

The rise of global social policy: social assistance in developed and developing countries

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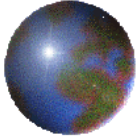
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The rise of global social policy
Social assistance in developed and developing countries

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Proponents of the new research paradigm 'global social policy' stipulate that welfare policies, which have been the domain of nation states, are moving into global politics, carried by international organisations, NGOs and other global actors (Deacon 1997, 2007, Yeates 2001). At the same time, welfare policies are assumed to become global in a spatial sense: Partially driven by international organisations, institutions of the welfare state, which originated in Western and Northern Europe, are spreading to non-Western nation states, some of which are even hypothesized to be turning into 'new welfare states' (Esping-Andersen 1996, Hort/Kuhnle 2000).¹ Studies of social security under the new global social policy paradigm have centred on the core fields of social policy like social insurance, old-age pensions and health while leaving the most basic system, social assistance, unexplored (see e.g. the journal *Global Social Policy*, 2001 ff., and Hort/Kuhnle 2000). This article aims to make a start on social assistance as global social policy.

Our first and main question is: Does the global social policy paradigm extend to social assistance? In other words, *is social assistance a case of global social policy* – in both regards: do global actors increasingly have a hand in social assistance policy, and are social assistance schemes spreading to nation states all over the world? If so, we could speak of a globalisation of social assistance that would corroborate the hypothesis of the rise of global social policy for a neglected field of social policy.

Social assistance is a good case for testing the hypothesis of a rise of global social policy because in a way social assistance is a rather unlikely candidate for turning global. Almost all developed countries provide some kind of formal means-tested assistance to persons whose means are insufficient to secure a living ('social assistance'). So social assistance might look like an obvious candidate for the global dissemination of Western welfare policies and institutions. However, despite its prevalence social assistance has less political appeal than e.g. health services or old-age pensions: Social assistance is widely seen as second or third class social security, carrying stigma and falling short of a full social right. Social assistance is a system at the bottom end of the welfare state. Social assistance is highly contested – neither liberals nor social democrats really like it. Social democrats prefer universal and fully rights-based social services to selective and means-tested assistance reminiscent of the early industrial poor laws (e.g. Deacon 2005) while liberals worry about dependency of social assistance claimants and work disincentives (for the US discourse see Bane/Ellwood 1994, ch. 3). Even in its homelands, the developed countries, social assistance has been under attack.

Therefore, in order to assess the global prospects of social assistance this article will also have to look into social assistance in the global North.

The second question addressed in this article is: If social assistance is indeed part and parcel of the rise of global social policy: what does the globalisation of social assistance tell us about *global social policy in general – about the nature of its rise and about its fabric?* Global social policy is still in its infancy and it is far from clear where it is heading for. Social assistance is a pivotal scheme in social welfare because it mirrors failures of prior institutions like families, labour markets and public services (Simmel 1908). Debates on social assistance accentuate key issues of the wider welfare debate, such as work incentives, ‘dependency’, social rights and stigma (Leibfried 1976, 1977).² The study of social assistance, therefore, might provide insights in the rise and the fabric of global social policy.

In the first section, we define the concept and the varieties of social assistance, both regarding the institutional design of social assistance schemes and the role of social assistance in the wider welfare environment. We then trace the rise of social assistance as an issue in the global debate, covering both the North and the South (section 2). Section 3 depicts the spread, the empirical varieties and the effects of social assistance and related social cash transfer schemes in the North and in the South. Section 4 compares Northern and Southern schemes and looks into the potential for policy learning. In the concluding section 5 we summarise the findings regarding our two questions about the relationship between social assistance and global social policy.

Social assistance in the global North and the global South is only beginning to be jointly analysed (for a first comprehensive study see Leisering/Buhr/Traiser-Diop 2006 on which this article draws; see also de Neubourg/Castonguay/Roelen 2007). Generally, social assistance is less researched than other welfare state institutions. For example, there is only one comparative in-depth study of social assistance in OECD countries (Eardley et al. 1996, with data for 1992). This is partly due to the unwieldy character of social assistance which does not allow easy classification and quantification of national schemes. None of the key social security data bases (US, ISSA, OECD, EU) cover the institutional characteristics of social assistance in a substantial way. Lack of scholarly attention has also been due to the fact that in many countries, e.g. in Germany, social assistance has moved to the centre stage of politics only in the 1990s. Regarding developing countries, existing studies have mostly focused on single types of social cash transfers such as ‘social’ (non-contributory) pensions (e.g.

Barrientos/Lloyd-Sherlock 2002, Palacios/Sluchynskyy 2006) or conditional cash transfers while our study covers all types.

1. Social assistance – concepts and varieties

In this section we aim to map the field of social assistance type schemes conceptually. This includes Western concepts of social assistance while for developing countries a wider spectrum of related programmes has to be considered, often referred to as ‘social cash transfers’. There is a variety of schemes. Terms equally vary, for example ‘basic income’, ‘minimum income’, ‘social cash transfers’, ‘social assistance’ etc.. Generally we can define the ideal type of social assistance as a means-tested and need-oriented public cash transfer to individuals with the explicit aim of securing a minimum income, based on a changing social definition of what a minimum is. Social cash transfers in developed and even more in developing countries may deviate from this ideal type in various ways, e.g. with benefits far below a social minimum or without reliable and continuous payment of benefits. In addition to social assistance we also have to consider universal and categorical cash transfer schemes (mainly ‘minimum pensions’ in developed countries and ‘social pensions’ in developing countries), that is, non-means-tested and non-contributory benefits for all citizens or a for defined category of citizens.

Regarding *institutional* design, the varieties of social assistance (plus universal schemes) can be classified in four dimensions. Accordingly 16 types of schemes are possible. The first dimension is selectivity (which is the hallmark of social assistance proper) vs. universality (which mainly applies to certain pensions). The second dimension is group-related vs. population-wide schemes. Group-related schemes are restricted to a certain social group (e.g. to the aged, the employed or families). For example, German social assistance was a population-wide system till 1993, that is, all citizens (and even many non-citizens) had a right to claim benefits in case of need. During the years 1993-2005 the scheme was split into four separate schemes. The third dimension is securing a living vs. providing single purpose benefits. Ideally, social assistance aims at securing a full socio-cultural minimum. But some benefit schemes only aim to enable persons to acquire certain goods and services, such as housing benefit, grants for attending higher education, legal aid or medical services. The fourth dimension is separated vs. integrated basic security. The Swedish universal basic pension, for example, is integrated into the old-age pensions system while the basic income

scheme for the elderly in Germany (since 2003) is not. Integration may increase acceptance and legitimacy of basic income payments.

