CALL FOR PAPERS

UNU-WIDER Symposium on the Political Economy of Social Protection Systems

1 Background

United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) has started a new project ‘The Economics and Politics of Taxation and Social Protection’ that aims to shed new light on the system-wide impacts of social protection and tax systems in developing countries. It involves research work that provides analytical tools for policy-makers and researchers alike to understand the current scope of tax-benefit systems and to be able to simulate impacts of policy changes. It also offers new evidence on the impacts of tax systems on economic efficiency; in particular, on tax collection efficacy. Political economy aspects are an important part of this research. Such an approach helps understand which features foster successful adoption of social protection reforms.

The relevance of the subject arises from the fact that social protection has emerged as a key policy strategy against poverty and vulnerability in many developing countries. It has evolved diversely in terms of focus and targeting population, coverage, scope, and design features, with some programmes providing income transfers alone, while others combining income transfers with the utilization of social services and assets. The scale and institutionalization of these programmes vary within countries and also markedly across regions, which reflect important financial, social, and political economy considerations.

The rapid growth of social protection systems has also underlined important knowledge gaps in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and also in comparative analysis of political structures, norms, and financial considerations that facilitate (or limit) the evolution and sustainability of such systems.

Financing, in particular, remains as a key constraint. Revenue mobilization strategies have been explored in some developing countries to finance social protection. These include reforms on natural resource taxes, royalties, and fees; shifting expenditure from subsidies and tax exemptions
to social protection, and redistribution. Efforts to increase the tax capacity by making the tax administration work more efficiently and by broadening the tax base are often essential, although the feasibility of these strategies often depend on political economy considerations.

2 Objective

The UNU-WIDER Symposium on the Political Economy of Social Protection Systems in Developing Countries aims to contribute to filling the existing knowledge gaps and address primarily, but not exclusively, the following questions:

- How can policy generate sustained routes to develop social protection systems in developing countries?
- Why specific types of programmes (e.g. conditional cash transfers, old age pensions, or workfare programmes) are favoured and clustered in particular regions? What are the implications of such regional configurations for global development efforts to tackle poverty, vulnerability, and other forms of wellbeing deprivation?
- What political regimes or conditions have facilitated (or limited) the expansion of social protection in developing countries? How domestic and external actors could promote these conditions? What underlines their political legitimacy?
- How have fiscal institutions evolved over time as economies in developing countries become more advanced and complex and how are these developments linked with parallel changes in the informal sector?
- What are the (dis)incentives of incumbent governments to use natural resource rents, redistribution, or other forms of revenue mobilization to finance social protection? What are the short-term and long-term implications of such decisions?

Comparative analysis of the emergence of social protection in developing countries, as well as theoretical models and conceptual analysis are essential to address these questions. Therefore, papers are invited to contribute to this Symposium covering aspects of the following areas:

1. Theoretical political economy models
2. Conceptual analysis of systems
3. Country case studies of programmes and impacts
4. Econometric analyses utilizing cross-country and panel data
5. Regional comparative studies

3 Submission procedure and deadlines

The Symposium is intended for established researchers and PhD students currently working on, or interested in, issues related to the political economy of social protection. Female and developing country participants are encouraged to apply. The Symposium will be held in English. Simultaneous translation will not be available.

Interested participants should complete the online application form, include an updated CV, and submit a full paper or an extended abstract (300 words). The abstract should include the research
question that the paper addresses, the methods and data used in the analysis, the anticipated findings, and the larger implications of the research.

Any questions regarding the submission should be sent to callforpapers1@wider.unu.edu no later than 15 April 2015. All queries and responses will be published on the Call for Papers announcement page. All answers will be updated on a rolling basis.

The deadline for submitting abstracts or draft manuscripts is 30 April 2015. Accepted applicants will be informed by 15 May 2015. For accepted abstracts/draft manuscripts, first full draft papers will be required by 1 November 2015. The draft papers should be limited to 10,000 words or less inclusive references.

Papers accepted through this call will be considered for publication in the WIDER Working Paper series. UNU-WIDER will formally pursue publication in a leading academic journal after the selection of accepted proposals.¹ The editors will draw from accepted proposals in order to develop a journal special issue. The editors may make requests of successful applicants in the development of the special issue proposal.

All successful applicants are expected to attend a 1–2 day Symposium (date and venue TBD) where work-in-progress will be presented and discussed with other contracted researchers. Costs of attending the Symposium will be borne by UNU-WIDER in accordance with United Nations University travel guidelines.

4 Financial support

UNU-WIDER will issue UNU Consultant Contracts (CTC) to the selected participants. A total research honorarium of USD 3,000 will be paid in two instalments. A first payment of USD 1,500 will be made upon delivery of the first draft paper, and the second payment will be made after submitting the revised full version of the working paper.² The deliverables must be deemed acceptable by the editors before payment is made. The honorarium is expected to cover all expenses associated with the analysis.

While final payment of the honorarium will be made upon delivery of the working paper, the final version of the journal special issue will not be complete at that point. After payment has been made, researchers will be asked to:

1. Respond to reasonable requests by the publisher and editors with respect to finalization of the journal special issue.
2. Participate in at least one knowledge-sharing event around the launch of the journal special issue.

¹ Researchers will transfer copyright of research produced under the contract to UNU-WIDER. The purpose of this copyright transfer is to allow UNU-WIDER to effectively negotiate with editors of journals in order to seek the most desirable possible publication outlet for a related set of papers. If no (further) publication is to be expected by UNU-WIDER, the copyright can be returned to the author(s).
² In case of co-authorships the honorarium will be divided equally among the contributors.