

## **Abstract**

Justifications for the welfare state in general, and for social protection in particular, have come from three sources: market failures, specifically the inability of commercial and community-based insurance mechanisms to provide cover against all forms of risk; doctrines of human rights, specifically economic and social rights; and needs-based doctrines which stress both the practical and the moral importance for poor and non-poor alike of eliminating (or at least alleviating) poverty. Perhaps because the three arise largely from distinct intellectual traditions, the three discourses tend to run in parallel, with remarkably few intersection points. In public policy debates, moreover, these three discourses tend to come into and fall out of fashion, only to come back again. Given these dynamics, those who support social protection and the goals of poverty reduction would do well to understand each of the three discourses, including the areas where they are mutually supportive and those where they are mutually contradictory. This paper explores those areas of mutual support and contradiction.

**Keywords:** social protection, human rights, economic rights, social rights, basic needs, risks, market failure

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