In developing and transitional countries there is an even greater variety of schemes. Two aspects mark the novelty of social cash transfer schemes in such countries. First, social cash transfer schemes provide resources to individuals or households, not to social groups, villages or regions as most collective forms of technical, agricultural or social development aid do. Second, ideally, social cash transfer schemes are institutionalized on a long-term basis, as opposed to temporary aid in case of disasters or economic crisis. ‘Countries now need to consider a shift from crisis response to sustainable social assistance programs.’ (Howell 2001: 285).

Regarding the role of social assistance in the wider welfare system (‘embedding’) we can distinguish *four models*:

Some conceive of social assistance as a necessary evil rather than a programmatic component of a comprehensive system of public welfare (the first conception). Social democrats tend to advocate universal social services designed to minimise or even do away with the need for selective services. Similarly, when the new social assistance statute came into force in 1962 in Germany, the legislators expected regular social assistance to die out in the years to come, with need for social assistance being restricted to ‘aid in particular situations of need’. This is a *universalist model* of income security which attributes a marginal role to social assistance.

The second conception can be traced to T.H. Marshall (1981/1965). Marshall who established the concept of social rights as the core of the welfare state (Marshall 1950), criticized the labour orthodoxy of Richard Titmuss who conceived of the welfare state in universalistic and bureaucratic terms. Marshall argued that even in an advanced welfare state social assistance is a necessary and useful instrument to meet special needs. In this sense social assistance is a component of social citizenship and can be rights-based. This is a *social citizenship model of social assistance*. Even in Sweden, the epitome of a universalist welfare state, social assistance has a role to play (Buhr 1999).

The third concept, the concept of a ‘universal basic income’ (van Parijs 1995, 2000; BIEN, Basic Income European Network, turned into Basic Income Earth Network in 2004) gives even more prominence to basic income security than Marshall to social assistance. The universal basic income means that every citizen, irrespective of his or her other sources of

income, has a right to an income that secures a socio-cultural minimum. The basic income scheme becomes a core component of a new welfare state (*hyper universalist model of basic income security*). The universal basic income is seen as easy to administer and effective in fighting poverty (Standing 2003). Moreover, it is designed to realize the right of freedom from poverty and enable indiscriminate liberty. The concept is presented as a social panacea. It is rooted in philosophy and is not realized in any country. Critics point out that many problems related to social assistance also arise in the case of a universal basic income (Gough 2000). While social democrats and liberals tend to underestimate the use of social assistance, the proponents of a universal basic income, conversely, seem to idealize the idea of basic income security. The idea of a universal basic income is also discussed for developing countries (e.g. Standing/Samson 2004), but mostly in a more realistic version, namely restricted to certain groups (i.e. 'categorical' rather than 'universal' in a strict sense) and often combined with a means test. Non-contributory pensions for the elderly ('social pensions') are the key example. In developing countries a universalist or categorical approach can also be a pragmatical response to problems of targeting of benefits which are more pronounced than in developed countries.

There is a fourth, liberal concept of the role of social assistance in the welfare state. This is the concept of a 'liberal welfare regime' (Esping-Andersen 1990) or 'residual social policy' (Titmuss 1974). Again, social assistance is given more prominence than in the integrated model of Marshall. Neoliberals do not normally call for dismantling the welfare state altogether but rather for reducing welfare entitlements to basic security. Social assistance is designed to act as the core system in the welfare state while prior social services like universal benefits or social insurance remain weak. This is a *residual model of social assistance* or the idea of a social assistance state (Eardley et al. 1996). The idea is to avoid the fallacies of the welfare state by targeting services to the 'really needy'. This is another way of idealizing social assistance since in the absence of substantial prior social services the capacity of social assistance to secure basic income is overstretched. Social assistance in a residual environment tends to be poor social assistance as Korpi/Palme (1998) have shown in a comparative study. The explanation is that a (residual) welfare state mainly geared to the poor loses middle-class support whereby political support for social assistance is also weakened. Contrary to a widespread view, there is no global trend towards a residual welfare state. Even in transitional countries there is only limited evidence for a race to the bottom in social policy

(Alber/Standing 2000). To the contrary, East Asian countries, e.g., have been expanding social insurance, even after the Asian Crisis of 1997 (Hort/Kuhnle 2000).

Regarding global politics, Deacon (2005) describes the 1980s and the 1990s as decades of a residualization of social policy. In particular, he refers to the World Bank's 'alliance with the poor' which aimed at establishing residual social security for the poor, especially 'safety nets' which include marginal cash transfers, while opposing public welfare services for the middle classes. According to Deacon, the pendulum is currently swinging back from residual to more universal models of social policy, promoted by social democrats. As a consequence the quality of services is expected to rise and public social security would rely on an alliance between the middle classes and the poor, following the argument by Korpi/Palme (1998). Deacon's argument is incomplete: His advocacy of universal systems needs to be complemented by an advocacy of selective systems like social assistance that fill the gaps of coverage and need-fulfilment left by universal systems. As we have argued following T.H. Marshall (1981/1965) both universality and selectivity are needed for an integrated strategy of social inclusion. Universal and selective schemes are not opposed but complementary to each other.

2. Social assistance as a global issue

In *Western welfare states* social assistance is the main instrument of providing a basic income (the other main type, less widespread and with a more limited scope, is universal old-age pensions). Despite continuous contestation social assistance can be found in most Western countries. Since the 1980s social assistance has even become more relevant since careers in employment, family and migration have become more discontinuous and risky, creating a need for (long-term as well as temporary) social assistance benefits for wider sections of the population. Politically social assistance has turned from a marginal into a key issue. Since the mid 1990s social assistance has been thoroughly reformed, including an emphasis on activating clients. Social assistance persists but continues to lack appeal, aligning uneasily with the idea of social rights and social citizenship that define the welfare state. In Germany, for instance, till 1918 receipt of poor relief implied disenfranchisement. An individual right to social assistance was only established by statute in 1961. Since social assistance benefits include discretion, entitlements are less standardized and not fully rights-based. Generally, the legitimacy of social assistance is low because in a work society payments solely on the basis of need tend to have limited support.

In *developing and transitional countries* social assistance and related social cash transfers are less widespread. This is due to the dominance of the concept of helping people to help themselves in the international development community. Social cash transfers to the poor are then often seen as just the opposite – as unsustainable handouts and as ineffective.

International organizations are used to providing benefits and services directly to individuals only as humanitarian help in case of disasters and as help to refugees.

