

What is wrong with Conditional Cash Transfers programs?

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Abstract

Many developing countries have implemented conditional cash-transfers (CCTs) in recent years. This paper explains why there is nothing intrinsically wrong with CCTs. First, it argues that what typically makes such conditions impermissible is not the nature of the conditions themselves, but mainly the ways in which conditionality is implemented, enforced, and monitored. Second, it suggests that conditionality should be understood as a policy instrument rather than as a particular policy goal associated with right-leaning policy positions. Finally, it explains why the standard objections that welfare conditionality produces discrimination and stigmatization and also reduces welfare recipients' self-respect do not necessarily apply to well-designed CCTs programs.

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Introduction

Many developing countries have implemented conditional cash-transfers (CCTs) in recent years. To put this in perspective, while in 1997 only Brazil, Mexico and Bangladesh had adopted CCTs programs, one decade later 17 countries from Latin America, three from Africa and seven from Asia had some type of CCTs in place (Fiszbein *et al.* 2009, p.205). This is an interesting situation because there are important ideological differences among the governments that adopted this kind of policy. In terms of how we typically understand ideology, then, both left and right governments in these countries have appealed to CCTs as redistributive instruments (Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2009).

CCT programs typically transfer money to the poor provided they “follow a pre-specified course of action” (Bastagli 2011, p.61). Most CCTs are implemented to minimize the intergenerational reproduction of poverty and inequality by investing in human capital. For that purpose, CCTs require of beneficiaries that they change their behavior in certain ways, particularly with respect to the health and education of their children. Thus, most CCTs are conditional on school attendance and primary health utilization.

In general, most research on CCTs focuses on the empirical issues associated with the design, implementation, and evaluation of this type of policy. In contrast to the extensive debate on workfare policies, the normative discussion about CCTs has been limited.¹ In what follows, I argue that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with CCTs. Most of the normative criticism of this policy points to problems that can be addressed through better policy design. My view can be summarized as follows. First, in the case of CCTs, what makes conditions impermissible is not the nature of the conditions themselves but mainly the ways in which these conditions are implemented, enforced, and monitored. Second, conditionality should be understood as a policy instrument rather than as a particular policy goal. It is not necessarily associated with right-wing conservative policy positions. Finally, the standard objections that welfare conditionality produces discrimination and stigmatization and also reduces welfare recipients' self-respect

¹The normative and empirical basis for workfare policies has been largely debated in investigations of the past decades. In this type of redistributive policy, individuals in receipt of welfare benefits are expected to fulfill some work-focused obligations or participating in a job-training scheme. There is an extensive scholarly literature on workfare. For a more detailed normative discussion see for instance: Bou-Habib and Olsaretti (2004); Dostal (2007); Goodin (2004); Handler (2004); Hibbert (2007); Jacobs (2004); Moss (2006); White (2004b,a).

should not apply to well-designed CCTs programs. This is because the conditions that most CCTs commonly impose are mandatory for all members of society, independent of their socio-economic status or their position in that society.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section two describes some of the more salient attributes of CCTs currently being debated in the literature. This includes a rough summary of the main reasons that have been used both to justify and also to criticize the use of conditionality. I illustrate these points with some remarks on Latin American CCTs. As my analysis is mainly normative in content, this section does not pretend to be a systematic and exhaustive survey of the empirical literature on the implementation of CCTs. Instead, its purpose is only to draw some insights from the empirical literature in order to illustrate the normative case for and against CCTs. Section three explains why conditionality should be understood as a particular motivational strategy for promoting specific behaviors rather than as an ultimate policy goal. This distinction is important because a substantial portion of the literature on alternative redistributive policies tends to assume that any kind of conditionality is intrinsically bad or normatively impermissible. The final section discusses some potential normative standards for evaluating conditionalities. It argues that even if we accept the most important normative challenges against welfare conditionality in general, they nevertheless do not hold in the specific case of CCTs. The article ends by considering two objections to its arguments.

2

Conditional Cash Transfers

There exists a general consensus that welfare policies changed in the 1990s. The most significant transformation in that respect concerns an increased emphasis on implementing policies in which welfare benefits are made conditional on the recipients' compliance with certain behavioral requirements. CCTs are illustrative of this shift. This type of redistributive policy is defined by three basic components: “a cash transfer, a targeting mechanism, and conditionality” (Bastagli 2011, p. 62).

The main objective of CCTs is to connect poor families with different benefits and generate minimal standards of inclusion that serve as a port of access to more comprehensive and

inclusive welfare policies (Cecchini and Madariaga 2011, pp. 169-170). CCTs are also known as programs that promote co-responsibilities; that is, a co-responsibility between the state and the beneficiary. Commonly, CCTs consist of family grants that target children in particular. The rationale behind this is that benefits are paid on condition that the children attend health clinics and school. However, as some scholars have pointed out, any given CCTs' design is the result of a balance between policy priorities and objectives. For instance, while some governments' main concern might be providing a minimum income guarantee, others may focus on the promotion of education and health outcome as their main goal (Bastagli 2011, p.65).

Built on the premise of behavioral conditionality, conditions can be binding -- in the sense that they impose penalties on those who do not behave properly -- or they can be based on a commitment without penalties. Conditions can also be executed at different points in the process. For example, while some conditions can be required before a person gains access to the benefit, others can be implemented during the actual receipt of the benefits or for a period of time after having received them (Standing 2011, p.28).

