

Do Conditional Cash Transfers Promote Human Development?

The Brazilian Case.

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to reduce poverty, many countries have been adopting Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs, especially in Latin America. Through these programs, governments offer money directly to poor families, provided the recipients meet some conditions. Generally, the most important conditions are children's attendance in school and in medical checkups. The Brazilian program, which is the subject of this paper, is the largest Conditional Cash Transfer in Latin America and one of the largest in the world. It benefits approximately 45 million people (Von Jacobi 4) and, according to the World Bank, is one of the reasons why Brazil "has nearly eliminated extreme poverty" in recent years (Báez et al. 77). The program is called Programa Bolsa Família, which can be translated as Family Grant Program or Family Bonus Program.

Conditional Cash Transfers usually have two strategies: a short-term one and a long-term one (Soares, pars. 1-2). The short-term strategy aims to alleviate or reduce poverty as a result of cash transfers. The long-term strategy, in turn, aims to stimulate investments in human capital as a result of the conditionalities and their focus on health and education. In other words, the long-term strategy expects to break the cycle of poverty, that is, its "transmission" between one generation and the next.

In this paper, the Brazilian program will be ethically evaluated. There are many reports evaluating Conditional Cash Transfers' implementation and results, but not many of them analyze those programs in an explicit ethical perspective. That is an interesting fact, since policies towards the poor presuppose an ethical basis, implicitly or explicitly, and even when it is inconsistent or contradictory.

In such ethical evaluation, one of the most important issues is empowerment –an issue which is clearly referred to in the Conditional Cash Transfers' long-term goals. Empowerment

for the poor in general, and for women in particular. In these programs, women are usually the ones entitled to represent their families and, therefore, they are the ones who receive the cash. That is what happens, for instance, in the Brazilian program, in which approximately 90% of the ones entitled to receive the transfers are women.

But do Conditional Cash Transfers really empower people (and women in particular) or are they no more than charity (stimulating thereby dependency on government)?

Development ethics is a framework in which questions like these can be adequately addressed. Authors like Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, after investigating national efforts to combat famine, concluded that development is the best answer. But they were not referring to any kind of development; they realized that economic growth, by itself, is not enough to guarantee well-being (it does not guarantee, for example, a balanced wealth distribution). The development these researchers advocate is one in which everyone is “entitled to become agents, not mere beneficiaries” (Goulet 148).

In order to achieve such agency, freedom is a prerequisite –and, in the broader context of development ethics, freedom and democracy are interwoven. “Political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action” (Sen, *Democracy* 7). Note that the appearance of Conditional Cash Transfers in Latin America only happened after the region went through a redemocratization process during the 1980s.

Development ethics, therefore, provides an adequate framework for a general evaluation of the Brazilian program. But in order to evaluate certain specific and practical aspects of Conditional Cash Transfers –especially the expected impacts on people’s empowerment and agency– a more specific approach can be useful. But such approach has to be compatible with

development ethics –almost as its subset). That is the case with the Capability Approach, which was created by Amartya Sen, a prominent author in the context of development ethics. This approach was designed for the evaluation of individual well-being and also for the evaluation of public policies.

The Capability Approach can be regarded as an example of what Des Gasper calls the second stage of development ethics (XII). In such stage, it deals with moral evaluation and development “theory-practices” (Crocker 16), instead of more abstract philosophical issues. Not coincidentally, this approach’s ideas have influenced the Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme –Sen was one of its consultants.

As its name suggests, capabilities are the central focus of this approach. It deals with the freedom that a person has to choose what she or he wants to be or to do, upon reasoning about it. Capabilities, therefore, can be associated with countless “beings” and “doings”: to be well-nourished, to study, to express opinions, to travel, etc. The capabilities include what Sen calls the basic capabilities, which “refer to the freedom to do some basic things that are necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty” (Robeyns 18).

This framework (development ethics for a general evaluation and the Capability Approach for a specific one with regard to certain issues) provides the tools to find out whether the Brazilian Conditional Cash Transfer does promote human development or is no more than a paternalist program.

Throughout this paper, Conditional Cash Transfers will be designated as such or simply by its acronym: CCTs. The Brazilian Conditional Cash Transfer, in turn, will be designated as Programa Bolsa Família (its Portuguese name), as “the Brazilian CCT”, or as “the Brazilian program”.

Chapter 1 will provide basic information about Conditional Cash Transfers: what they are, how they work, their flourishing in Latin America, and some of the criticisms on them. Chapter 2 will do the same about the Brazilian CCT, besides describing some of its results. Chapter 3 will present this paper's ethical framework: the aforementioned development ethics and, more specifically, the Capability Approach. These chapters are prerequisites for Chapter 4, in which the Brazilian program will be ethically evaluated. After that, the paper comes to a close with the Conclusion. The citation style used is the Modern Language Association (MLA).

## **CHAPTER 1 - CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS**

### **A Brief Explanation**

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) are programs that give money to poor households since the recipients meet certain requirements. Generally, the most important requirements are: the recipients have to guarantee that their children attend school and medical checkups (in order to receive, for example, vaccinations). CCTs are the result of public policies and, thereby, the government is the one that provides the money for the recipients and the one that offers the schools and the medical services.