In some developing countries colonial powers had established systems of poor relief early on (Midgley 1984), but on a broader scale social assistance schemes – or rather more modest ‘social cash transfers’ – have long not figured on the agenda of development policy. In fact, social assistance has long resided in an *ideological nowhere land*, not supported by any of the three great ideologies or discourses which shape global as well as national social policy thinking: liberalism, social democracy and the civil society discourse. Liberals tend to see social assistance as anti-individualistic: as undermining, not strengthening individual capacities and leading to dependency. Social democrats tend to hold social assistance in low esteem since they prefer ‘universal’ schemes. They see social assistance as anti-individualistic in a different way: as not based on individual rights, as degrading and stigmatising through the means test. A third discourse associated with NGOs, social movements and champions of human rights may be termed civil society discourse. Proponents of this discourse call for participation and empowerment of the poor and the vulnerable, that is, they call for the extension of civil and political human rights and not so much of social human rights. If in this discourse welfare aspects are addressed at all, reference is normally made to self-organized groups like women’s networks and associations or to holistic concepts like livelihoods, vulnerability and social exclusion rather than income poverty and cash benefits. Thus, social assistance has no genuine constituency – it falls ‘between the chairs’ of the three key discourses in politics.

However, since the 1990s and ultimately since the 2000s issues regarding social cash transfers have cropped up in reports or even in the practice of international organizations and movements. A major force is the ILO with its global campaign ‘social security for all’ (ILO 2001, van Ginneken 2003) and its pilot programme ‘Global Social Trust’ (ILO 2003). The International Social Security Association has followed in the ILO’s footsteps (ISSA 2007). International organisations call for ‘Social Security for All’ (ILO 2001), for ‘extending social security to all’ (ISSA 2007) or even for a ‘global social security floor’ (Cichon/Hagemeyer 2007, from the ILO). Among national development agencies the British Department for

International Development (DFID) has taken the lead. German development policy has been exploring the issue since 2002 and has run pilot projects in Africa. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) uses the expression 'social assistance', covering a heterogeneous range of services. Since the 1980s the World Bank has increasingly attended to the needs of the poor, through concepts like 'safety nets' and (since 2000) 'social risk management'. These concepts include social cash transfers but only social pensions (Holzmann/Hinz 2005, Palacios/Sluchynskyy 2006) and conditional cash transfers (see below). Safety nets are normally conceived as residual social policy without embedding in a wider arrangement of social services. NGOs like Oxfam and HelpAge International have also espoused the cause of social cash transfers (for a more detailed analysis of the role of international organisations in this field see Leisering 2008).

We may assume that at least *three new – or newly perceived – problems of social inclusion* have pushed the issue on the global agenda. First, social groups were identified who have a limited capacity for self-help. Conventional developmental policy oriented to self-help would not be adequate for this type of persons, especially for families affected by HIV/AIDS, for the increasing number of elderly in developing countries, for people with disabilities and for single mothers. Second, an inclusion paradox has come to the fore: The more persons in the formal (mostly urban) employment sector are covered by the core social security systems like social insurance, the more it becomes apparent that certain groups, above all persons in the informal sector and in rural areas, are excluded. Third, several global discourses have changed, creating a supportive platform for social cash benefits: Since the 1990s poverty has been rediscovered and redefined as global problem number one by an unprecedented alliance of international organizations (Noël 2006), manifest in the Millennium Development Goals of 2000. Poverty is also being redefined as a human rights issue (OHCHR 2004). Moreover, the general global move towards strengthening social human rights feeds into the rise of social cash transfers - social cash transfers are beginning to be seen as a human rights issue (DFID 2005). Changes in general global discourses – the opening of the Washington Consensus towards more 'social' concerns (Mehrotra/Delamonica 2005, Deacon 2005) - could equally help to give more prominence to questions of basic income security.

3. Social assistance and social cash transfers in the global North and South: spread, varieties and effects

3.1 Social assistance in developed countries

Social assistance comes in various forms and names, such as ‘social assistance’ and ‘Grundsicherung’ (basic security) in Germany, ‘revenu minimum d’insertion’ (RMI, minimum income for social integration) in France or ‘temporary assistance for needy families’ (TANF) or ‘welfare’ in the USA. The USA stands out because TANF (even more than pre-TANF welfare)³ lacks some of the characteristics of advanced modern social assistance. In Europe the Mediterranean countries have been latecomers to modern social assistance.

Western social assistance has three *aims*: security of income to reduce poverty; social integration; and activation of claimants. The latter two aims have become more prominent since the 1980s and the 1990s respectively. All in all social assistance is effective: Empirical studies show that poverty is substantially reduced. In addition social assistance may have wider positive effects, especially bridging periods of biographical crisis in peoples’ lives and increasing the autonomy of single mothers or old people by providing an independent source of income (Leisering/Leibfried 1999). There is little empirical evidence that social assistance has substantial deleterious effects on individual behaviour in the labour market or on family life, as suggested by critics. Dependency is a limited phenomenon (Bane/Ellwood 1994, Leisering/Leibfried 1999, Dean/Taylor-Gooby 1992).

Since the 1990s social assistance has been *reformed* thoroughly in many Western countries. One tendency of reform was to control access to benefits more rigidly and to tighten controls of claimants. Another line of reform was to rationalize the administration of social assistance, following models of new public management and expanding partnerships between governmental, voluntary and private agencies. Another strand of reform was to place more emphasis on activating claimants in view of leaving assistance. This includes reforms under the ‘New Deal’ and the ‘Third Way’ by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair since 1997 (Leisering/Hilkert 2000, Stewart 2004); the US-American welfare reform of 1996 under President Clinton, which introduced, among others, time limits on claiming assistance; and Chancellor Schröder’s ‘Hartz IV’ reform of 2005 which downgraded unemployment benefit for the long-term unemployed (more than one year) to a kind of social assistance and

introduced a wide range of activating measures. Although social assistance, for example in Germany, had always been directed at enabling self-help, since the 1990s this principle has been taken more seriously than before ('welfare to work'). In some countries 'workfare' makes receipt of benefits conditional on participating in make work schemes. Activation may have a punitive side, relying on incentives and sanctions, but it may also have a supportive side, emphasizing positive support measures for claimants. Countries vary with regard to the emphasis they put on either side. Part of the reforms has been to increase personal social services, especially counselling and case management, beyond cash benefits. In some countries social assistance was complemented by new tax policies to combat poverty, especially in the USA under the Earned Income Tax Credit scheme (EITC), in Britain and in Germany.

