of this relates to food subsidies in Sri Lanka, when the transformation of a universal food subsidy into a targeted food stamp program led to the steady erosion of the value of the transfer as the result of inflation and absence of interest on the part of the tax payer and had severe consequence for poverty and malnutrition (Gelbach and Pritchett, 2000).

Gelbach and Pritchett also point to the example of a food subsidy in Colombia that was similarly transformed into a targeted food stamp programme. While a World Bank assessment of the programme commented that 'although it seemed effective and well-targeted…it lacked political support and was discontinued' (p. 17). They suggest the possibility that the program might have lost support 'because of, rather than in spite of, the effectiveness of its targeting' (p. 17). Another example comes from India where Kochar (2004) found that the quantity of food grains taken up by poor households under India's Public Distribution Scheme declined as the scheme was transformed from a universal to a targeted scheme, reducing or eliminating benefits to the non-poor.

Reconceptualising the fiscal constraint

As we noted, resistance to principles of universalism in social protection is frequently framed in terms of an exogenously determined fiscal constraint which places limits on the availability of domestic resources. The arguments and evidence put forward in this section suggests that this way of framing the argument may be unduly rigid, ruling out the possibility of some degree of endogeneity to the fiscal constraint. First of all, we pointed to evidence that well designed social protection programmes can yield 'double dividends': providing safety nets to the poor but also achieving both immediate and longer term developmental impacts. Such dividends not only help to offset some of the immediate costs of social protection but can contribute to easing fiscal constraints in the longer run.

The second challenge to the idea of the exogenously given fiscal constraint reflects political considerations. As Mkandawire points out, the fiscal constraint is at least partly a matter of public policy choices about domestic revenue mobilisation. In some countries, structural adjustment policies have been associated with the removal of the state's capacity to collect widely applied and easy to collect taxes. In other countries, the state itself has opted for a very minimal level of taxation because of its residual approach to social policy. The decision to opt for targeted rather than universal measures is thus closely bound up with the decision to opt for a minimal tax regime.

However, the political economy literature on targeting also suggests that choice of provision itself can influence the availability of resources (Gelbach and Pritchett, 2000). Targeted measures are likely to be poorer quality measures, with very little developmental potential, because there is little political support for them. Not only are the poor more likely to benefit when they share in forms of provision with the better off, but the better off may be more willing to contribute to such programmes if they derive some benefit from it. The debate over universal versus targeted programmes needs to explore in greater detail whether the fiscal constraint should be taken as a 'given' or whether the availability of financial resources for social protection is responsive to the accessibility of its benefits.

Conclusion: big bang versus incremental approaches to universalism

Given the uneven nature of development across countries, and given differences in political culture, progress in the direction of universalist strategies is likely to be similarly uneven. Some countries appear to be favourably disposed towards some form of universalism: the basic income grant in Brazil, guaranteed employment in India, universal access to basic health services in Thailand; universal pensions in Namibia. In others, often those characterised by high levels of inequality, there is little evidence of progress. This paper has sought to put forward arguments which directly address the concerns of those who are resistant to the idea of redistribution on other than hard-core ideological grounds. In keeping with the pragmatic tone of the analysis so far, we conclude the paper by arguing that the case for universalism needs to be framed in ways that do not set up false dichotomies or unrealistic expectations.

Certain aspects of the recent discourse around universalism have not been helpful in building broad-based support for redistributive programmes, particularly in countries without any history of such programmes - and possibly hostile to them. The resort to a purely moral imperative to make the case for universalism overlooks the fact the progress in this direction in the welfare states of Western Europe was never motivated by moral considerations alone. It was always designed to achieve other objectives as well: building citizenship certainly but also to increase overall productivity and to ensure social stability (Esping-Anderson). To that extent, the emerging evidence of the productive and political payoffs to social protection together with arguments about the possible endogeneity of the relationship between protective measures and fiscal resources helps to link citizen-centred arguments for universalism with a developmental rationale.

The tendency to frame the move to universalism in 'big bang' (Lautier) or 'all or nothing' (Thomson, 2007) terms and to conflate universality with uniformity (as with the basic income grant) is also not conducive to building support. Such formulations appear to rule out the possibility of tailoring social protection measures to local needs at a pace permitted by local resources. The reality is that the process took over 150 year in Western Europe and most of it built on and extended a variety of pre-existing schemes, some managed by the state but others by charity, workers organisations, paternalistic employers and so on (Lautier). This suggests a place for a bottom-up welfare pluralism as a pathway to universalism but, as suggested by Harriss-White, with an important role for the state to step in at particular stages along the way to build on existing arrangements and ensure that no one is systematically excluded.

Finally, the need to build social protection from the bottom up suggests that it must begin with measures that are 'minimally decent' rather than 'maximally comfortable' (Beetham, 1995). It was the focus on the standards achieved by rich countries that long hampered the ILO's ability to respond to the needs of workers and others outside the formal economy. Universalism would appear far more affordable to lower income countries if the movement is from the 'weak to the strong' rather than 'the strong to the weak' – and indeed this seems to be the form it is taking in many of these countries (Barrientos, 2005). This does not rule out the possibility of social insurance schemes that benefit those that can afford to pay nor does it rule out the use of targeting and conditionality in order to reach the most exclude: what Titmus (1968) referred to as 'positive selectivism'. But it does suggest that attention has to be paid to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable have been incorporated into public provision on terms that lend themselves to a process of incremental universalism. It is this more pragmatic approach that seems to characterise current ILO thinking (ILO, 2011).

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[1] See Centre for Social Protection (2011)

[2] OECD (2011) found that income inequality in the US had was worsened over time and was, according to 2008 figures, worse than all other OECD countries with the exception of Turkey, Chile and Mexico

[3] Some societies, the US included, have prioritized the negative freedoms associated with civil and political rights but failed to acknowledge the right to some basic level of socio-economic security while former socialist countries generally prioritized the latter at the expense of the former.