The definition above is a basic one. As CCTs have spread throughout many countries, they can have some variations, but usually the main characteristics are the ones mentioned in this chapter. Many CCTs are funded by international organizations like the World Bank (but this is not what happens in the Brazilian program: its funding comes from the Brazilian federal budget).

In many cases, the CCT's cash is delivered to women. As a study published by the World

Bank notes, “this preference for payments to women reflects international experience” (Lindert et al. 17). The argument behind such preference: women would be more prone than men to invest the additional income in the welfare of their family –and especially in education and health for their children. But, as it will be shown in Chapter 4, some authors dispute such assumption, arguing it refers to a gender stereotype.

CCTs can be described as programs that have simultaneously short-term and long-term strategies (Soares, pars. 1-2). The short-term strategy is the most clear and explicit part of the program: by making cash transfers to poor households, it expects to promote an immediate –or at least almost immediate– reduction of poverty. The long-term strategy is based on the requirements attached to the transfers. Some of the requirements may vary from country to country, but the most important ones usually don’t: as mentioned before, they are the ones that aim to guarantee education and healthcare assistance for the poor’s children. Doing so, the long-term strategy intends to break the chain of poverty between one generation and the next, as a result of investments in human capital. Or, to put it in the terms used by the United Nations, the long-term strategy’s goal is “human development”.

## **Latin America**

According to a World Bank report published in 2009, the adoption of CCTs or the intention to adopt such program was increasing “at a prodigious rate” at the time (Fiszbein et al. 29). The report mentioned CCTs in countries like Bangladesh, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and Turkey. It also mentioned pilot programs in Cambodia, Malawi, Morocco, Pakistan, and South Africa. According to a more recent report, there are CCTs in approximately 30 countries (Shei et al, par. 1). But the region where the programs became predominant is Latin America.

In the beginning of this century, Latin America had about “40% of its population in poverty, a large proportion of which is involved in poorly paid informal work with minimal social protection. Women constitute the majority in this situation” (Molyneux 62). After the process of re-democratization that happened in the region during the 1980s and 1990s, Conditional Cash Transfers began to appear and now “virtually every country in Latin America has such a program” (Fiszbein et al. 1).

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (which is a United Nations regional commission), by 2011 Conditional Cash Transfers were benefiting approximately 113 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching thereby 19% of the total population in that region, at a cost of approximately 0.4% of the regional Gross Domestic Product (Cecchini and Madariaga 7)<sup>1</sup>.

The CCTs in Brazil and Mexico are considered to be the largest in Latin America. The Brazilian CCT benefits around 14 million families (Brasil, 2015). It is called Programa Bolsa Família. The Mexican CCT benefits around 5.8 million families (Mexico 7). It is called Oportunidades. For these two countries, the CCTs became the most important type of social assistance program (Fiszbein et al. 1).

The amount of money spent by each country with their CCTs is small relative to their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs). The cost can range from about 0.5% of GDP in countries like Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico to 0.08% in Chile (Fiszbein et al. 5).

## **Recognition**

A series of World Bank and United Nations reports published in the last decade highlights

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<sup>1</sup> The authors stress that those data were drawn from a database of social protection programs in the region –this database was set by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (Cecchini and Madariaga 7)

the CCTs' importance and accomplishments. Some examples can be found in the following excerpts:

- “CCTs have been regarded worldwide as the latest ‘silver bullet’ to fight poverty and inequality.” (Soares, par. 1)
- “CCT programs are efficient in reaching the poor: on average 80 percent of the benefits go to the 40 percent poorest families.” (De la Brière and Rawlings 13)
- “(...) CCTs generally have been successful in reducing poverty and encouraging parents to invest in the health and education of their children.” (Fiszbein et al. XI). This study, a World Bank report with almost 400 pages, takes its conclusions after drawing upon a series of other evaluations, besides its own, on CCT's impacts<sup>2</sup>.
- “Evaluations confirm that such transfers do reach the poor. They also help increase school attendance (...), promote more intensive use of basic health services and improve nutrition.” (Zepeda, par. 2)

### **Criticism: Paternalism**

Nevertheless, some of those reports mention a criticism according to which the problem with CCTs is their conditionalities. Some researchers say that the requirements are not necessary, because cash transfers, by itself, induce poor families to improve investments in education, health and nutrition achievements (Soares, par. 3). Guy Standing is a very vocal supporter of such opinion. In a text published by the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, he not only argues that conditionalities are not necessary, but also accuse them of being

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<sup>2</sup> As this World Bank report explains in its Appendix B - Review of CCT Impact Evaluations, “CCTs have been remarkable in a variety of ways. One of those ways is that perhaps more than any intervention in developing countries, CCTs have been evaluated credibly for their impact on a variety of outcomes –consumption, labor market participation, poverty, nutritional status, and schooling to name but a few. (...) The evaluations of CCTs have used a variety of methods.” (Fiszbein et al. 297-298) Some of those evaluations used control groups.

paternalistic, since they “assume, in effect, that a poor family must be irrational or incapable of knowing what is in its long-term interests or lacks some kind of vital information” (Standing, par. 9).