By following Cecchini and Martínez (2012, p. 97), we can classify CCT programs according to the rationale behind the type of conditionality that they impose. A first type of CCT aims to change recipients' behavior toward greater investment in human development. In general, this type of CCT has specific mechanisms to monitor, enforce, and sanction behaviors. It specifies sanctions of various severity to those beneficiaries who do not fulfill the conditionalities. In this case, the fulfillment of conditions constitutes a central goal of the program itself given that its main goal is to promote human development for the poor. For instance, the Mexican program *Oportunidades* has education, health and nutrition conditions. It requires both minimum school attendance as well as eventual graduation. *Oportunidades* also requires attendance at scheduled medical checkups for all household members and monthly participation in educational programs that promote self-care (Cecchini and Martínez 2012, p. 97).

There is a second group of CCTs where conditions play a different role. This is because in those cases, the cash transfers are more important than the fulfillment of the conditions. For these programs, verification is weak and sanctions are moderate. Their main goal is to guarantee a basic level of consumption for poor families rather than to enforce and promote particular

conditions.² An example of a CCT with moderate or soft conditionality is the Brazilian program *Bolsa Familia*. Even though *Bolsa Familia* requires both a minimum school attendance for children and the fulfillment of the immunization schedule and other health checkups, its sanctions are stipulated according to different stages of non-fulfillment with the planned conditions (Cecchini and Martínez 2012, p.93). Thus, whereas in *Bolsa Familia*, non-compliance with conditionalities results in suspension “of payments for the month in question but the amounts continue to accumulate and are refunded once the family certifies resumed compliance with conditionalities”, in *Oportunidades*, non-compliance leads to an “immediate cessation of the cash benefit” (Cecchini and Martínez 2012, p. 96).

Finally, there is a group of CCTs with flexible or light conditionalities. They take specific modalities not associated with sanctions and suspensions. For example, there are some CCTs where the conditions are negotiated with the families. An illustrative example of a CCT with light conditionalities can be seen in *Chile Solidario*. The benefits of this program depend on “agreement in the family contract on compliance with 53 minimum standards in education, health, identification, habitability, family dynamic monetary income and work” (Cecchini and Martínez 2012, p.93). The benefits are canceled once non-compliance with the participation commitment is repeated. Thus, it is possible to see a simple continuum here, with those programs that strongly enforce conditions at one pole and those programs whose verification tends to be weak, or else penalties for non-compliance are variable and fairly flexible at the other (Cecchini and Martínez 2012, p.96).

Recent studies have shown that CCTs have positive effects on the health and education of recipients' children as well as in terms of poverty reduction (Fiszbein et al. 2009, IEG 2011, Rawlings and Rubio 2005). In the short run, CCTs increase both the use of educational services and the utilization of health inputs. CCTs have shown a significant impact on the levels of school enrollment of children of recipients' households in Colombia (Attanasio et al 2010), Ecuador (Schady and Araujo 2008), Mexico (Behrman et al 2012) and Nicaragua (Maluccio and Flores

² These policies bother with conditionalities because the use of conditions may serve other purposes. For example, the inclusion of conditionalities, though moderate, may favor the political feasibility of the cash transfer program. Thus, in the context of severe poverty and vulnerability, conditionalities can be thought of primarily as an instrument to make a cash transfer policy politically feasible (Fiszbein et al 2009, pp. 59-64).

2005). Compliance to the conditions imposed by these programs explains these results (IEG 2011). For instance, Baird et al (2014) provide a systematic review of 75 reports from 35 different studies. When compared with no cash transfer programs, the authors find that both CCTs and unconditional transfers improve the levels of enrollment and school attendance. But they also show that CCTs that “monitor compliance and penalize non-compliance have substantively larger effects (60% improvement in odds of enrollment)” (Baird et al 2014, p. 29).

There are, however, some doubts about CCTs positive effects on the long run. For example, the effectiveness of CCTs in terms of improvement on test scores and learning for children in secondary school is modest (IEG 2011). While CCTs effects on school attendance and graduation (at different educative levels) is positive, there are mixed results in terms of learning outcomes. Baez and Camacho (2011) found, for instance, that the Colombian CCT, *Familias en Accion*, has a positive impact on children’s high school graduation. Participants are more likely than non-participants to graduate from high school. The authors also show that the cohort of children from poor households who have benefited up to nine years of that program attained more school. However, they did not find a positive impact of CCTs on test scores.

As the IEG (2011) report points out, there is evidence on the heterogeneity of impacts across beneficiaries of different characteristics (age, gender, education, income, locality, etc.). Although program impacts appear to vary depending on the characteristics of beneficiaries, the heterogeneity pattern seems to be specific to programs and countries (IEG 2011). The evaluations through different methods of various similar CCTs suggest that a subset of impacts can be largely generalizable. The results in terms of “school enrollment, consumption, poverty, and child labor” are alike in similar CCTs “no matter how and where they are implemented” (IEG 2011, p. xii).³

2.1. Justifications and concerns about conditionality

³ As I mentioned before, the purpose of this article is to offer normative insights on CCT programs, rather than present a comprehensive review of the empirical literature. For an overview of the literature see: Rawlings and Rubio (2005), Handa and Davis (2006); Hanlon, Hulme and Barrientos, 2010; Cecchini and Madariaga (2011, 2012); Grosh et al (2008), IEG (2011), Fiszbein, Schady and Ferreira (2009).

There are three main justifications for the imposition of conditionalities.⁴ First, there is a paternalist argument suggesting that poor people need some guidance to behave in ways that are good for them and their families (Mead 1992, 2005; Fiszbein *et al* 2009, pp.51-59). In the case of CCTs, this idea is based on the belief that some lower income parents do not properly value the impact that education may have on their children. Some authors argue that cash transfers which are conditional on school attendance or health check-ups, constitute an incentive for parents to invest in the human development of their children. In that case, the parents are targeted but the children are the intended beneficiaries. This can be also seen as a way to strengthen the exercise of rights to education and health. The basic argument is that conditions send a signal to the beneficiary to show that investment in human development is important (Barrientos 2011, p.18).

