2021 Social Policy in Africa Conference

22-24 November 2021
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Announcement and Conference Call Document

Theme:
Development, Democracy and Social Policy: Remembering Thandika Mkandawire

Organisers:
South African Research Chair in Social Policy, University of South Africa
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Dakar, Senegal)
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Geneva, Switzerland)

Theme of the 2021 Conference:
Development, Democracy and Social Policy: Remembering Thandika Mkandawire

In 2009, during a UN television interview that marked the end of his tenure as the Director of the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Thandika Mkandawire reflected on the research project, *Social Policy in a Development Context,* that he initiated at the institute. "One aspect of what we have done that might last much longer is that we initiated a process of thinking about social policy that relates social policy to issues of development, directly, and to issues of democracy. We tried to make the link between the debate on democratisation and the debates on development, and the debates on welfare policies— which normally occur in different literatures. We tried to indicate that there ought to be some close relationship between these three literatures." He noted how much he was struck that "people who write on developmental state, don't often write on welfare policy, and the ones who write on welfare policies rarely talk about developmental state, and those who write about developmental state rarely talk about democracy." Putting the three literatures in conversation was, however, not explicit in the original research design. Some of the conceptual clarity, he noted, came much later in the research. Mkandawire noted that if he were to design the Social Policy programme all over again, he would do it differently. It would involve making the links between Development, Democracy, and Social Policy more explicit, and getting the literatures to speak to one another. This would be the central message of the research.

The research programme initiated the idea of *Transformative Social Policy* as the basis for thinking through the linkages between development and social policy, explicitly, instead of what he referred to as "welfarist social policy."

In many ways, the strands of literature that Mkandawire noted are summative of his *oeuvre* in the pursuit of a developmental project that is democratic, inclusive, and equitable. In very fundamental ways, Mkandawire's ideas of 'development', 'democracy', and 'social policy' differ from the conventional wisdom in the contemporary approaches to these concerns. In each area, he provided seminal contributions.

In contrast to the denuding of development in the wake of the neoliberal counter-revolution in Development Economics/Studies and the repurposing of the idea of development as the *relief* of poverty, Mkandawire offered a vision of development grounded in the Bandung Spirit. Development involves growth with structural transformation of economy and society, the mastery of technology, and strong manufacturing capacity. 'Catching up', a phrase Thandika had no problem using, "requires that countries know themselves and their history that has set the 'initial conditions' for any future progress." Development requires learning from the pioneers, but it is not mimicry. The knowledge imperative requires considerable investment in institutions of knowledge production and state capacity—the capacity to coordinate and steer the development process. This involves a sustained eco-system of innovation and the capacity to respond to a broad range of challenges. Structural transformation and mastery of technology go with innovative and robust manufacturing capacity, within Ocampo's broader idea of "active production policies". The focus of such

strategy, as Ocampo further noted, should "be on the *dynamic efficiency* of economic structures, defined as their capacity to generate new waves of structural change." In the Bandung Spirit, development is, in the words of Samir Amin, also grounded in a national sovereign project. It is a quest for averting the extraversion of economy, culture, and knowledge systems inherent in the nature of imperialism.

In a context in which democracy is hollowed out and reduced to the performative process of periodic elections, for Mkandawire, the idea of guaranteed individual and collective rights is firmly linked with deliberative governance and accountability. Fundamental to this is the policymaking process based on popular interest and policy autonomy. Development becomes a debilitating process when grounded in an autocratic system of governance; it is undermined in the context of externally imposed policy diktat and the placing of unaccountable, "technocratic" institutions at the core of economic and social policymaking. The ideas of *Disempowered Democracy* or *Choiceless Democracies* inform Mkandawire's gaze on the political landscape, especially of "governance reform" in the context of the neoliberal counter-revolution. In this sense, development is a constitutive component of the national sovereign project, framed by endogenously grounded policymaking. Democracy, in this sense, is a constitutive pillar of development. Mkandawire rejects the idea of development as a process of blood, sweat, and tears.