Social assistance schemes *differ* considerably among countries, both with regard to the institutional design of the scheme and its role in the overall architecture of social security in the country. The only comprehensive comparative study, Eardley et al. (1996), is dated but still relevant in the absence of more recent studies (for more restricted comparative studies see Bonny/Bosco 2002, Heikkilä/Keskatalo 2001, Lødemel/Trickey 2000, Tesliuc 2006, Jewell 2007; for summaries of the Eardley study see Gough et al. 1997, for a reanalysis of the data by cluster analysis see Gough 2001). Countries differ, among others, as to whether social assistance is group-related (e.g. in the USA, Australia, Belgium, France and Italy) or population-wide (for these terms see section 2) as in the Nordic countries, Japan, England and Germany, including cases of separate social assistance schemes for certain groups adding up to population-wide coverage. Benefit levels equally vary. In social democratic welfare regimes like Finland, Sweden and Denmark but also in conservative regimes like Germany and Austria social assistance is relatively generous while south-European countries are less generous (Kazepow/Sabatinelli 2001, Bonny/Bosco 2002). Countries also differ with regard to the administrative structure, with a more centralized, integrated, national type of social assistance, especially in the UK and Australia, and more locally shaped administrations (Ditch 1996: 33). Obligations to work also differ considerably (Lødemel/Trickey 2000). On the basis of a multidimensional analysis Eardley et al. obtained *eight types of social assistance* with regard to their position in the overall system of social security:

- selective welfare systems: means-tested categorical schemes with a relatively high benefit level and a generous means test (Australia, New Zealand)

- public assistance state: means-tested schemes with strong stigma, large clientele, strong work incentives and low benefit level (USA)
- welfare states with integrated safety nets: largely centrally regulated social assistance with little discretion of local offices and reliable benefits (England, Ireland, Canada, Germany)
- dual social assistance: coexistence of various categorical schemes and more recent comprehensive schemes (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg)
- rudimentary assistance: categorical programmes for some groups while payment of general social assistance is highly discretionary depending on the localities (South Europe, Turkey)
- residual social assistance: a population-wide system of social assistance with limited relevance due to comprehensive prior social security systems (Nordic countries)
- highly decentralized assistance with local discretion, but with relatively high benefit level (Austria, Switzerland)
- centralized social assistance with far-reaching support obligations for kin and high stigma attached (Japan).

This typology refers to the early 1990s. There have been some changes since. Some Mediterranean countries have left the category ‘rudimentary social assistance’: Portugal has introduced a public minimum income system in 1996 and Italy operated pilot programmes for the introduction of a comprehensive ‘reddito minimo d’inserimento’ (RMI) since 1998 (Benassi/Mingione 2003). The French RMI served as a model. With the exception of Greece (see Matsaganis 2003) all EU countries now have a basic income scheme. Changes in German social assistance include a segmentation, that is, a move from a unified scheme to an arrangement of four separate (though very similar) categorical schemes for asylum seekers (since 1993), for the elderly and the invalid (since 2003), for the long-term unemployed (since 2005) and for the remaining persons (‘social assistance’). Other changes include a sharp rise in the number of claimants in Switzerland and a substantial reduction of the caseload in the wake of the welfare reform of 1996 in the USA.

Despite all these differences we propose to construct an ideal type of ‘*modern social assistance*’ to which many Western countries come near and which sharply differs from older types of poor relief. This ideal type of modern social assistance (‘ideal’ in a methodological sense following Max Weber, not in a normative sense) can serve as a model for comparing social cash transfer schemes in developing countries to schemes in developed countries (see section 4). Strong deviations from the ideal type can be found particularly in the USA.

Australia is special because the Australian means-tested schemes are core schemes of the welfare state, with income thresholds well above poverty lines. The ideal type ‘modern social assistance’ is defined by:

- Responsibility for the operation of the scheme lies with the government(s).
- The scheme is taxed-financed.
- Assistance is only paid second to private means and other public benefits.
- The assistance depends on the individual needs of each client (principle of individualization).
- Assistance is need-oriented, irrespective of the causes of need.
- The main benefits are cash benefits but benefits may additionally include social services, e.g. financing medical treatment, and, in the cause of activating policies, personal social services like debt counselling, vocational training, education etc..
- Assistance relates to both short-term and long-term situations of need. Social assistance may serve to bridge a temporary crisis but it may also act as a long-term, pension-like benefit.
- The level of benefits is decided according to standards that are deliberated in the political process and related to defensible statistical measures and scientific evidence.
- Social assistance is institutionalized, that is, its legal regulation, bureaucratic administration and budget are put on a reliable base.
- Social assistance enjoys a minimum of political legitimacy.

3.2 Social cash transfers in developing and transitional countries

Social cash transfer schemes are fairly widespread in non-Western societies: in post-communist societies, in other transitional societies but also in developing countries.⁴ All in all we found such schemes in 58 non-OECD countries (and in Mexico and South-Korea) and there may be more.

Apart from some older schemes social cash transfers have emerged in a big wave since the 1990s. Some schemes have been initiated by national and sub-national governments – above all the Minimum Living Standard System (MLSS) in the People’s Republic of China – while other schemes have been promoted by international organisations. Often endogenous and exogenous influences mix. The ILO’s pilot project ‘Global Social Trust’ (ILO 2003) is a

special case. Under this project citizens of OECD countries pay individual contributions into a fund to finance basic income security in developing countries.

We propose a *typology of social cash transfers* with four types. In the literature no such overarching typology has been developed since almost all studies focussed on one particular type, e.g. non-contributory pensions or conditional cash transfers.⁵ Our typology has emerged inductively from a survey analysis of empirical studies found in the literature, combined with a theoretical perspective. We distinguish four main types (ideal types) of social transfer schemes (table 1):

- non-contributory (or ‘social’) pensions,
- social assistance (without specific reference to families),
- social assistance for families,
- conditional transfers (money or food for work or for participation in education or health).

The fourth type, conditional transfers, deviates from the ideal type of social assistance since payments are conditional on activities of the recipients and, therefore, are not entirely need-oriented. In Western countries conditional transfers are not common, with the exception of ‘workfare’ e.g. in the USA, that is, social assistance tied to work requirements. However, even non-workfare social assistance is normally conditional on the willingness to work. ‘Food-for’ programmes also deviate from the ideal-typical social cash transfers since they provide assistance in kind.

Social cash transfers are designed, among others, to overcome the drawbacks of assistance in kind. In-kind benefits are not normally directly targeted to individuals, e.g. subsidies to the price of basic goods or subsidies to agricultural production. Food stamps are directed to individuals but they restrict the free use by the recipient which is typical for cash transfers. Generally, benefits in kind are deemed ineffective.

Obviously social cash transfers in developing countries do not normally come near the ideal type of highly institutionalized, Western-style modern social assistance, with the exception of South Korea.