According to him, cash transfers without conditionalities tend to be more effective when compared, for example, to commodity-based alternatives, such as food aid, which do not allow recipients to make their own choices. “Moreover, such programmes [the commodity-based ones] strengthen a sense of charity rather than economic rights” (Standing, par. 3). Standing highlights that the absence of conditions provides freedom of choice for the recipients –in how the money will be spent.

In this vision, such freedom is undermined when conditionalities are included. Thereby, both CCTs and commodity-based programs would be paternalistic ones. However, Soares notes that the conditionalities can also change entrenched behaviour “that jeopardize the chances of children of poor families from getting out of poverty. For example, there is evidence in Brazil that families whose heads worked while they were children are more likely to send their children to work. In cases like this, conditionality might prompt a cultural change that would protect these children from an early entry into the labour market” (Soares, par. 3). Moreover, “proponents of CCT programs argue that market failures may often lead to underinvestment in education or health, which are addressed by the conditions imposed on recipient households” (Baird, McIntosh, and Özler 2010).

### **Criticism: Implementation Problems**

In his criticism of conditionalities, Guy Standing adds that CCTs face implementation problems in very poor regions, such as lack of schools, health clinics and even transport, as well

as lack of administrative capacity in low-income countries. These implementation problems are also pointed out in another UNDP's text (*Do CCT Programmes Work in Low-Income Countries?*), in which the author stresses that CCTs "have worked fairly well in large upper middle-income countries such as Brazil and Mexico. But this does not mean that the CCT model can be exported to all countries, especially the poorest." (Cecchini, par. 1).

World Bank economist Laura Ralston supports Unconditional Cash Transfers, but in a particular context: she suggests they "could be a useful instrument in countries with low institutional capacity, such as fragile and conflict-affected states" (Ralston, par. 1). She argues that, in these specific countries, Unconditional Cash Transfers would be more efficient and feasible.

## **Politics**

On the other hand, there may be another reason for the conditionalities –a political one. Some researchers (Lindert and Vincensini; Fiszbein et al.; Baird, McIntosh and Özler) suggest or conclude that the conditionalities make cash transfer programs politically acceptable, especially "to middle and upper-class voters who are not direct beneficiaries of such programs" (Baird, McIntosh, and Özler 1710).

In the case of the Brazilian CCT, a World Bank report states that "the acceptance of conditions across the political spectrum –where the left sees the conditions as merely restating citizen's rights, and the right tends to see them as enforceable contracts –played an important role in generating broad-based support for the program in Brazil" (Fiszbein et al. 62).

## CHAPTER 2 - THE BRAZILIAN CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER

### A Brief Context

Even though Brazil is frequently mentioned as a “middle income” country in World Bank’s and United Nations’ reports, poverty has been one of its main problems. The country is also known for its high degree of inequality<sup>3</sup>. “In fact, Brazil has historically had one of the highest degrees of income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient persistently hovering around 0.60 since the 1970s.” (Lindert et al. 9)

According to Deborah Wetzel, World Bank’s Country Director for Brazil, inequality and poverty in Brazil are the historical result of non-inclusive growth models and regressive social policies. “In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Brazil has been one of the most unequal countries in the world. (...) For years, the poorest 60% of the population had only 4% of the wealth, while the richest 20% held 58% of the pie.” (Wetzel, par. 1)

During the process of redemocratization that began in the mid-1980s –the country had been under military dictatorship from 1964 to 1984– debates about public policies towards inequality and poverty began to spread in Brazil. And those debates marked the Constitution of 1988, which is the seventh and current Brazilian Constitution. It was in such social and political environment that Conditional Cash Transfer programs began to appear as a possibility.

Concerns about the social injustice (...) are reflected in Brazil’s Constitution, which places great emphasis on poverty reduction and the creation of a more just and equitable society. The Constitution established a legal foundation of social assistance as guaranteed “rights” for the needy –and also an obligation of the state to provide health and education

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<sup>3</sup> A paper prepared for the United Nations University - World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) states that “extraordinarily high inequality levels and persistent poverty despite of a diversified economy have been a stable component of the country’s national profile.” (Von Jacobi 2)

services, among others, the access to which is established as a basic right of all citizens.

(Lindert et al. 9)

This explains why it is possible to state that “Conditional Cash Transfer programs in Brazil form part of a wider social contract developed in the post-dictatorship era and codified in the 1988 Constitution. The state is seen as responsible for providing basic human services such as education and health” (Miller 3). The concept of Conditional Cash Transfer first appeared in Brazilian policy debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s –not coincidentally, in the beginning of the redemocratization process. During that period, discussions about poverty and social injustice focused on the ideas of: a) providing minimum income to the poor and b) strategies towards education in order to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Lindert et al. 10). CCTs offered an integrated solution for both ideas.

