



SOUTHERN CENTRE FOR INEQUALITY STUDIES SYMPOSIUM: UNDERSTANDING INEQUALITY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

10-11 April 2019

Conference Report

On 10 and 11 April 2019, the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, in conjunction with the Julius Baer Foundation hosted an international inequality symposium at Wits University. The symposium brought together researchers from across the global South to discuss methodological and substantive issues relating to the study of inequality, and in particular to develop a Southern approach to inequality studies. Among the attendees were researchers and policy makers from across the global South, including South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Mexico, Brazil, Ethiopia and India, as well as researchers from the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and the United States, in global North.

The programme was conceptualized around the six thematic research areas which underpin the work of the SCIS. Firstly, we looked at how we conceptualise, measure and understand inequality in the global South. What do we mean by equality and inequality? Inequality of what? Is inequality ever necessary? Why? Secondly, how do we measure these various types of inequality? Secondly, the symposium examined the structure of the economy, and the link to inequality. Here we examined the role that power plays in shaping economic inequality, and particularly the role that market power, economic concentration and regulation play in shaping economic and social outcomes. This theme focused on several important areas of research which relate to the structure of the economy. These included macroeconomic policy, economic regulation, competition and concentration, ownership and financialisation. These broad areas are linked fundamentally by questions of structure – the structure of ownership of assets, for example.

Third was the important issue of land, class and rural economies. Central to understanding inequality in the global South are questions of the articulation between the rural and urban, patterns of land ownership, and rural economies. This theme interrogated questions of property, rural economies and the spatial dimensions of class and how they reproduce inequality. Related is the issue of space, cities and the environment. Given the rapid urbanisation in the global South, urban spaces play an increasingly important role in producing and reproducing inequality both spatially and economically. Climate change is reshaping both urban and rural space, and is putting increasing pressure on citizens across the global South. This theme examined the infrastructures

of urban inequality, how space shapes inequality, and will interrogate the link between climate change and inequality.

Fifth, we looked at work, households and the labour market. There is a growing appreciation that the unit of economic analysis in many important socio-economic questions is the household, rather than the individual. In this theme, we looked at the relationship between paid and unpaid labour both within and without the household, and the implications for the persistence of structural inequalities. We examined the role of education in the reproduction of inequality, and interrogated the structure of the labour market. Furthermore, central to understanding work in the South is the role of informality, both informal employment and the informal economy, in shaping the world of work, and this theme looked at these issues.

Finally, the symposium turned to developing alternatives to inequality. As we seek to understand in greater detail how inequality is produced and reproduced in the global South, we also need examine ways in which we can develop alternatives to overcome inequality. In particular, we need to be aware of power, and to understand both how power produces and reproduces inequality, and to identify sources of power which can be harnessed to confront and perhaps address inequality.