A second argument in favor of conditionalities is of a contractualist nature. According to this view, conditionalities are conceived as obligations that constitute part of the contract between the government and the welfare recipients (Deacon 2004, p.915; White 2003, p.13). This contract implies that if the government provides welfare benefits for some individuals, the beneficiaries should assume certain responsibilities and obligations: in this case, to fulfill some specific conditions. It is the fulfillment of conditions that allows welfare claimants to honor the relevant principles of justice (e.g. reciprocity, fairness) (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, White 2003).

Finally, there is a political argument justifying conditionalities. This is based on the idea that in contexts where there is little support, conditionality may increase the political feasibility of a particular redistributive policy (Fiszbein *et al* 2009, pp. 59-64). That happens because those who fulfill the conditions can be perceived by the rest of the society as exhibiting good behavior and deserving welfare benefits (Goodin 2003, 2004; Moffit 2006).⁵

Notice that these three justifications are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to hold all of them simultaneously to justify conditionality. We could argue, for example, that conditionality

⁴ For a discussion of the different reasons for conditions on income transfers see: (Fiszbein, Schady and Ferreira, 2009);(Hanlon, Hulme and Barrientos, 2010, p.128-129); (Cecchini and Madariaga, 2011, pp.85-86).

⁵ Likewise, the effect that conditionalities may have on human capital formation, and, subsequently, in terms of economic growth, is also a factor that can strength the political feasibility of CCTs. I would like to thank to an anonymous referee for making this point.

is not only in the best interest of the beneficiaries themselves and their families, but it also both honors some important principles of justice and makes its political implementation more feasible than unconditional redistributive schemes. But these arguments can be used independent of one another as well. For example, we might argue that CCTs are only valuable for political reasons. Therefore, CCTs should be exclusively defended as an intermediate step towards more universal and unconditional redistributive policies (Suplicy 2007).

This particular justification is not, however, compatible with the paternalist and contractualist arguments. This is because advocates of welfare paternalism and contractualism think that redistribution should have other important virtues that go beyond political feasibility. To give an example, contractualists justify CCTs not because they are the most politically viable redistributive strategy given current conditions, but because there are justice-based reasons to implement this kind of policy. According to this view, it is normatively fair that people who receive benefits from the state ought to return to the society in some way the good they receive in the form of welfare benefits. In this case, the enforcement of conditions is necessary for promoting social justice. One key difference, however, between paternalism and contractualism is that the former does not necessarily support the idea that the state must create just background conditions before imposing conditionality on welfare provision. Conversely, contractualist defenses of conditionality are commonly based on the idea that just background conditions must be in place before enforcing welfare conditionality (White 2003, 2004). Without just background conditions, the enforcement of conditionalities may exacerbate existing injustices. For example, the presence of supply-side constraints in the provision of education and health care may leave CCTs claimants without a real opportunity to fulfill those conditionalities, and, as a consequence, unable to receive welfare benefits. In that sense, paternalist and contractualist defenses of conditionality differ in their expectations of the government (Deacon 2004, p.917).

But what about the opposite side of the coin? That is to say, what is there to be said more generally against the use of conditionalities? We can identify six main arguments against conditionality that are relevant for the debate on CCTs. While the first set of criticisms is related to the effect that conditionality may directly have on welfare recipients, the last three objections point to potential problems associated with its implementation.

The first argument is that conditional welfare impose burdens over those groups that are already more vulnerable and marginalized. For example, conditionality can increase the “risks of exclusion and the potential additional penalization of vulnerable groups” (Bastagli 2011, p.63). This is what Stuart White denominates as the “contextual objection”. The idea is that conditional policies may exacerbate existing injustices. This may happen for two main reasons. On the one hand, they can promote an unequal enforcement of social duty which is discriminatory given that the non-poor are not evaluated in the same way as welfare claimants. On the other hand, conditional policies can consolidate the market vulnerability of unjustly disadvantaged individuals. This is especially relevant for the case of workfare policies in which individuals with poor education and non-inherited wealth have a pressure to take poor quality jobs (White 2004a, p.279). Thus, under certain circumstances imposing conditions may be worse than the problems that conditional redistributive policies are intended to solve.

A second argument against conditionalities says that the process by which conditions are monitored and enforced is potentially both intrusive and stigmatizing (Van Parijs 1995; Wolff 1998; King 1999; Standing 2002; Raventos 2007; Lo Vuolo 2012). In the case of workfare policies, for example, recipients’ self-respect may be affected by requiring recipients to behave in ways that they may find shameful (Wolff 1998, pp. 109; 121-122). Workfare programs may require welfare recipients to work several hours in jobs that they do not want to take. That can have a negative impact on recipients’ self-respect. Similarly, and extending outside the scope of workfare-specific policies, it may be argued that CCTs force recipients to behave in ways that can have potentially undesirable effects on recipients’ self-respect (Standing 2011; Freeland 2007). For example, CCTs’ conditionalities may be based on the assumption that parents with limited financial means may not be entirely trusted when it comes to the education and health of their children. That lack of trust can undermine respect (Wolff 1998, p.107).