Initially, CCTs appeared in Brazil as municipal enterprises during the 1990s, which included cities governed by two of the most important –an opposing– political parties in the country: the Workers Party (PT) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). At the end of the 1990s, the federal government –run by PSDB– began to support those initiatives, providing funding to cities that did not have enough resources to sustain their CCTs. Next, at the beginning of the 2000s, PSDB launched three federal programs inspired by those initial ones: Programa Bolsa Escola (Scholarship Program), Programa Bolsa Alimentação (Feeding Bonus Program), and Programa Auxílio Gás (Gas Bonus Program)<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, there is “a long tradition of Conditional Cash Transfers in Brazil. Indeed, Brazil was the first country to pioneer the instrument of CCTs in Latin America and the Caribbean” (Lindert et al. 10).

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<sup>4</sup> The history of CCTs in Brazil is described in many articles, but the summarized version presented here is based on a World Bank report: Lindert et al. 11-13.

## **Programa Bolsa Família**

At the end of 2003, the newly elected federal government, led by the Workers Party (PT), creates Programa Bolsa Família (Family Grant Program). In order to do so, the new government merged four preexisting federal programs: the three aforementioned programs created by PSDB and another one created by the Workers Party itself a few months before: Programa Cartão Alimentação (Feeding Card Program).

The arguments in favor of the merge were that the preexisting programs: a) were not articulated, b) used different enrollment criteria, c) employed databases that could not interface between each other, and d) two of them had very low coverage (Santos et al. 1). The Workers Party claimed that, by merging the preexisting programs, it would be easier to improve the efficiency and the coherence of the Brazilian social safety net. At the same time, such integration would make possible to scale up assistance in order to provide a large coverage for the poor – and, in fact, Programa Bolsa Família became the largest CCT in Latin America and one of the largest in the world.

According to a paper prepared for the United Nations University - World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), the Brazilian CCT distributes “approximately 7.6 billion dollars per year to approximately 13.8 million households, which implies approximately 45 million people or 24% of the entire Brazilian population” (Von Jacobi 4). This report also notes that the program has a “relatively low incidence on overall Gross Domestic Product –about 0.5%”. The program is funded by the federal budget.

## How It Works

To become a recipient, a family needs to be classified in one of the two following categories:

- Extremely Poor Families: the ones whose monthly *per capita* income is lower than 77 reais (around 30.56 Canadian dollars)<sup>5</sup>. This value (77 reais) is based on a World Bank assessment from 2010, according to which “extreme poverty is defined as average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence”.
- Poor Families: the ones whose monthly *per capita* income is over 77 reais and lower than 154 reais (around 61.12 Canadian dollars)<sup>6</sup> and at the same time have: a) children and adolescents up to 17 years old and/or b) a pregnant or lactating women.

As a typical CCT, the program has a short-term goal, which is to alleviate poverty, and a long-term goal, which is to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty by means of investments in human capital (health and education). Nevertheless, as the categories aforementioned show, the household does not necessarily need to have children to become a recipient; that is the case with Extreme Poor Families or Poor Families with pregnant or lactating women.

The income offered by the program varies. The minimum is 77 reais a month (around 30.56 Canadian dollars). The maximum depends of a combination of different criteria (*e.g.* the number of children and the possibility to add incomes from other social programs that are

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<sup>5</sup> The exchange rate used here was the following: 1 Canadian dollar = 2.52 reais (or, in reverse: 1 real = 0.40 Canadian Dollar). This was the exchange rate on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, according to the Brazilian Central Bank.

<sup>6</sup> The exchange rate used here was the following: 1 Canadian dollar = 2.52 reais (or, in reverse: 1 real = 0.40 Canadian Dollar). This was the exchange rate on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, according to the Brazilian Central Bank.

articulated with Bolsa Família). The law<sup>7</sup> which created Programa Bolsa Família says explicitly that payments will be made preferentially to the woman in each family.

The program's implementation is shared between the federal and the sub-national levels of government (municipalities and states<sup>8</sup>). Besides, some governmental agencies are also involved in it. As a result, some studies highlight that “an important feature of the Programa Bolsa Família is its implementation in a highly decentralized context” (Lindert et al. 20). However, the federal government makes most of the planning and is responsible for the most important decisions –something that is established in the articles 4 and 5 of the law that created the program<sup>9</sup>.

### **Results (Some Examples)**

Programa Bolsa Família has short-term and long-term goals, but it is still difficult to evaluate the long-term results, since they are linked to the children whose families currently receive financial support from the program. Note that the program is relatively new: it was launched at the end of 2003 and is currently little more than ten years. These children's performance in the future will show if the current conditionalities do stimulate their empowerment –and if they will be able to break the intergenerational chain of poverty.

Nevertheless, there are various reports about the short-term results. In 2006, the program was recognized as the largest CCT in the world at the time, after having scaled up its coverage “at an exponential pace since its inception in 2003” (Lindert et al. 6). And, as aforementioned,

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<sup>7</sup> “Lei nº 10.836, de 9 de janeiro de 2004” <[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2004-2006/2004/lei/110.836.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2004/lei/110.836.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup> States are the Brazilian equivalent to provinces (even though there are legal differences between states and provinces).