Finally, in the context of the idea of social policy as the relief of (extreme) poverty while market-based social provisioning caters for those not considered destitute—a social policy architecture that is stratified, segmented, and segregated—Mkandawire reminds us of the importance of a coherent, normative, and holistic approach to social policy. Mkandawire offers insights into the connectedness of social policy to development (as outlined above) in the transformative role that social policy plays in the context of development. This takes us beyond a social protection-centric reading of social policy or social policy as the mechanism for addressing the diswelfares of industrialisation. Social policy's multiple tasks offer diverse ways of ensuring inclusive development and playing a transformative role in the development process. When left to its own devices, as Irma Adelman and Cynthia Morris reminded us decades ago, "the primary impact of economic development on income distribution is, on the average, to decrease both the absolute and the relative incomes of the poor. Not only is there no automatic trickle-down of the benefits of development; on the contrary, the development process leads typically to a trickle-up in favour of the middle classes and the rich." Social Policy instruments are vital to redressing "trickle-up" and ensuring equitable and inclusive allocation of the proceeds of development. Its redistributive roles are equally important for ensuring the social compact necessary for development. In this context, social policy involves the deliberative effort at enhancing the nation-building project.

Similarly, social policy is about the social investment necessary for inclusivity, enhancing the productive basis of society. Progressive social policy is concerned with redressing the gender inequity which, left on its own, the development process does not rectify. Labour-power, as feminist economists remind us, is a produced commodity; it is produced within the abode of the unpaid care economy. In reconciling the burden of social reproduction with other social tasks, social policy involves deliberate efforts at redressing gender inequities, the transformation of social relations and social institutions. In contrast with the New Poverty Agenda, Mkandawire reminds us that those

societies that successfully reduced poverty and enhanced human wellbeing were often concerned with broader social and economic issues rather than the narrow relief of poverty. In its transformative role and the pursuit of human wellbeing and often the outcome of popular struggles for equity and voice in society, social policy provides the underpinnings of inclusivity and deliberative governance in the context of development. Rather than simply b e i n g about the relief of poverty, social policy offers a broad range of instruments for driving inclusive development processes, security throughout the life cycle, and the transformation of social relations and institutions.

In seeking to get the different literatures of Development, Democracy and Social Policy to speak to one another, Mkandawire sought to give a coherent conceptual underpinning to the idea of an Inclusive Democratic Development Project. Mkandawire, who passed away on 27 March 2020, has contributed immensely to an intellectual project vital for a rejuvenation of the developmental process. We invite, for this conference, contributions and papers that critically reflect on not simply Mkandawire's oeuvre but the project of exchange between the different literatures and imaginations on development, democracy and social policy.

In addition, the conference organisers invite critical reflections on the social policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of the stratified, segmented, and segregated social policy architecture that has been the staple of international agencies in the last three to four decades. Equally, the conference invites papers on other different dimensions of social policy. Contributions need not be limited to the African context or experience. In particular, we invite contributions on experiences from the Global South.

We invite abstracts and papers in the following thematic areas:

1. Critical Reflections on the *Oeuvre* of Thandika Mkandawire: Development, democracy and social policy
2. Social Policy for Inclusive and Democratic Development
3. Critical Reflections on Social Policy Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic
4. Poverty and Inequality in Africa
5. Critical Perspectives on Social Protection
6. Non-Formal Social Provisioning: The African experiences
7. Land and Agrarian Reform: The social policy perspectives

Deadlines:

Deadline for Abstracts: Friday, 27 August 2021. Authors of accepted abstracts will be informed by Friday, 10 September 2021.

Deadline for full papers of accepted abstracts: Friday, 22 October 2021

Submission of Abstracts:

Click here or use https://bit.ly/3uOLMFI to access the abstracts submission page.

Format of the Conference:

The 2021 conference will be virtual.

Please direct all enquiries to:

Ms Simangele Sithole
Administrator
2021 Social Policy in Africa Conference
South African Research Chair in Social Policy
University of South Africa. City of Tshwane-Pretoria. South Africa.
E-mail: sarchisp@unisa.ac.za
Tel: +27 12 337 6114.