Are social cash transfer schemes *effective*? The analysis of existing studies and evaluations (see table 1) shows that social cash transfers can be successful in reducing poverty to a sizable extent. In South Africa non-contributory pensions have reduced poverty by 94 %. Conditional

transfers, especially money for education, have also been successful. Effectiveness depends on institutional conditions in a country and on the quality of implementation. This applies particularly to two other types, social assistance for families and not family-related social assistance. Evidence about effectiveness is mixed for these two types. Subsidies and basic assistance in kind have largely proved ineffective. Critics view social cash transfers as not sustainable and not productive, as feeding people rather than helping them to feed themselves. However, there is no substantial evidence to support these views. The operation of the schemes is riddled with problems – especially problems of exclusion and inclusion and too low benefits (see Leisering 2008) – , but these problems are not specific to social cash transfers. In low-developed countries all institutions, markets and public administrations alike, tend to be deficient.

There is also evidence that social cash transfers have further positive social and economic effects in addition to their immediate impact of reducing poverty. In this sense social cash transfers can act as self-help devices. First, social cash transfers can support families. Cash for grandmothers in families affected by HIV/AIDS as well as cash for single mothers may increase the self-help capacity of the family. Second, cash transfers can increase social respect and autonomy of the poor. This applies to old persons whose status within the family is heightened by disposal of own income, and to women. Third, cash transfers may have positive economic effects by creating demand on local markets. Poor people are enabled to participate in markets, triggering multiplier effects (pro-poor growth; Schubert 2005).

The evidence also shows that social cash transfer schemes are *financially viable* also in poor countries. Funding requirements are limited as can be seen from existing schemes which absorb between 1 to 2 % of gross social product (for comprehensive estimations of the cost of a global social security floor see Cichon/Hagemeyer 2007). Basic income security, therefore, is not primarily an economic question but a question of a supportive institutional and political environment in a country ('embedding'). Fighting poverty and installing social cash transfers requires a sustained and explicit political commitment, both by donors and by the elites in developing countries. This commitment has long been weak.

Table 1: The four main types of social cash transfers in developing countries compared

	<i>Non-contributory pensions</i>	<i>Social assistance</i> (without specific reference to families)	<i>Family-related social assistance</i>	<i>Conditional transfers</i> a) food for work b) money for work (public works) c) food for education d) money for education
<i>Target group(s)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the aged people with disabilities widows orphans war-disabled persons the incapacitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> persons threatened by starvation victims of natural disasters pregnant women living by themselves single mothers and women with many children refugees youth on vocational training relatives of prisoners diverse other groups total population (urban China; Uzbekistan: Mahalla system) 	poor families with children	a) persons lacking food b) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> low-paid workers poor persons fit for work urban unemployed unemployed women c) and d) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> families with children of school age families with babies and small children pregnant women
<i>Targeting</i>	two stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> categorically defined target group individual means test (in some cases: universal) 	two or three stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> geographical targeting categorically defined target group and/or individual means test 	categorically defined target group	a) diverse b) project targeting and self-targeting or community-based c) and d): three stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> geographical targeting categorical definition of target group individual means test
<i>Effects</i> (positive and negative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduction of poverty enhancing the status of the recipient in the family improving the medical condition particular support of women, children and households afflicted by HIV/AIDS multiplier effects 	often limited effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited poverty reduction exclusion errors low benefit level regional bias 		negative impact: autonomy of recipients curtailed (paternalism); (a and c:) local markets impaired a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> trade-off between poverty reduction and promotion of desired behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> little reduction of hunger and poverty, ineffective

- no disincentives

- b)
 - partial reduction of poverty
 - fostering the ability to work and self-help
 - multiplier effects
 - low take-up/exclusion errors
- c)
 - improved nutritional status
 - little poverty reduction
- d)
 - poverty reduction
 - improved educational attainment
 - improved nutritional and health status
 - positive impact on gender relationships
 - social integration of the poor
 - no disincentives
 - multiplier effects
- a) failure
- b) partially successful
- c) partially successful
- d) *successful beyond the aim of poverty reduction (prevention of future poverty through social investment); hybrid system (poverty reduction and behavioural aim) with possible trade-offs; not need-oriented modern social assistance*

Overall assessment

achieves intended effects and has further positive side effects

- *effectiveness depends on institutional design and administrative control capacity in the country; potential for future development*
- *variegated implementation, few empirical studies, mostly negative assessment in the literature*
- *only South Korea, urban China and, in some respects, Uzbekistan come close to the Western model of social assistance*
- *effectiveness depends on institutional design and administrative control capacity in the country; potential for future development*
- *variegated implementation, few empirical studies, mostly negative assessment in the existing literature*

Source: derived from an analysis of empirical studies on social cash transfers (see Leisering 2008, Leisering/Buhr/Traiser-Diop 2004, 2006)

4. North and South: differences and chances for learning

4.1 Comparing North and South

How do schemes in the global North compare to those in the global South? Are there similarities or is it misleading to deal with Northern and Southern systems under the same label 'social assistance' or 'social cash transfers'? There are reasons to assume that Northern and Southern schemes are indeed related, in fact Southern schemes have mostly been influenced by Northern actors and models. Still, differences are marked. These differences include:

- Benefit levels in Southern countries are mostly below subsistence.
- Benefit levels are less standardised, with pronounced differences between administrative agencies, areas, and over time.
- Coverage is confined to the very poor, to selected social groups, and/or to the long-term poor.
- Methods of targeting are more elaborate in the face of addressees from the informal sector and remote rural areas.
- Implementation is less formalised, especially through the involvement of local community groups and schools in targeting the needy.
- The beneficiaries use the benefits in a less individualised way, sometimes channeling the money into their families, thus linking formal cash payments with informal social security.

These adaptations indicate that SCT deviate systematically from key norms of Western social policy such as formal bureaucracy, individualism, universalism and professionalism.

However, considering that many schemes are rather recent, no definite assessment can be made.

To broadly capture the differences between social cash transfer schemes in theoretical terms we propose three ideal types – crisis relief, developed poor relief, modern social assistance – that could be interpreted as a sequence of institutional modernization. Modernization theory

has often been taken to suggest an inevitable or desirable sequence of development. The tripartite ideal typology we are proposing need not imply such assumptions. Rather, it provides a map which may help to see differences and shared characteristics in existing schemes. Most income schemes in developing and transitional countries considered in this article will be close to the medium ideal type, developed poor relief, while some would fall into the category crisis relief. Only very few of these countries, mainly South Korea and, to a degree, the People's Republic of China, come near modern social assistance. Even in developed countries the ideal type modern social assistance is realized only to varying degrees. Table 2 specifies the three types.

Crisis relief includes traditional forms of local, mostly informal poor relief and international humanitarian aid and disaster relief. Crisis relief is weakly institutionalized: Benefits are very low, only the very poor are targeted, there is no right to assistance, expectations of receiving assistance are insecure, and sometimes there are collective provisions not tailored to individual needs. This is a far cry from an inclusive and sustainable policy of social security.