<sup>9</sup> “Lei nº 10.836, de 9 de janeiro de 2004” <[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2004-2006/2004/lei/110.836.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2004/lei/110.836.htm)>.

the program currently covers around 45 million people (Von Jacobi 4).

The program may also have contributed to the decrease of income inequality in the country, as the World Bank's Country Director for Brazil suggests, pointing out to the approximately 15% decrease registered between 2003 and 2013 (Wetzel, par. 4). According to the World Bank's data, Brazil's Gini coefficient fell to 0.527 in recent years.

A World Bank report published in 2015 points out that "Brazil has succeeded in significantly reducing poverty in the last decade. It has nearly eliminated extreme poverty, which fell from a rate of almost 10 percent in 2001 to 4 percent in 2013." (Báez et al. 77). According to the report, many factors contributed to such accomplishment, including the Brazilian CCT.

According to the Brazilian government, the program took out of extreme poverty situation 36 million people in ten years, from 2003 to 2013. But the government is accused of inflating that number. For instance: according to *Folha de S. Paulo*, one of the biggest newspapers in Brazil, the number is debatable and it would be possible to claim that in reality the program took out of extreme poverty around 8.4 million people during a similar period (Patu)<sup>10</sup>.

Another important result: the federal government claims that 93% of the people entitled to receive the cash –that is, the ones who represent their families– are women. This effort to privilege women is in line with the "international experience (...) that suggest that women are more likely than men to invest additional income in improving the education, health and welfare of their family, particularly their children" (Lindert et al. 17)<sup>11</sup>. The government argues that, doing so, the program stimulates social inclusion and empowerment to women.

The short-term evaluations also reveal results on education and health. According to the

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<sup>10</sup> There is also a methodological issue: the numbers can vary according to the criteria used to define "extreme poverty". For the Brazilian government, families in extreme poverty are the ones whose monthly *per capita* income is lower than 77 reais (value based on a World Bank's assessment).

<sup>11</sup> Such argument, nevertheless, is criticized by some researchers, as shown in Chapter 4 (in the section *Gender and Agency*).

World Bank's Country Director for Brazil, Programa Bolsa Família led to an increase in school attendance and also contributed to the students' evolution throughout the grades (Wetzel, par. 6) –thereby avoiding school failure, a chronic problem among poor students. Data released by the federal government on a regular basis support that claim. For instance: according to the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome (Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation), 15 million students between 6 e 17 years old that are Bolsa Família beneficiaries accomplished the minimum school attendance required by the program during June and July of 2014. They represented 96.1% of the students benefited by Bolsa Família at the time (Brasil, 2014).

In terms of health, a report published in 2014 informs that Programa Bolsa Família “increases utilization of preventive health care services” and “encourages poor families to use existing health services and to interact with the public health system” (Shei et al., par. 13). More specifically, the report says that, in children under age seven, the program was associated with increased odds for growth monitoring, vaccinations, and checkups. It also says that there were positive spillover effects on older siblings (ages 7-17); the program increased their odds for growth monitoring and checkups and improved psychosocial health (Shei et al.).

On the other hand, one of the most common criticisms against the program claims it creates incentives for the poor having children (in order to receive the cash). According to such criticism, this would be a predictable result of a paternalistic policy that stimulates dependency on the government. But government's data does not seem to support that. According to the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome (Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation), the number of children per family in Brazil fell 10.7% between 2003 and 2013; during the same period, the number of children per family fell 15.7% among the 20%

poorer (Laboissière).

Another worth noting result is related to an institutional analysis: according to a study that covered approximately 5.5 thousand municipalities (nearly all municipalities in the country), the Brazilian bureaucratic apparatus –including its subnational levels– was successful in enforcing the rules concerning Programa Bolsa Família, which include the ones related to the conditionalities (Coêlho). Thereby, after ten years of its implementation, from 2003 to 2013, it “triggered a positive and political learning, and engendered the institutionalization of the rules” concerning the program (Coêlho, *Regras 2*).

### **Criticism: Electoral Strategy?**

In the Brazilian media, it is not rare to find evaluations about Programa Bolsa Família which associate –explicitly or implicitly– the program with *assistencialismo* (a Portuguese word that may be translated as *welfarism*, in the derogatory sense of a charity policy or a policy of “handouts”). A study about the Brazilian media points out the ideological bias of such evaluations, noting that the word *assistencialismo* has been used by many journalists to suggest that such policies stimulate dependency on the government and, as a consequence, deny the beneficiaries the possibility of empowerment (Biroli, Miguel, and Duailibe 2).

Another study about Brazilian media assessed how *Veja*, the country’s leading weekly news magazine, portrayed the program during 2005 and 2006. The study highlights that the magazine’s reports not only associated Programa Bolsa Família with *assistencialismo* –one of the reports had the title “Assistencialismo’s hostages”– but also evaluated the program as part of an electoral strategy (Prado and Moassab), which is a common criticism against Programa Bolsa Família.