Third, some critics of conditional policies believe that this type of redistributive strategy does not recognize citizens' social and economic rights. The thought is that in the same way that citizens are equally entitled to civil (e.g rights concerning individual freedom) and political rights (e.g. democratic rights of participation), they should be also entitled to social rights, namely, economic and welfare rights such as access to minimum levels of welfare and income (King and Waldron 1988). This is associated with the idea that CCTs are not a complete safety net. To see

why, consider the fact that, say, CCTs focusing on children of a certain age not only exclude families without children in the targeted age group, but also may not serve the transient poor (Grosh *et al.* 2008, p.322). Without satisfying the requirements of inclusion, many disadvantaged members of society may still be unable to make use of such government-sponsored relief programs.

There are additional concerns with the *implementation* of conditional policies. The first is that there is a supply-side problem that affects the implementation of CCTs in many developing countries. That problem appears when the programs are not associated with improvements in the supply side of education and health services. Without the expansion of basic services, we cannot expect that cash transfers will work on their own (Grosh *et al.* 2008, p.322; Hanlon, Hulme and Barrientos 2010, p.136).

A second point is that conditionalities generate opportunities for corruption (especially among individuals who are responsible for verifying that conditions are met) (Hanlon, Hulme and Barrientos 2010, p.133). A corrupted redistributive scheme can increase the discretionary power of those agents who are in charge of implementing, monitoring and enforcing the policy (Standing 2011). A final point is based on the assumption that conditional programs have higher administrative costs (costs of delivering the cash, targeting, monitoring, enforcement costs) than unconditional ones (Standing 2002; Handler 2004; Offe 2005; Lo Vuolo 2012). As Grosh *et al.* (2008, p.322) point out, CCTs are complex programs to implement not only because they require an intricate interplay of government and administrative actors at local and central levels but also because the “monitoring of conditions is information intensive and time sensitive”.

I will return to these concerns in the next two sections. In section 3, I evaluate the problem of paternalism and the arbitrary exercise of power by welfare schemes. In section 4, I examine and criticize Guy Standing’s general objection to CCT programs. Standing’s criticism incorporates most of the objections to CCTs discussed before. My goal is to show why they fail to make a persuasive case against CCTs.

Policy goals and instruments

The discussion about universal vs. targeted and conditional vs. unconditional policies is usually understood as a debate about policy outcomes. It is commonly thought that conditional and targeted policies are associated with conservative approaches to social policy. Likewise, unconditional and universal policies are usually associated with more liberal or progressive welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990; King 1999). However, this conclusion is based on a failure to differentiate the desired policy outcomes from the instruments or tools used to address those policy aims. As Paul Spicker noted, the arguments about conditionality and targeting have been “colonized by particular partisan approaches, giving the political right a claim to a monopoly of certain methods and closing the minds of the left to strategic alternatives” (Spicker 2005, p.363). Nevertheless, targeting and conditionality can be used for diverse purposes. That is because targeting and conditionality should be primarily understood as tools of public policy, not specific policy goals. The thought is that it is improper to think about CCTs as a goal. Instead, it should be understood as a policy tool that can be used in various ways even as a means to a progressive or egalitarian redistributive policy. In fact, Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloni (2009, p.47) tested whether Latin American governments leaning ideologically to the right and center are more likely to adopt CCT programs than those on the left. They do not find evidence suggesting that “the choice of these programs is more or less likely to come from presidents who occupy a particular location in the ideological spectrum”.

Consider, for example, the distinction between universality and selectivity. Universality usually refers to the scope of a given policy. That is, to the “extent of the population that is covered by a particular policy” (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004, p.267). Universal policies “are open to all”. Conversely, selective measures only treat a subset of the population as beneficiaries (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004, p.267). For instance, in many countries, education and health services are commonly provided in a comprehensive way. In those cases, all citizens at least nominally have equal access to education regardless of economic circumstance, gender, etc. However, there are some variables (notably age and citizenship) that are usually considered as relevant for delimiting the scope of voting rights, education access and so on.

In the case of social policies, distribution to everyone is exceptional. Most universal benefits are “categorical, and aimed at a broad class of people in need (such as children or old people) as a way of targeting needs within the group” (Spicker 2005, p.357). It is certainly difficult to avoid allocating resources to particular groups. The key normative issue, then, is not whether targeting should happen in the first place, but how to solve the potential problems of inclusion that arise from such targeting policies once they are enacted (Spicker 2005, p.357).

To complicate matters, it is usually the case that there is an important overlap between targeting and conditionality. This is so because while conditions are used as a means of targeting in their own right, targeted services are themselves sometimes both regulated and conditioned (Spicker 2005, p.359). To put it simply, conditionality refers to the existence of conditions that may restrict individuals' eligibility for a policy or service. Welfare policies usually come with different conditions attached that need to be satisfied before a recipient can gain or maintain eligibility (De Wispelaere and Stirton 2004, p.268). While it is possible to have a targeted policy without imposing any kind of conditions, redistributive policies appeal most of the time to different sorts of conditions. Thus, while targeting refers to factors beyond beneficiaries' control, conditionality refers to choices the beneficiary can make.

The normative claim for rejecting conditions is usually made not against those conditions that can be used to categorize beneficiaries (age, gender, citizenship status) but mainly on those conditions that impose particular moral criteria. That is, those conditions implemented for regulating and disciplining beneficiaries in a specific way. The case for unconditionality is mostly built on this controversial assumption. Supporters of unconditional redistributive policies emphasize that unconditionality is the only mechanism that we can employ to avoid paternalism and protect people against the arbitrary exercise of power by welfare schemes (Van Parijs 1995; Widerquist 1999; Standing 2002; Pateman 2003, 2004; Raventos 2007). It seems, however, difficult to argue that all conditions aimed to regulate and motivate particular behaviors are normatively troubling.