Developed poor relief shares basic characteristics of crisis relief, there are no clear-cut boundaries. However, the degree of institutionalization is higher: The benefit level is higher, though still below subsistence; relief may aim at investing in human capital rather than only securing survival; and the spectrum of target persons is broader though still restricted to specific vulnerable groups. Institutional steering capacity is higher than in the case of crisis relief, and instruments of relief are more diverse.

Modern social assistance has fully emerged only after the second World War in Western countries. It has become an accepted though contested component of advanced welfare states. Modern social assistance is institutionally complex, it aims at securing a socio-culturally defined minimum and is 'target person universal', that is, covers all citizens in case of need (in some countries in one scheme, in many countries through an arrangement of several group-related schemes). There is an individual right to assistance. Only modern social assistance provides 'basic security' in a strict sense: *basic* security since it provides an adequate 'base' of living, a full minimum; and *basic security* since it provides a reliable, need-oriented and potentially unlimited support for current and potential future contingencies.

Modern social assistance differs from earlier poor relief not only by institutional characteristics but also by its reference to two interrelated key institutions of modern society,

the *welfare state* and the modern individualized *life course* (Marshall 1950, Kohli 1986). The individual and the individual life course are cultural constructions of modernity (Meyer 1986), involving a diversity of individual life plans that give rise to various risks and discontinuities. The welfare state can be seen as an institution that structures, regulates and evens out the life course (Leisering 2003). While poor relief addresses the poor, marginalized persons and people with reduced capacity for self-help (like families affected by HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, the elderly etc.), welfare state institutions, including social assistance, address a broader variety of risks and people in need. Social assistance is life course policy in a comprehensive sense. Modern welfare institutions also address problems of persons who are in principle able to help themselves. Poverty research based on event history later has shown that social assistance often acts as a bridge at points of a biographical crisis or transition.⁶ A need for temporary aid may also occur for members of the middle classes. This finding has been referred to as ‘democratization’ of poverty and social assistance (Beck 1986, Leisering/Leibfried 1999). Risks in the life course covered by social assistance also include unemployment. While social cash transfer schemes in developing countries largely address vulnerable groups who are remote from the labour market, we can expect that with increasing modernization the problem of unemployment may become the main challenge for social cash transfer schemes, as is already the case in the Chinese Minimum Living Standard System.

Table 2: Ideal types of social cash transfer schemes

<i>Type of social cash transfer scheme</i>	<i>Crisis relief</i>	<i>Developed poor relief</i>	<i>Modern social assistance</i>
Wider welfare environment (esp. social insurance)	none/weak	privileged welfare schemes for persons in formal sector and close to government	welfare schemes for majority of the population
Function	securing survival	securing a living, investing in human capital	security in the life course, social integration, activation
Risks and persons covered	hunger, acute threat the poorest	poverty, social exclusion, low human capital the poor, the vulnerable (categorical) like aged, disabled, children/families, women a. o.	risks in the modern life course all persons in need ('target person universalism'), including unemployed, single mothers
Benefits	benefits in kind, sometimes cash or personal social services	cash, sometimes personal social services and collective assistance in kind partially conditional, hybrid schemes (combining poverty reduction with promotion of work, education or health)	individualized cash payments, modern personal social services, broad range of provisions
Benefit duration	short, sometimes longer	often limited	short and long/unlimited
Benefit level	below poverty line unstable/insecure	below poverty line partially unstable	socio-cultural minimum standard stable/secure, largely standardized
Spatial structure	local diversity; sometimes centralized	regional diversity; often division urban – rural areas	unitary national structure
Targeting	geographical targeting, categorical targeting (proxy indicators, individual means test) targeting by local communities, institutions (e.g. schools), public agencies	see crisis relief	bureaucratic individualized means test; social assistance as a right
Finance	diverse, partially mixed (national, subnational, international) unstable; limited (if donor-financed)	see crisis relief	national, subnational (from taxes) stable, unlimited

Source: Author's conceptualisation⁷

4.2 The North: Lessons for the South?

Policy learning is not normally a process of copying models from other countries. Institution building depends on the social conditions given in a country, and obviously conditions in developing countries differ markedly from developed countries. But since social cash transfer schemes in developing countries share at least some of the goals and the instruments of modern social assistance, it may be worthwhile to take stock of the experience of Northern countries. Even if immediate lesson drawing for institution building is not feasible or often not desirable, the discourse on basic income security in Southern countries may be informed by the findings of studies of Northern systems. What can policy makers, administrators and other participants in the political discourse learn from the Northern experience? There are some lessons that could be learnt while other pieces of experience do not easily translate to developing countries.

Findings that could inform discourses in the South and in the international development community include:

- There is need for social assistance. Almost all developed countries have created a more or less comprehensive last safety net or arrangement of nets, with the major exception of the USA. Social assistance, in particular, is the key instrument of poverty reduction in developed countries. Since the 1990s the size and significance of social assistance has even increased. Social assistance schemes respond to gaps in prior systems of formal social security, to failures or volatility of markets and families, covering persons in need, many of which may be activated to leave social assistance while others may have to rely on assistance for a longer period of time.
- As studies have shown social assistance is effective in reducing poverty.
- Countries that concentrate social services on social assistance type programmes while minimising prior social security schemes (liberal welfare regimes, residual model) have less effective social assistance programmes ('paradox of redistribution', comparative empirical study by Korpi/Palme 1998).
- Concerns that social assistance renders clients 'dependent' and creates disincentives to work, need considerable qualification. Empirical studies only found no or very limited evidence of negative incentives. To the contrary, social assistance to a large extent strengthens the individual capacity for self-help, and institutional reforms as recently undertaken in many Western welfare states can reinforce this function.

- Concerns about soaring expenditure also need qualification. Social assistance is a comparatively small (if growing) social security system in financial terms.
- The introduction, the institutional design and the generosity of a social assistance scheme is largely a question of political commitment and not primarily of economic resources in a country.

The Mediterranean countries established social assistance schemes as late as the late 1990s. Since developing countries share some of the characteristics of Mediterranean countries, e.g. large agricultural and informal sectors, a strong role of the family and entrenched clientelism, developing countries might particularly learn from these countries.

