

The Social Production of Conditional Cash Transfers' Impacts

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It is often assumed that the mere implementation of a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) policy model, with its emphasis on altering recipients' behaviour or preferences via co-responsibilities, can bring about a desired new social order. However, this assumption obscures relatively autonomous power relations operating at the local level between myriad CCT stakeholders, policy intermediaries and recipients included, which influence a CCT's ultimate impact. Conventional theories of change that inform the causal models underpinning most CCTs overlook how different actors in a given socio-cultural arena actually defend their vested interests, producing their own contexts and thus altering CCT results in ways unanticipated by policy-makers (Mosse 2005).

In this chapter, Agudo Sanchiz (2012) discusses the results of a qualitative research study aimed at assessing the impacts of Mexico's *Oportunidades* anti-poverty programme. He gives particular focus to how different rural communities in Chiapas and Oaxaca were exposed to the ideas behind the notion of contract and co-responsibility and, in turn, how exactly these communities responded when the programmes were put into operation.

Some of the social relationships affecting *Oportunidades'* implementation at the local level were influenced by the long-established institution known as *'tequios'*—collective work wherein men, traditionally, contribute unremunerated labour for the benefit of their community. The implementation of *Oportunidades* in rural areas, Agudo Sanchiz finds, actually altered the nature of *tequios* in many indigenous communities in Chiapas and Oaxaca. The *tequios* increasingly came to rely on *Oportunidades'* beneficiaries, themselves primarily women, under the logic that they must contribute some work on behalf of their communities precisely because they are recipients of Government transfers. Likewise, staff at local health centres and schools came to assume that beneficiary mothers had the 'duty' to supply a certain amount of work hours. Thus, even though such work was never an official part of *Oportunidades'* co-responsibilities, female *tequios* have now become an essential component in negotiations with local doctors, nurses and teachers, who, in turn, often reward and hence reinforce the 'unofficial contract' by promising, for example, to not report beneficiaries' failure to attend the health check-up sessions and workshops otherwise required as conditions of the CCT programme.

To make the matter even more complex, besides doing some work for their communities, beneficiary mothers are compelled by local public service providers to make payments to cover the costs of services and infrastructure that have nothing to do with *Oportunidades*. And while this occurs, non-fulfilment of the actual co-responsibilities is often informally penalised with fines not stipulated by the programme. In this latter case, the fines are administered by the *vocales*, beneficiary women whom the

others elect as their official representatives and who are at the same time in charge of organising female work teams in coordination with local authorities and service providers. The amount of such fines is set according to local conventions: larger sums apply to parents who miss workshops or cannot take their children to school or to medical check-ups because they are working outside rather than within the community, which follows the logic of sanctions imposed on those skipping community assemblies not related to *Oportunidades*. Programme rules are thus informally adapted by the use of informal mechanisms of coercion already in place in the community.

Vocales, like the local doctors, nurses, teachers and other service providers, illustrate the new and changing hierarchies of knowledge and authority that both shape and are shaped by development interventions based on the principle of co-responsibility. These women show some features of the long-established yet flexible frameworks of leadership that, in many Mexican rural communities, can accommodate new figures of authority. *Vocales* have even come to assume responsibilities in matters normally restricted to men, which is sometimes seen as an indication of women's empowerment in the 'public sphere' in many impact assessments.

Altogether, Agudo Sanchiz has found that pre-existing sanction and duty systems informally modify programme rules and their logic but at the same time have the effect of ensuring the fulfilment of co-responsibilities. In practice, rather than introducing the idea of agency and equal partnership with the government (which is traditionally associated with the notion of co-responsibilities in the design of the programme), the CCT transfer is seen by beneficiaries as a subsidy that is in fact mediated through uneven power relations between local operators of the programme—e.g., doctors, nurses, teachers, and *vocales* and recipient mothers. This demands of CCT policy makers a more nuanced understanding of the 'self-regulation' principle imparted by the programme's trainers in the capacity building sessions undertaken at the local level.

The co-responsibility discourse in which families and the State are responsible for improving the human capital of the children of the poorest families based on equality-restitution principles are actually drastically changed by the local subjectivities and power relations. The latter rely on a different notion of reciprocity that is essentially based on *clientelistic* practices in which patrons dispense favours in exchange of the gratitude of their clients to guarantee the desired 'outcome' of the policy.

References:

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