



**UNRISD**

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

## **Conference & Call for Papers**

### **Social and Political Dimensions of the Global Crisis: Implications for Developing Countries**

Much of the commentary on the global financial and economic crisis has focused on the proximate causes and governance issues related to risk management, monetary policy and weak regulation. It has largely focused on the advanced capitalist economies, although there is now increasing recognition that developing countries are severely affected by the crisis.<sup>1</sup> The *social and political* dimensions of the crisis itself and subsequent reforms have, however, received little attention.

New political alignments allowed global financial regulations to be substantially changed in the early 1970s. With the political ascendancy of finance capital and extensive capital market liberalization that followed, social goals (full employment) were delinked from economic policy making, while macroeconomic stabilization and “fiscal prudence” replaced them as primary objectives. The period of capital market liberalization was also a period of growing inequality, both between and within countries, along with labour market informalization and changes in state-market relations; changes in housing, pensions and wage policies; the rise in the structural and instrumental power of financial institutions and transnational corporations; and the general disembedding of the economy from society and from democratic politics.

Northern and Southern governments, and different social actors, have responded in diverse ways to the crisis. The current context provides new openings for activism, social pacts, public policy and debate on a number of key fronts aimed at reintegrating “the economic” and “the social” through democratic politics: (re)centering job creation, poverty reduction and well-being as the

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations system is drawing attention to the development implications through a number of high-level initiatives and public conference, including The Commission of Experts of the President of the UN General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System; Special High-Level Meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the Bretton Woods Institutions, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 27 April 2009, New York ; UNCTAD 2009 Public Symposium: The Global Economic Crisis and Development: The Way Forward, 18–19 May 2009, Geneva; and The United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impacts on Development, 24–26 June 2009, New York.

goals of economic policy making; reconnecting redistribution and social policy with economic policy making; and recognizing and supporting the unpaid work that goes into social reproduction and care, often intensified during crises. For developing country governments to have greater policy space as well as stronger accountability to their citizens, social dialogues need to include a diversity of social forces, including farmers, workers and social movements.

On 12–13 November 2009, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) will host an international conference in Geneva to better understand the social and political dimensions of the current crisis and subsequent policy and institutional reforms, and their implications for developing countries. In addition, the conference will provide an opportunity to identify key issues for future research in this field.

This **call for papers**, therefore, invites researchers to submit abstracts proposing papers that relate to the following themes and questions.

**The social and political origins of the financial crisis:** Changes in power relations and political configurations were instrumental in facilitating the rise of financialization, deregulation and other aspects of neoliberal orthodoxy. Many developing country governments adopted this agenda as a result of conditionality associated with the multilateral lending agencies and donor governments, as well as the buy-in from certain interest groups and technocrats committed to liberalization “from within”.

- What social and political forces precipitated the current financial crisis, especially the financialization of the economy to which it is closely linked?
- What important variations in social and political underpinnings can be observed across countries and varieties of capitalism which help explain both the severity of the crisis and the responses to it?
- How in particular have processes of liberalization (both external and domestic) rendered developing countries more vulnerable to external shocks and crises such as the current one?
- Despite the rise of civil society and the emergence of a global justice movement in recent decades, why did these and other social actors and progressive intellectual traditions have little influence on government and international policy?

**Enhancing social protection, redistribution and care through social policies:** Social policy—understood broadly as government policies that relate more directly to social protection, redistribution, reproduction/care and “human capital” formation—can play a crucial role in not only mitigating the impacts of the crisis on human well-being but also restructuring models of development to make them more resilient to future crises of various sorts. Consideration should also be given to the role of non-state actors—business and civil society—that have assumed a more prominent role in social provisioning and regulatory activities in recent decades.

- How are existing social policy programmes (for example, privatized pension systems, social insurance and assistance programmes) faring in the context of the current crisis,

- in terms of both their fiscal sustainability and effectiveness in providing protection and preventing poverty and inequality?
- What new social programmes (for example, public works programmes and school feeding programmes) are being put in place to mitigate the social impacts of the crisis? Can some of these programmes (both existing and new) be institutionalized and made more transformative?
  - Is there a role for policies and practices of corporate social responsibility and private regulation involving business and civil society actors?
  - How are households and families changing their social reproduction strategies in response to labour market retrenchment and economic slowdown?

**The politics of institutional and transformative change:** The experience of the 1930s revealed that deep crisis can result in very diverse ideological and institutional responses. Crises create opportunities for progressive policy and institutional reforms, but outcomes often hinge on contestation and the alignment of social and political forces. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the kind of political configurations that are emerging and consider whether they are likely to recast the current global and national agendas to meet social and transformative goals or reconstitute pre-crisis structural conditions.

- How have social actors and movements associated with different ideological perspectives responded to the crisis?
- How influential have they been in terms of shaping public debate and policy?
- Are social actors striving for global justice (trade unions, social movements, coalitions of states and civil society actors) organized, allied and vocal enough to engender progressive change?
- How are national and global elites manoeuvring to shape the reform agenda and frame public and policy debate?
- What implication does the enhanced role that is being assumed by the international financial institutions (IFIs) in managing the crisis have for developing countries and their policy space?

## Next Steps

If you are interested in participating in this inquiry, please submit by **15 June 2009**:

- an extended abstract of 500–1,000 words, outlining the main issues, hypotheses and structure of the paper
- CV
- copy of any previous publication on this or a related subject
- full contact details

Please send to Rebecca Buchholz (email: [buchholz@unrisd.org](mailto:buchholz@unrisd.org))

In early July, successful candidates will be invited to submit a 7,000 to 9,000 word draft paper by **30 September**, and present their findings at a conference to be held at the United Nations in Geneva, planned for 12–13 November 2009.

It is anticipated that UNRISD will be able to cover travel and accommodation costs. Subject to peer review, selected papers will be published in an edited volume through a reputable commercial publisher or as a special issue of an academic journal. They should, therefore, not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

For further information, please contact Rebecca Buchholz.