Such perception is not limited to the media; it echoes part of Brazilian society's opinion. Rodrigo Constantino, president of Instituto Liberal and one of Instituto Millenium's founders, which are Brazilian organizations with pro free market and right-wing bias, is an example. According to him, the money provided by the program is a "handout" and "nowadays it is unmistakable the Workers Party's political use of those handouts" in order to obtain votes (Constantino, par. 4 - my translation). Besides, during the last presidential election, there were many accusations against Workers Party members, according to which they were telling voters that, if the opposition wins, it would put an end to Programa Bolsa Família.

In fact, there is a noticeable correspondence between the program and the results in the last three presidential elections –which by itself is not an ethical problem. The Workers Party won its first presidential election in 2002 and launched Programa Bolsa Família in 2003, the first year of its government. After that, the program coverage spread throughout the country "at an exponential pace" (Lindert et al. 6). And, since then, the Workers Party won all presidential elections to date: in 2006, 2010 and 2014.

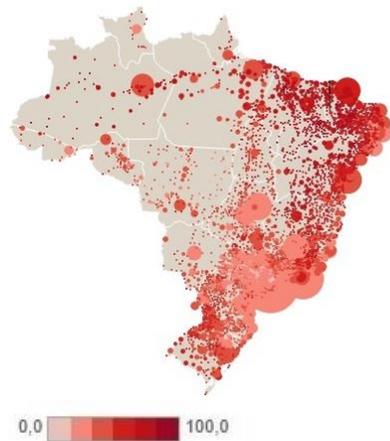
The electoral importance of Programa Bolsa Família for the current government has also been pointed out in the academy. A study suggests that the program "did play an important role in the 2006 elections" (Zucco and Power 4). The 2006 election was the first one after Programa Bolsa Família's creation. These researchers say that, although they did not analyzed the government's victory in 2010, they were "confident" that the Workers Party presidential vote bases in 2006 and 2010 "will be found to be much more similar to each other" than they were in 2002 (Zucco and Power 22).

Another researcher, Pui Shen Yoong, whose study focused on the 2010 election, started her investigation with the hypothesis that the Workers Party was indirectly "buying" the poor

vote through Programa Bolsa Família. She interviewed program’s beneficiaries from one of the biggest cities in the country, Belo Horizonte, and applied the theory of clientelism on her analysis. The researcher concluded that the interviewees do not “consciously” consider the program as a fundamental factor in their votes, but she states that the “beneficiaries’ patronage-based views of politicians generated support for the incumbent Workers Party in the 2010 elections” (Yoong 1).

The correspondence between the program and the presidential elections is also noticeable in the 2014’s election, as shown in an infographic produced by newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*. It shows two Brazil’s maps. The first, in the left side, shows the regions where the incumbent (Workers Party’s Dilma Rousseff) had more votes in the first round of the election<sup>12</sup>: the darker areas of the map. In the second map, in the right side, the darker areas are the ones where there are the cities with larger Programa Bolsa Família’s coverage.

Workers Party’s votes in the first round of 2014’s election (%)



Programa Bolsa Família’s coverage at the time (%)



(Kanno, Soares, and Britto, 2014, infographic)

<sup>12</sup> When no candidate receives more than 50% of the votes in the first round, Brazilian presidential elections mandatorily have two rounds. When that happens, only the two candidates who received the most votes run in the second round.

## CHAPTER 3 - ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

### Charity or Moral Duty?

The discussion on the ethics that underlies policies towards poverty is not new. In the 1970s, Peter Singer and Garrett Hardin initiated an intellectual debate about it, with the first supporting actions to help the poor and the latter arguing that nothing should be done (but note that both were discussing international aid, while CCTs are a “domestic” solution). The debate between Singer and Hardin not only inspired the investigations of many philosophers, either in response to Singer or Hardin; their basic ideas also underlies many of the current perceptions about Conditional Cash Transfers –and that is why they will be discussed here.

In his essay *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, the philosopher Peter Singer states that affluent citizens in affluent countries should help poor people in poor countries, since “it follows from some forms of utilitarian theory that we all ought, morally, to be working full time to increase the balance of happiness over misery” (238). Singer argues that such aid is not a mere matter of charity; it should not even be defined as charity, because in fact it is a moral obligation –a duty. According to him, “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” (Singer 231).

The opposite opinion is presented by the ecologist Garrett Hardin in his essay *Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor*. He compares rich nations to lifeboats with a limited amount of people, which are surrounded by a much larger amount of people –the poor nations– who are “swimming in the water outside, begging for admission to our boat or for handouts” (38). Hardin argues that the planet’s resources cannot provide for an ever-growing population –

and he stresses that the growth's higher rates are found in the poor countries. Therefore, foreign aid<sup>13</sup> is not only naïve, but also wrong, because it results in more mouths to feed and stimulates dependency. Poor countries, he says, should solve the problems of famine and population growth on their own.