While these are more general, discursive lessons, some institutional characteristics of Northern systems do not easily travel to the South. This includes:

- To be effective, social assistance requires a degree of institutional capacity which cannot be taken for granted in most Southern countries. Social assistance schemes need to be embedded in sound administrative, fiscal and political institutions (Leisering 2008).
- Welfare to work programmes, in particular, which some transitional countries (like urban China) have started to adopt, require a developed infrastructure regarding administration and staff. This has to be taken into account when lessons are to be drawn from the US welfare reform of 1996 for developing countries regarding make-work schemes (e.g. Tabor 2002: 31).
- In Western countries targeting is largely self-targeting because claiming social assistance still carries stigma for many persons. Due to the spread of formalized and monetarized social relationships, targeting in developed countries is easier than in developing countries. In the literature and in the practice of social cash transfers in developing countries targeting is a big issue. Complicated methods and theories are developed. Targeting sometimes relies on very crude measures like geographical or categorical targeting. Several methods of targeting may be combined (see table 2).

All in all there is reason to reflect on the Northern experience when installing social cash transfer schemes in the South. As yet, a common joint discourse and common models have not emerged – in contrast to, e.g., old-age security where the multi pillar model advocated by the World Bank (World Bank 1994, Holzmann/Hinz 2005) has become a uniform model for all countries in the world.

5. Conclusion: the rise of global social policy – normative and sectoral diversity

The article has addressed the question whether social assistance is a case of growing global social policy, defined by an increasing involvement of international organisations and a world wide spread to an increasing number of nation states. In the concluding section we summarise the relevant findings and then discuss our second question as to what overall model of global social policy is promoted by the global rise of social assistance.

The answer to the first question – whether social assistance is a case of global social policy – is ‘yes’ but with substantial qualifications. Benefit schemes which have some (often rudimentary) resemblance to Western social assistance – often referred to as ‘social cash transfers’ – have indeed spread to all world regions (to at least 58 non-OECD countries) since the 1990s. So there is geographical globalisation of social assistance. The issue of social cash transfers has simultaneously made its way onto the global political agenda, with a breakthrough around 2005/2006. Various governmental and non-governmental international organisations have become champions of social cash transfers. There is evidence that this move cannot easily be reversed since social cash transfers are backed by several strands of policy: The rise of social cash transfers is part of a wider ‘socialisation’ of *development policies* – ‘Social protection is moving up on the development agenda.’ (Holzmann et al., 2003: 1, a World Bank paper). We also found that *human rights policies* feed into social cash transfers. In addition, diverse issues of global *social policy* regarding children, the elderly and education overlap and converge in concepts of social cash transfers.

According to John W. Meyer’s theory of the world polity, policies can be expected to spread worldwide when they confirm to the basic norms and models of the world culture. Social assistance can be seen to reflect two key elements of the world culture, universalism and individualism (for the relationship of social assistance to the world culture see Leisering/Buhr/Traiser-Diop 2006: section 20.2) but in the dominant global social policy discourses – the liberal, the social democratic and the civil society discourses – social assistance is not normally seen this way. Moreover, social assistance is not backed by forceful epistemic communities and professional associations. Still, social assistance could expand incrementally as experienced earlier in developed countries: grounded in a basic concern for the dignity of all human beings; not actively promoted but tolerated by the middle class; and

propelled by needs of special groups like the elderly and by special world events like AIDS in Africa.

Our findings on social assistance in the global North show that despite sustained criticism, social assistance schemes persist in Western welfare states. Social assistance is hotly debated and thoroughly reformed but not normally substantially reduced (with the US welfare reforms of 1996 as a major exception). So also in this respect, social assistance is (or rather remains) global.

However, the globalisation of social assistance is *limited* in many ways. First, even in the global North, social assistance sense is not universal. Social assistance in the full sense is *not a least common denominator of Western countries*, as often believed. Social assistance in the USA, in particular (TANF and food stamps), lacks essential institutional elements of the ideal type ‘modern social assistance’. Greece and partially Italy are other cases in point. The US case is even more complicated: Institutionalization is weak mainly with regard to legal entitlements to benefits and with regard to funding while the office-client relationship is more institutionalized (through concepts of case management) than in many other countries (see Jewell 2007).

Second, social cash transfer schemes in the global South are mostly *weakly institutionalised* compared to Western social assistance. It is open to question if these schemes could rightly be considered as instances of a globalisation of social assistance. Most social cash transfers also fall short of the grand semantics used by international organisations, such as a ‘global social security floor’. This is a case of what John W. Meyer called ‘*decoupling*’ of global ideas from national realities.

Third, even the *programmatic documents* of international organisations regarding social cash transfers in developing countries fall short of Western concepts of social assistance. On closer examination, much of the social cash transfer agenda boils down to social pensions and conditional cash transfers. Even in the documents of the leading international organisation commonly viewed as champion of ‘social’ ends, the ILO, ambitious calls for ‘social security for all’ and for a ‘global social security floor’ do not translate into benefit schemes that cover all persons in need (but only selected groups; see Kulke 2007).

Fourth, the ideas and models of social cash transfers devised by international organisations only refer to developing countries, not to developed countries. There is *no unified global*

discourse. In this sense, global social assistance policy is less ‘global’ than, for example, global pension policy which has unified ideas, discourses and models (like the multi pillar model) that pertain to all countries in the world. Education and health also have elements of a genuinely global agenda, coupled to activities of the relevant international organisations like UNESCO and WHO in the global North (absent in the field of social assistance).

The question remains: *What* global social policy is propelled by the ongoing (partial) globalisation of social assistance and social cash transfers? Social policy debates are normally framed in terms of a simple dualistic pattern, market liberalism vs. state welfarism.

Accordingly, global social policy is often seen as a struggle between neoliberal and social democratic forces (Deacon 1997, Yeates 2001). Similarly, in the current crisis of Western welfare states, neoliberal ideas of dismantling the ingrained welfare state clash with welfare state orthodoxy or reformism. For developing and transitional countries residual models of social policy compete with more ‘social’ models, and the notion of a ‘race to the bottom’ competes with the scholarly hypothesis of the expansion of social policy or even the advent of ‘new welfare states’.

From our findings we conclude that the rise of social assistance in global social policy is *ambivalent* with regard to the two competing scenarios: social assistance could be part of a neoliberal scenario of global social policy as well as part of a more ‘social’ scenario. This is rooted in the general ambivalence of social assistance: On the one hand, securing a ‘floor’ for human lives, social assistance constitutes a moral minimum worth striving for in the view of most people. On the other hand, if social assistance is conceived as the mainstay of public welfare under a liberal welfare regime, then social assistance becomes the epitome of welfare residualism disapproved by many.

What side of social assistance prevails and in which ways, depends on the institutional design of social assistance schemes and their linkages to the wider welfare environment. Social assistance schemes differ in two dimensions: institutionalization and social embedding.

