

Title: Social citizens? : welfare provision and perceptions of citizenship amongst young people in Sri Lanka
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Abstract

Sri Lanka has a strong social development record and throughout the civil conflict of the past two decades the country's welfare state has remained in place. In the wake of the controversial defeat of the armed separatist movement, the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government faces the challenge of convincing its citizens of the benefits of a unified nation. This thesis looks at the role government provided social services have to play in contributing to perceptions of social solidarity and national belonging in the country, asking the extent to which social citizenship is a relevant concept in a multi-ethnic, developing country context. It uses a multiple method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the question through the perceptions of young adults in the country. The findings suggest that access to welfare does contribute to perceptions of citizenship amongst young Sri Lankans, but that this is dependent on the type of provision. Universal welfare is associated with perceptions of social solidarity and inclusion amongst young adults while, in a context of ethnic divisions, poverty-targeted social policies appear to enhance perceptions of difference and exclusion. This suggests that social policies aimed at addressing marginalisation may work to accentuate grievance, a process here coined the 'paradox of social cohesion'. The findings therefore point to a sense of citizenship that is essentially fluid and unstable, with young people expressing differing perceptions of both the state and their fellow citizens in relation to different types of social services, and varying in relation to their civil, political and social rights. While it is evident that the extent to which welfare is experienced as socially just is key to its association with perceptions of citizenship, the thesis argues that in a developing country context, where the majority of the population are poor and the challenge of equitable targeting greater, a discourse of equality may have a greater chance of being associated with social justice. In Sri Lanka, this is partly because targeted policies represent a disjuncture in their country's tradition of 'welfare state citizenship'. Here it may be seen how social policies initiated by external donor agencies, and based on new or alternative understandings of citizenship, may bypass the process of social negotiation required for the organic development of citizenship as a stable institution. Social citizenship should therefore be conceived as an evolving and iterative interaction between social policy and political discourse in the negotiation of social justice in a specific context.