In fact, some have observed that unconditional basic income (UBI)⁶ advocates appeal to

⁶ A UBI can be defined as “an income paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis, without means tests or work requirements” (Van Parijs 2004, 8). This income is “paid to each full member of society (1) even if she is not willing to work; (2) irrespective of her being rich or poor; (3) whoever she lives with; and (4) no matter which part of the country she lives in” (Van Parijs 1995, 35).

paternalist reasons to support a stream of regular monthly payments instead of a lump sum (Van der Veen 2003, White 2004, Lewis 2005). For instance, Philippe Van Parijs (2004) justifies a monthly UBI by arguing that this type of arrangement can help people to avoid blowing their stake. It can be argued, then, that monthly payments operate as a form of conditionality that regulates how UBI recipients can spend their money. In contrast to other universal cash transfers, such as the Stakeholder society defended by Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott (1999)⁷, a UBI is designed to provide its recipients with a cash transfer every month even if they decide to squander their money in Las Vegas on a regular basis.⁸ This seems to be a reasonable arrangement if our goal is to make sure that every citizen or resident in a given political community has access to some kind of permanent economic security. However, it is clear that this preference of UBI over BC is a choice that can only be justified on paternalistic grounds (it is in the recipients' interest not to blow or lose their stake).

The idea of unconditionality is problematic in at least two senses. The first is that agents' behavior can lead to some undesirable results that could -- in principle -- be minimized through regulatory and motivational strategies. For instance, UBI proposals may encourage behaviors in individual recipients that make it difficult for UBIs to generate their own support base (Midgaard 2008, Perez-Muñoz 2016, p. 168). In particular, the fact that UBI programs are designed to give people the freedom to decide whether or not to participate in the job market can generate motivational problems at the individual level that, in the aggregate may adversely affect the program's stability. The second is that practically all social benefits are inevitably subject to some form of conditionality. In the final analysis, there is no welfare regime that does not impose some form of condition (Goodin 2004, p. 298). The crucial point here is not to reject conditionality out of hand, but to critically evaluate the best way to distinguish between permissible and impermissible methods of conditional scheme implementation. In particular, we

⁷ Ackerman and Alstott famously proposed the idea of granting each American citizen a "one-time grant of eighty thousand dollars as he reaches early adulthood". Stakeholders can do whatever they want with that grant: "they may use their money for any purpose they choose: to start a business or pay for more education, to buy a house or raise a family or save for the future. But they may take responsibility for their choices" (pp.4-5). This unconditional and universal proposal has been vigorously debated by UBI advocates.

⁸ Some scholars have argued that BC may not promote a genuine promotion of equal opportunities given the possibility of "stakeblowing" (resulting from bad decisions) or "stakelosing" (resulting from bad luck) (Van der Veen 2003, White 2004, Lewis 2005, Fitzpatrick 2011). Instead, a stream of regular monthly payments (i.e. a UBI) can help to minimize these problems.

need to determine to what extent CCTs are unacceptably paternalistic.⁹

4

Normative evaluation of conditionalities

So far I have argued that the use of conditionalities should be understood as a policy instrument that can be used for achieving different policy outcomes. If we accept that behavioral regulation might be necessary to pursue redistributive goals, then the next move is to discuss how we can draw a distinction between ethical from unethical conditional policies.

Guy Standing, a well-known advocate of unconditional welfare policies, presents a criterion for evaluating the normative implications of the motivational strategies attached to CCT programs. His proposal is useful in that it coherently incorporates the criticisms discussed in the previous section.¹⁰ According to him, there are three main ethical principles relevant to conditionality: (1) a security difference principle, (2) a Paternalist Test Principle and (3) a Right-not-Charity Principle. With a Rawlsian flavor, the first principle says that a redistributive policy can be just only if it reduces the insecurity of the most insecure. Thus, a welfare policy would be flawed if it does not help those who are the most insecure. Standing believes that CCT programs do not satisfy this principle because they add unnecessary complexity to the process of selecting and targeting those beneficiaries who are most in need. Moreover, according to him it is arbitrary to decide who should be included and who should be excluded from receiving benefits. The use of conditions may make those boundary problems even worse.

The second principle argues that a redistributive policy is unjust if it imposes controls on some groups of society but not on those who enjoy better levels of freedom. Standing argues that

⁹ It is worth noting that the primary beneficiary of CCTs is the child and not the recipient who receives the transfer. This point distinguishes CCTs from other welfare-conditional policies such as workfare programs. For instance, one could argue that the conditionalities of CCTs are a mechanism that the state can use to enforce the child's right to receive basic health care and education--that is, a right that arguably trumps parents' right to direct their children's education and health care. Unfortunately, in a paper of this scope, I cannot seriously engage the extensive literature on children's right to education. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.

¹⁰ Notice, however, that as far as I know the third objection is not directly formulated by Standing. This is the idea that CCTs do not constitute a coherent safety net. In response to this criticism, one could simply say that CCTs should not be thought as a comprehensive welfare policy that can work as a safety net. For the sake of the argument, I assume that CCTs are only one particular form of welfare provision. The question I try to answer here is whether or not a particular policy can be justified as a policy that cohabits with other welfare policies.

conditionality offends the Paternalism test principle 'by imposing controls on benefit recipients that are not imposed on others. It intrudes on their liberty and whittles away at their sense of personal responsibility' (Standing 2011, p.31).