Institutionalization refers to the degree and the ways social assistance is institutionalized (in terms of goal definition, law, administration, finance, social professions etc.) while social embedding refers to the location of social assistance in a wider institutional and political environment. The analysis by Korpi/Palme (1998) mentioned earlier implies that the two dimensions are linked: weak embedding (as in residual welfare regimes) entails weak

institutionalization. We found that in both developed and developing countries, social assistance schemes vary widely on both accounts.

Social embedding is crucial in two dimensions: institutional and political. A social assistance scheme may be embedded in an environment with comprehensive universal social services or social insurance; or the institutional environment may be weak (as in the USA) leaving more people to fall onto social assistance (residual welfare regime, ‘poverty approach’). This is institutional embedding. Political embedding, by contrast, refers to whether social assistance rests on a strong political commitment to basic income security or even on constitutional law (as in Germany) or not. Social assistance may be imbued with a culture of suspicion towards welfare rights and welfare clients, linked to derogatory semantics like ‘welfare’, ‘welfare mothers’ or ‘welfare queens’ (as in the USA). The analysis by Korpi/Palme rests on the finding that weak institutional embedding entails weak political embedding since political support of social assistance by the middle classes depends on whether there are core welfare institutions that cater for them.

Differences with regard to institutionalisation and embedding lead back to the normative models of social assistance that we have distinguished in section 1. If social assistance is weakly institutionalized (e.g. not rights-based, with poorly defined benefit standards and limited coverage, without reliable administration and budgeting) and is not embedded in a strong institutional and political environment, then the global rise of social assistance would indeed indicate a neoliberal vision of global social policy, predicated on a residual social policy model as found in the USA and canvassed in various forms by the World Bank.⁸ This would be a *residual model of social assistance*. If, to the contrary, social assistance is strongly institutionalized and embedded in a strong institutional and political environment, social assistance can be an essential element of global social citizenship, broadening the coverage of the overall system of social security and its responsiveness to need. This (Marshallian) *social citizenship model of social assistance* differs from a third model, the social democratic or *universalist* model of public welfare, which defines universalism in opposition to selectivity, with scant attention to the latter. The social citizenship model recognizes and elaborates the specific role of social assistance even amidst a wide range of universal social services.⁹

It waits to be seen if the residual, the universalist or the social citizenship model of social assistance (and what varieties thereof) will prevail – in the policies of international organizations, in developing and transitional countries and in the ongoing restructuring of

developed welfare states. Affinities between certain normative models and certain international organisations seem to emerge, such as universal transfers being espoused by DFID, social pensions and conditional transfers by the World Bank (see de la Brière and Rawlings, 2006) and means-tested transfers resembling Western social assistance possibly by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Contestations which have accompanied cash transfers to the poor ever since the early modern poor laws in European nation states seem to continue when social assistance is becoming a part of global social policy. If a residual model of global social policy were to prevail the thesis of the rise of global social policy would lose much of its thrust.

The normative debate on global social politics seems to follow ideological divides familiar from national social policy debates. But what does the case of social assistance tell us about global social policy beyond normative models? First, the general hypothesis of a *rise* of global social policy is corroborated by and large. Even an area of social policy like social assistance which is less standardised than the core areas of public welfare and which has a pronounced local/municipal character may become a subject of global politics. Second, the globalisation of social policy varies by policy area or sector. A sector considered as constitutive in most national welfare states, social assistance, turns out to be less globalised than other sectors of social policy. This indicates (at least current) limitations of the move towards global social policy. It might be more appropriate to speak of a (heterogeneous) *globalisation of social policy sectors* rather than of a globalisation of social policy at large. As a research agenda this would imply to investigate sectoral differences in the causes and the forms of the rise of global social policy. From this comparative point of view, the rise of social assistance as a global issue is remarkable because the social assistance sector lacks a pivotal international organisation (like the ILO with regard to labour law or, partly, social insurance or the WHO with regard to health) as well as an established policy community. Rather, a variety of interests and pressure from diverse social problems in developing countries seem to converge on social cash transfers. Third, global social policy, even more than national social policy, is replete with rhetorics. Programmatic declarations of international organisations and even conventions are often far removed from the realities in the countries they refer to. So there is a good dose of '*decoupling*' identified by Meyer as a general characteristic of world politics (Meyer et al. 1997). Fourth, global social policy (in our case: the rise of social cash transfers as a global issue) has created a new arena of conflict - but also of *consensus*. There is more to global social policy than suggested in the common

views of the ‘neoliberal’ World Bank vs. the ‘social’ ILO. Concepts like ‘social cash transfers’, ‘social pensions’ or even the term ‘social’ as such indicate a new global consensus, testifying to Meyer’s general thesis of the global spread of shared normative patterns. Shared norms create a platform on which dissent on institution building can build.

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¹ Leibfried and Rieger (2004) make a critical argument that welfare statism lacks cultural roots in Asian countries and is therefore unlikely to emerge.

² Long before social assistance became a wider concern of European politics in the 1990s, Stephan Leibfried had pursued the project of a social-scientific analysis of social assistance in a legal, historical and cross-national perspective (see the summary compilation Leibfried et al. 1985; Leibfried/Tennstedt 1985, Leibfried 1978).

³ For a comparative analysis of the earlier welfare system in the USA see Leibfried (1978).

⁴ For a full analysis of social cash transfers in developing and transitional countries see Leisering (2008).

⁵ The following typology was first developed in the GTZ report by Leisering/Buhr/Traiser-Diop (2004). To my knowledge the only other overarching typology is found in DFID (2005: 9 f.). Howell's typology (2001: 293-295) goes beyond social cash transfers and serves a different purpose. The typology by DFID is similar to the one by Leisering/Buhr/Traiser-Diop.

⁶ It was Stephan Leibfried who introduced the life course perspective in the study of social assistance, also referred to as dynamic poverty research, to Europe in the late 1980s (Buhr/Leibfried/Ludwig/Voges 1989). For a summary of the Bremen Long-Term Study of Social Assistance, 'Social Assistance Careers' (later: 'Social Assistance Dynamics'), initiated by Leibfried in 1988 at the Collaborative Research Centre 186 of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), see Leisering/Leibfried (1999).

⁷ I thank Petra Buhr for helping to construct an early version of this table.

⁸ Social cash transfers were included in the original plan for 'safety nets' in the 1980s by the World Bank but they were hardly implemented (Schubert 2004).

⁹ Kaufmann, in his ambitious comparative study of Western welfare societies (2003), argues that not all Western countries are welfare states and that 'welfare states' should be distinguished from 'capitalist' countries (like the USA) in which the government fails to assume a political and legal responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. In the case of social assistance, weak institutionalization and weak embedding are indicative of a weak political and legal commitment by policy makers to fighting poverty. Translated to the global level, the social citizenship model of social assistance would point towards a global welfare state while weaker selective schemes would be indicative of global capitalism.