A very similar kind of debate underlies the public's perceptions on policies towards poverty –even if, in the case of CCTs, the issue is not international aid. The controversy on the Brazilian CCT is an example of such debate: on one hand, there is the argument of “social justice for the needy”, and, on the other, there is the criticism that describes the program as a handout policy.

Nevertheless, Singer and Hardin's focus is on ethical principles, and not on the implementation of policies towards the poor<sup>14</sup>. That is, they offer a theoretical background for *a priori* evaluations, in order to answer questions like “Should the rich nations help the poor ones?” or “Should programs like CCTs exist?” (since many CCTs are funded by international organizations like the World Bank). Their effort could be shown as an example of the first stage of development ethics, when researchers highlight how important this issue is (Gasper). In other words, the first stage is about “putting ethics on the development agenda” (Croker 16).

Despite its undeniable importance, this first stage is not enough to evaluate the way in which those public policies are implemented. CCTs demand both *a priori* and *a posteriori* evaluations. Besides, CCTs are generally implemented by developing or poor countries as a local solution, while Singer and Hardin are discussing rich nations' initiatives to help the poor in poor

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<sup>13</sup> Note that many CCTs are funded by international organizations like the World Bank.

<sup>14</sup> One may be tempted to say that, for Garrett Hardin, there is no sense in evaluating public policies towards the poor, since the essence of his “lifeboat ethics” is exactly “the case against helping the poor”. But what Hardin actually says is that rich nations (and their rich people) should not help the poor nations (and their poor people). He argues that the poor need to solve their problems on their own. And it seems to be the case in CCTs like the Brazilian one. While some CCTs are funded by international organizations, the Brazilian program is not only the result of a policy implemented by the Brazilian government; it is also funded by the Brazilian federal budget.

countries. In short, it is necessary an ethical framework able to deal –in more specific terms– with policies towards the poor and implemented by the poor.

### **Development Ethics**

In a more recent study, published as a book in 2008, David Crocker states that, even though Singer is right in his proposal of an ethic of aid (one that justifies international aid from the rich towards the poor), that ethic is very limited and has a lot of problems, such as perceiving the rich as agents and the poor as passive recipients. According to Crocker’s critique, in order to be really helpful, international aid first has to understand how the recipient historically conceived its development and what it has already done about it –in other words, the recipient must be understood as an agent. Therefore, he states that an ethic of aid “would be only one part of an ethics of and for national and local development” (Crocker 8).

Note that this line of thought not only has Peter Singer as a starting point, but also has an echo of Garrett Hardin’s view that the poor should solve their problems on their own –an echo that has been transmuted into a new idea: the poor as agents, as autonomous people. As Crocker highlights, “one is an agent when one deliberates and decides for herself” (298).

Crocker’s ideas are largely influenced by authors like the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. In the 1970s, the same decade in which Singer and Hardin were debating whether the rich should help the poor, Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze were investigating national efforts to combat hunger. Such research led Sen and Drèze, both economists, to write together various texts addressing policies towards poverty, like *Hunger and Public Action*. In their writings, development appears as a fundamental key in order to eradicate famine. But they realized that such development cannot be simply a straightforward economic process, since for them poverty is not only an

economic problem.

Sen and Drèze are part of a group that questions the idea that economic growth, by itself, is the solution for poverty (in other words, the idea that, by increasing a country's wealth, it will lead automatically to the population's well-being). Economic growth is necessary, but it is not enough. Wealth distribution, for example, is also fundamental, as Okun and Richardson stressed in the beginning of the 1960s. In order to illustrate their argument, Okun and Richardson mentioned the case of Kuwait, "which, by no stretch of the imagination, can be considered a developed country", since the profits from the oil royalties –which contribute to the country's economic growth– actually enriched the ruling family, while "almost the entire population lives in poverty (233).

Another example of an inadequate view of development, at least according to this group, is the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of well-being or quality of life –even though many economists warn against such use. Roughly speaking, GDP is an estimate of the economic growth that a country or a region achieves during a period of time. As Martha Nussbaum notes, one of the many problems with GDP is that, "first of all, it does not take account of distribution. It is an average. So it can give very high marks to nations that have huge and alarming inequalities. Second, it funnels all parts of human life together in a single number".

Nussbaum, a philosopher who collaborated with Amartya Sen in the 1980s, also disputes the idea that if a country concentrates its efforts solely in economic growth, this will lead to later improvements in the quality of life (which was a common idea, for example, during the military dictatorship in Brazil). She stresses that empirical research has shown that health and education "are not very robustly" correlated with increased GDP. And she mentions China to illustrate that, in the case of political liberties, "it's even more obvious" that quality of life is not highly

correlated with economic growth and its proxy, the GDP (Nussbaum).

Speaking of which, political liberties are another vital element to this new concept of development –an element as important as health and education. As Amartya Sen puts it, “political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action. The response of a government to the acute suffering of its people often depends on the pressure that is put on it” (Sen, *Democracy* 7). This statement appears in his essay *Democracy as a Universal Value* –and such title explicitly indicates what is the best environment for political and civil rights, at least according to Sen.