Finally, the Right-not-Charity Principle establishes that a policy can only be considered just if it enhances the rights of beneficiaries while at the same time diminishes the discretionary power of the providers. There are many issues that should be considered in examining the implications of this principle. First, it is commonly thought that conditionalities create opportunities for corruption. If this is the case, CCTs could increase the discretionary power of providers. The second problem is that CCTs entail a democratic deficit since beneficiaries do not directly participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs. As Veit-Wilson noted, the issue here is not just "whether CCTs improve levels of living for people in poverty in ways they approve, but also whether they accept the sanctions as appropriate when conditions are not met" (Veit-Wilson 2009, p.171). A third problem is that conditionality offends the rights-not-charity principle because "people cannot be said to have a right if they have to behave in ways determined by the state or its agents particularly if they think that behaving differently would be preferable" (Standing 2011, p.32). This problem is especially germane when there are difficulties in the supply of services. For example, some children may not be attending school or health clinics due to a lack of such facilities to attend (Lund 2011, p.6). CCT programs that are not associated with improvements in the supply side of education and health services will fail and impose unfair conditions on beneficiaries. Standing believes that parents know better than the state when it is appropriate to send their children to school and to the health centers given the supply of services available.

Undoubtedly, the implementation of CCT programs may have undesirable normative implications. However, it seems that most of these concerns are not as significant as Standing and other opponents to CCTs argue. That is because most criticisms do not apply to CCTs' conditionality. As I have already implied, properly designed CCTs can potentially avoid most of the normative and technical concerns frequently used to criticize other conditional policies.

Workfare schemes, for example, are commonly criticized for stigmatizing beneficiaries and increasing their vulnerabilities. There are good reasons to believe that the ways in which these policies are applied can consolidate the disadvantage suffered by those who have unjustly

limited opportunities. As Stuart White points out, "in a society in which there is considerable injustice in the background distribution of assets and opportunities, some individuals will face unjustly limited employment opportunities. A combination of no inherited wealth and poor education will restrict their options, so that they have little choice but to move into poor quality (abusive or exploitative, or simply very unpleasant) jobs" (White 2004a, p.279). The implication to be derived here is that there are some necessary preconditions for conditionality to work in a fair way.¹¹ We should be wary of conditional schemes that only function as a mechanism to reproduce social inequalities.

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between the conditionality commonly imposed by workfare schemes and those typically used in CCTs programs. While the former are exclusively targeted on changing the behavior of welfare recipients, the latter are aimed to promote behaviors that are a priori expected from all citizens regardless of their socioeconomic status. Paternalist and contractualist justifications of workfare are predicated on the assumption that people need to be more responsible of their own welfare and that they need to collaborate with the social product of their society. However, this kind of policy exclusively regulates the behavior of welfare claimants. Workfare policies do not regulate the "work ethic" and the attitudes towards unemployment and other forms of social contribution that the most advantaged members of society may have. The inheritance-rich are under little economic pressure to work and, of course, have no need welfare assistance. Therefore, they may behave in all those objectionable ways that most workfare advocates want to minimize in our societies. The problem is that, contrary to what happens with the inheritance-rich members of society, the asset-poor individuals can hardly refrain from accepting conditional welfare benefits. The consequence of this is that workfare policies can be highly discriminatory at the point of regulating behavior.

But that is not the case with the conditionalities behind CCT programs. Most of those conditions are mandatory for all members of society, independent of their socio-economic status.

¹¹ The supply-side problem is also relevant for the discussion of background conditions. If the quality of the services provided is low or inaccessible, we would be imposing a behavioral condition against an unjust background. We could think that, as in the case of workfare, the recipient would be forced to take a low quality option. There is, however, a key difference between these two cases. While one could argue that even low quality education or health provision are still better than none, it is more difficult to make a similar argument for the case of workfare. It is hard to argue, for instance, that a low quality job is always better than none. Consider, for example, the case of the provision of care. As several scholars have argued, it is better to pay people to provide care in their families than to work several hours in a low paid job (Pateman 2003, 2004). I thank an anonymous referee for bringing this to my attention.

Schooling, for example, is mandatory in most democratic countries for at least six years. This requirement is difficult to enforce, however, in places where schooling and child labor are substitutes. Poor households may prefer to send their children out to work in order to increase their short-term economic situation, at the expense of obtaining a higher remuneration in the long term (Grosh *et al.* 2008). If CCTs can help to keep children from underprivileged homes at school instead of working, why should we reject that kind of conditionality? In that case, CCTs only operate as an instrument to enforce a policy that has a universal scope.¹²

One could reply that, in order to work, this argument should show not only that CCTs ask for a type of behavioral conditionality that everybody is required to fulfill, but also that this type of conditionality is requested for people receiving other sorts of public benefits. In other words, the argument should show not only that all children are required to attend school and receive medical check ups, but that parents who do not fulfill these duties (independently of their economic status) cannot apply for public benefits. This second view attaches the same conditionalities to the recipients of different public benefits such as mortgage subsidies, tax deductions, and so on. Accordingly, only parents who send their children to school would be able to apply to these other types of public benefits. Otherwise, it may not be clear that CCTs avoid unfair targeting on the poor. This is an important objection. One way to respond to it is by arguing that in contrast to workfare policies, CCT policies are fairer in the first sense (i.e. apply conditionalities that everybody has to fulfill) but fail in the second sense, namely that they apply conditionalities that are not equally adopted for beneficiaries of other public policies. Certainly, workfare policies do not satisfy either of those criteria. But this response, of course, leaves us unclear about which of the two interpretations should matter more.

