

Conditional Cash Transfer Programs and Women's Well Being in Latin America

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Conditional Cash Transfer programs (CCTs) have become the most extensive type of government social policy, targeted at the segment of the population living in poverty (in income terms). These programs ensure a basic (usually minimal) level of cash income. Almost all the governments in the region implements one of these types of programs. They are not marginal, but rather important public budget items that serve a significant portion of the population. Mexico's Oportunidades and Brazil's Bolsa Familia are two programs that stand out for their history, trajectory, magnitude, coverage, and impact.

Even while the various Latin American CCTs may have their differences and peculiarities, they all have common characteristics that identify and define them. The two most distinctive ones being: i) a cash transfer, that in some cases can be accompanied by other types of benefits (such as job training workshops, awareness-raising events on sensitive social issues such as sexual and reproductive health, promoting productive activities, organizing community participation activities, etc.); ii) conditionalities that must be followed in order to receive the benefit (identified as co-responsibilities), mostly related to children's school assistance and health care. These two defining characteristics of CCTs are based on the following public policy goals: i) alleviate poverty based on lack of income; ii) contribute to the strengthening of children skills and abilities (this is to say, their "human capital"), in an attempt to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

One peculiar characteristic of these programs is their focus on women. In fact, CCTs' target population is at-risk households. Families have the right to receive benefits based on the presence of children in the household, but the effective benefit receiving party is the woman of the house. The most widespread argument in favour of this shift is that transfers on women's head have more potential to ensure the promotion of other family members' (particularly children) human and social capital.

CCTs have been in place in the region for over a decade, longer if you take their most recent predecessors into account. Due to their trajectory, and the importance they have been acquiring within social policy systems, papers discussing such programs' characteristics, reach, coverage, and impact are becoming more common. Literature on the subject is ample and diverse, promoted by the governments themselves, multilateral organizations, and academia. Papers cover a variety of themes, with particular emphasis on the impact these programs have on poverty, school attendance, consumption, and employment. Despite this significant knowledge base, there is a definitive lack of literature detailing the implications of this type of program on the status of women and their well-being. This paper aims to address that deficit.

What is the significance of looking the CCTs' experience from this point of view? It means concentrating on the specific implications that these programs have on women's lives, on their short-term and long-term opportunities, on elements that are integral in determining their well-being. Based on the Latin American experience in general, and more profoundly on the case of

the Argentinean Universal Child Allowance (Asignación Universal por Hijo), this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the implications of CCTs on women's economic autonomy?
- What effects and possibilities do CCTs have with regards to the redistribution of paid and unpaid work?
- How do CCTs affect inter-household power relationships and decision-making process?
- What effects do CCTs have on the social organization of care, and on the intra-household distribution of care responsibilities?
- Do CCTs have any effect on women's physical autonomy?
- Do CCTs promote women's political autonomy in any way?