

ABOUT GETSPA

Social policies have over the years been often consigned to a residual category in policy making. However, the recent experience of COVID-19 illustrates that policy responses in periods of crisis usually rely on social policies for improvements in the human condition. COVID-19 has shown that, while multi-level global crises affect all who live on the planet, both responses and impacts are highly differentiated and exacerbate gender, class and spatial inequalities. All over Africa, working people in rural and urban areas who are engaged in precarious work are facing existential challenges as a result of the contraction of economies and the limitations of state responses. These challenges are gendered. Measures such as lockdowns and the closing of workplaces, educational institutions, and places of leisure and social engagements have underlined the importance of living spaces and reproductive activities.

The COVID-19 situation has also brought into sharp relief the gender pay gap, the gender segmentation of paid work, and the burdens of reproductive and care work for women. There is also emerging evidence of a significant increase in gender-based violence. Furthermore, gender, class and spatial inequalities in access to education have come to the fore in several ways, including in the threat of increased attrition rates in education. With respect to health, there are risks that spending on reproductive health and other public health challenges will be sacrificed to COVID-19 expenditures. Such a change in focus could have negative impacts on maternal and under-5 mortality and morbidity, and result in a rise in women's paid and unpaid care burdens for the sick as frontline health workers and in their own households. Responses to the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 from state institutions--such as water and electricity subsidies for poor households, support for businesses and the augmentation of social protection programmes targeting the poor--have exposed the possibilities and limitations of social policy as currently constituted and created.

Scholars of social development have over the years focused largely on social protection programmes or sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, employment, and housing. Much of the discussion has been on questions of access and quality. Even fewer of such studies take on a gender equity perspective and almost none are interested in the economic policy dimensions of social development. These, coupled with a dearth of social policy expertise in Africa, create a compelling need for rethinking social policy and building constituencies that work for change in philosophies and approaches to social policy - herein lies the *raison d'être* of GETSPA.

The research activities under GETSPA focus on understanding the framing and value propositions underpinning social policy; the assumptions about the role of the state, markets and society (the family and community); the interface between social and economic policies; and the socio-economic development outcomes of social policy, particularly in terms of gender, class and spatial inequalities. In addition to research, the project also seeks to undertake advocacy, networking, documentation and constituency building activities, to bring about transformations in the approaches to and cultures of social policymaking and implementation in Africa.

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