Alternatively, one could respond that the most relevant aspect here is not that the same conditionalities are attached to all public benefits, but rather that the conditionality that is used does not differ from the one applied universally to all people, independently of whether or not they apply to public benefits. Otherwise, we may leave open the possibility that those who do not

¹² This is a particular feature of CCT programs. Even if the state could ask for a work contribution from anyone who receives public benefits, those who can buy their way out of such benefits may therefore waive that work requirement. Instead, CCTs ask recipients to fulfill a behavioral conditionality that everybody is expected to fulfill. Other things being equal, the wealthier are not expected to have the chance to buy their way out of their obligation to provide education for their children.

require public benefits can buy their way out of important obligations (i.e. sending children to school).

Most of the problems previously discussed can be solved by improving the design and the mechanisms of CCT program implementation. For instance, there is no doubt that it is unfair to enforce conditionalities that in principle cannot be fulfilled. Making benefits conditional on school attendance and health check-ups is unreasonable if there are supply-side constraints.

Notice, however that if an improvement of the services itself is enough to get families to send children to school, then the conditionalities may be redundant. These conditionalities are only justified if they help to produce good results in terms of children's education and health outcomes. My argument here is not that these conditionalities are always required, but that they may be justified as long as they help to produce the desired outcomes. If an improvement in the provision of services is enough to make people send their children to school in order to receive those services, then conditionalities are redundant, and, consequently, unjustified. As a result, CCTs' conditionalities can be justified unless we have reasons to believe that they are redundant. Likewise, a similar case can be made based on the idea that conditionalities are not only redundant, but they make resources worse. CCT programs appeal to conditionalities that can be justified if they help to produce the outcomes their advocates claim to produce.

Similarly, the use of conditions can hardly be justified in the presence of patronage and corruption. This mainly happens when CCTs become instruments of patronage that can be politically manipulated. But that does not necessarily need to be the case. CCTs can be implemented along with the establishment of different accountability and transparency mechanisms (Cecchini and Madariaga 2011). For example, a recent study for the Mexican case suggests that CCTs' design emphasis on audits, evaluation and monitoring can block opportunities for corruption (Grimes and Wangnerud 2010, pp. 676-677). CCTs put in place various evaluative mechanisms that are planned for continuously monitor the outcomes and performance of this type of programs. As Grimes and Wangnerud (2010, p. 676) point out, that emphasis on outcome evaluations limits the room for blatant manipulation since continual monitoring and evaluations are conducted independently of the CCTs programs.

Additionally, it is a common mistake to assume that unconditional redistributive policies are always more efficient and easier to administrate than conditional ones. As De Wispelaere and

Stirton (2011) have explained, unconditional basic income proposals aimed to achieve a real inclusion of all recipients also present considerable administrative challenges that should not be taken lightly. We need more empirical and normative work to better compare unconditional and conditional redistributive schemes. The rationale for adopting CCTs is that the benefits exceed their costs. In considering costs and benefits we must evaluate how conditional and unconditional redistributive policies perform in terms of various potentially relevant evaluative criteria such as efficiency, efficacy, feasibility, fairness, individual freedom, and accountability. It may be the case in some instances that the cost of trading individual freedom for another value will be prohibitively high. This is precisely why advocates of unconditional redistributive schemes criticize conditional policies. If my argument is persuasive, however, that should not be the case for CCTs.

4.1 Two objections

There are two important objections to my previous argument. First, it could be argued that "if we want improved school and clinic attendance by the poor, then the best way would be to improve primary education and health services close to where poor people live" (Freeland 2007, p.77). But that suggestion is not compelling in cases where child labor or low schooling attendance are serious obstacles for children's formal education. In those cases, it is not clear how an improvement of primary education can be enough to solve the problem. Besides, and more importantly, this argument needs an additional explanation of why CCTs are an undesirable policy tool to make sure that most children and young adults attend school. Other things being equal, we should welcome CCT programs that can help to achieve this goal.

Naturally, which policy constitutes the "best" policy to ensure children go to school is an open empirical question. My argument here, however, is that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with most of the conditions attached to CCTs. Many of the conditionalities typically used by these programs should not by themselves expose under-privileged families to stigmatization and discrimination. Therefore, these programs should be criticized if they do not improve children's school and clinic attendance or if there are other, more efficient ways to achieve those objectives.

But it is not compelling simply to normatively criticize the types of conditionalities commonly used by CCTs in the abstract.

A second, and perhaps more important, objection is that even though most of the conditions utilized by CCTs are mandatory for all members of society, those conditions are a significant burden on women, particularly on poor mothers. Since most obligations are discharged by participating mothers, some scholars argue that men and women are differentially affected by CCTs (Molyneux 2007, Razabi 2007, Chant 2008, Martinez Franzoni and Voorend 2012). As Molyneux (2007, p.iii) points out, through this kind of programs, the state is “actively involved...in the structuring of asymmetrical and unequal gender relations”. That mainly happens because these programs “are designed to secure greater regulation of women’s socially ascribed maternal responsibilities as a means of combating the intergenerational transmission of poverty” (Molyneux 2007, p.41).

For instance, Chant (2008, p.185) shows that the Mexican CCT *Progresa* made little effort in involving fathers in the “co-responsibility” process. Most of the unpaid volunteer work required by the program relies on mothers. As a consequence, she suggests that this CCT “has built upon, endorsed and entrenched a highly non-egalitarian model of family”. Similarly, in their analysis of CCTs in Chile, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, Martinez Franzoni and Voorend (2012) offer a discouraging analysis of CCTs’ capacity to promote gender equality. They conclude that CCTs: (1) “do little to promote women’s access to paid work rather encourages their confinement to the household”, (2) “do not help to overcome assumptions regarding women’s sole responsibility for unpaid domestic work” and (3) “do not reorganize gender roles to reduce or avoid tensions between paid and unpaid work” (Martinez Franzoni and Voorend 2012, p.399).

This objection is certainly valid in principle. In order to succeed, however, it should show that this unfair distribution of burdens among women and men is intrinsically related to any possible form of CCTs and not to other alternative redistributive policies. But this is hardly the case. These problems transcend CCT programs. We may expect similar difficulties in various redistributive policies that are not supplemented by measures to bring men into household and care work and to facilitate childcare services for low income families. Indeed, we may go further and say that even unconditional basic income programs can affect women and men differently.

Ingrid Robeyns (2007, p. 102), for example, argues that an unconditional cash transfer such as a UBI can become an unjust social policy for women if that policy is not accompanied by a “larger package of social policy measures”. The thought here is that even an unconditional cash transfer policy -- presupposing “current gender-structured societies” -- can reinforce traditional gender roles.¹³ Among other things, Robeyns (2007, p. 114) believe that a UBI can “have a negative effect on the women withdrawing from the labour market as they experience a depreciation of their human capital, they would lose the non-pecuniary advantages of paid labour and might experience a worsening of their bargaining position at home, as well as run higher well-being risks in the case of divorce”. She suggests that a UBI needs to be supplemented with gender-oriented policies that can help to counter its potential negative effects on women. This suggestion is similar to the one proposed by some scholars evaluating CCTs programs (e.g. Martinez Franzoni and Voorend 2012, Staab 2010).

Additionally, it could be argued that some CCTs unfairly require women, particularly mothers, to attend courses and other forms of training. As is commonplace with workfare and other welfare programs, some CCTs may require low-income mothers to attend self-help meetings, parenting and vocationally related classes. This form of conditionality is morally impermissible as long as this arrangement is a mandatory component of the “co-responsibility” program. Those CCTs that impose on non-poor women conditions which are not mandatory for all members of society are capable of producing discrimination, stigmatization and the reduction of welfare recipients' self-respect. Fortunately, not all CCTs make use of this type of mandatory conditionality. It is perfectly possible to design a CCT program that offers non-mandatory courses and training sessions for its recipients. That would eliminate or at least minimize the worry that this kind of redistributive program applies behavioral conditions unequally across populations.

¹³ Additionally, there is some evidence showing that the gender of the welfare recipient matters for the efficiency of the transfer. In particular, some studies estimate that welfare benefits received by women may have a larger impact on children's human capital than those received by men (e.g. Duflo 2003, 2005; Bobonis 2009, De Brauw et al 2014). This may introduce a trade-off between reducing gender-bias and implementing an efficient transfer policy. I thank an anonymous referee for this suggestion.

Concluding remarks

Welfare conditionality has many proponents and detractors. In the course of this article I attempted to explain why the existence of conditions in a redistributive policy does not tell us anything about its progressive or inclusive nature. It is a mistake to assume that conditionality necessarily leads to discrimination, stigma, social exclusion and the deprivation of people's rights. Instead of focusing on conditionality per se, we should spend more time examining the ways in which conditions may be justified, imposed, monitored, evaluated and so on. The case of CCT programs is a good illustration of a conditional redistributive scheme that appeals to permissible conditions.

Permissibility depends, of course, on many different variables. Let me mention two relevant points. First, CCTs impose conditions that are required for both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of that policy. In consequence, it is difficult to support the common objection that conditional redistributive policies are discriminatory. What can make CCTs discriminatory and abusive is the way in which this kind of redistributive strategy is implemented and enforced. Schooling is an obvious example of a policy that is required for all the citizens, independent of their socio-economic status. Some forms of minimal preventive health care (e.g. vaccination) are also mandatory requirements in most liberal democracies. Thus, CCT programs can be seen as an additional motivational strategy for minimizing non-compliance with these two important universal policies. Second, even though CCTs can be seen as a form of interference with beneficiaries' freedom, it is difficult to argue that there is a universal argument against any form of interference. That is because it is difficult to justify unlimited freedom of action. Most of our rights and liberties would be jeopardized if we neglect of any form of governmental authority or intervention. The question, in that case, is not only whether the CCTs' conditionalities are acceptable, but also whether we can accept having compulsory education and health-check up for all children in society.

No one, however, should assume without argument that conditionality is always required. That conditionality can be permissible does not mean that it is always needed. In order to evaluate the permissibility of conditional redistributive schemes, we cannot only take into account what welfare recipients are expected to do. As White and Cooke (2007, p.7) argue, any

sophisticated normative analysis of conditionality needs to evaluate whether those expectations are reasonable for the welfare claimants (given their circumstances), who has the power to decide the nature of those expectations, and what type of reciprocal support other actors and institutions do offer. For instance, CCT programs can be designed to provide beneficiaries with the power to negotiate the type of specific conditionalities that they would have to fulfill (as in the case of *Chile Solidario*). CCTs also need to be avoided where the supply of required services is scarce or corrupted. While those are important facts to be considered at the time of implementing a conditional redistributive scheme, they do not constitute an argument against conditionality, per se. CCTs have costs and benefits, and these must be carefully weighed.

If my argument is sound, the debate on unconditional redistributive policies (notably the debate about unconditional basic income and similar proposals) should more seriously take into account the idea that not all conditions are normatively indefensible. What forms of conditionality can be accepted, and for what reasons, by unconditional basic income supporters? To what extent should those committed to fostering more just societies appeal to CCT programs? These are questions for further research.

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