Besides, Sen’s line of thought not only shows that democracy allows political and civil rights to flourish, but also implicitly contains an idea of agency, since these rights “give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to” their needs and, thereby, stimulate policies towards poverty. As Crocker notes, “one is an agent when one (...) acts to realize one’s aim, and, thereby, makes some intentional difference in the world (298). This reasoning may sound obvious in rich countries with well-established democracies, but it is far from reaching a consensus in other parts of the world. In fact, the first half of *Democracy as a Universal Value* addresses and the disputes the arguments according to which “non-democratic systems are better at bringing about economic development” (Sen, *Democracy* 6).

The ideas described in the last three pages are part of what became known as development ethics –a framework in which economic growth is not enough and a series of values must be satisfied.

As development ethics has evolved over the past forty years, its central principle is that development is a worthy social goal if, and only if, it satisfies a number of values, including human well-being, equity, empowerment, cultural freedom, human rights, environmental sustainability and integrity regarding corruption. (Penz, Drydyk and Bose

## The Capability Approach

The ideas presented by development ethics begun to inform, in the beginning of the 1980s, a new framework: the Capability Approach, which was first designed by Amartya Sen. It can be described as a “normative framework for the evaluation of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies and proposals about social change in society” (Robeyns 5). It can also be an example of what Gasper calls the second stage of development ethics, in which there is an examination “of major valuative concepts and theories used to guide, interpret or critique” experiences and actions (XII). Or, as Crocker puts it, the second stage deals with moral evaluation and “development theory-practice”.

Sen defines the Capability Approach<sup>15</sup> as “an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person’s achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being” (Sen, *Capability* 16). It is important to be aware, in this context, that “achievements” are related to the notion of functionings, while “freedoms” are related to the notion of capabilities.

Capability refers to what a person is able to do or to be; the possibilities he or she effectively has. More specifically, it is the freedom –or the opportunity– a person has to choose what he or she values doing or being. Note that Sen is not mentioning any “doing” or “being”; just the ones people have “reason to value”, which refers to the democratic element in this approach. Examples of capabilities: the freedom or opportunity to be well-nourished, the

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<sup>15</sup>“(…) it is important to note that Sen has developed his capability approach gradually, (…) and has substantially refined it over the last two decades. Sen has not only published a number of books in which he developed the capability approach, but he also wrote a number of crucial articles in journals across different disciplines”. (Robeyns 4)

freedom or opportunity to study, the freedom or opportunity to express opinions, the freedom or opportunity to travel<sup>16</sup>.

Functioning, in turn, is the “being” or “doing”. In other words, it refers to what a person has effectively achieved to do or to be (as Sen says: “a person’s achievement”). Possible examples: being well-nourished, being educated, expressing opinions or travelling. Therefore, functionings are the capabilities –the effective possibilities– that are realized.

What is ultimately important is that people have the freedoms (capabilities) to lead the kind of lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do and be the person they want to be. (Robeyns 6-7)

That being so, the ultimate goal of the Capability Approach is a humanistic one, in which agency and empowerment are fundamental: human development. And the approach’s influence appears in a report published by the United Nations since 1990: the Human Development Report. Amartya Sen was one of its first consultants.

In the United Nations Development Programme’s website there is a statement in which the influence of the Capability Approach’s concepts is noticeable: “(...) the first Human Development Report introduced a new approach for advancing human well-being. Human development –or the human development approach– is about expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live. It is an approach that is focused on people and their opportunities and choices”.

## **Basic Capabilities**

Among the diversity of capabilities, there are the basic ones, which “are a subset of all

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<sup>16</sup> In Sen’s texts, the notions of freedom and opportunity are interchangeable. One example: “Capabilities (...) are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead.” (Sen, *Standard* 36)

capabilities; they refer to the freedom to do some basic things that are necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty” (Robeyns 18). According to Sen, a basic capability is “the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels” (Sen, *Inequality* 45). And its relevance is “in deciding on a cut-off point for the purpose of assessing poverty and deprivation” (Sen, *Standard* 109).

That being so, basic capabilities can have an important role in researches about poverty – and in evaluations about policies on poverty. That is why “Sen’s writings on development often refer to basic capabilities” (Robeyns 19). Therefore, basic capabilities can offer important contributions to development ethics.

The capability approach to well-being and development thus evaluates policies according to their impact on people’s capabilities. It asks whether people are being healthy, and whether the resources necessary for this capability (...) are present. It asks whether people are well-nourished, and whether the conditions for this capability (...) are met. It asks whether people have access to a high quality education, to real political participation, to community activities which support them to cope with struggles in daily life (...). (Robeyns 7)

It is important to emphasize that, in this paper, the term basic capabilities is used in the way Sen defines it. Martha Nussbaum, another important author for the Capability Approach, uses this term with another meaning, which resembles “natural and innate capacities, or talents, and have little to do with the cut off point for poverty or deprivation analysis” (Robeyns 20).

It is also important not to confuse basic capabilities, as defined by Sen, with the basic needs approach. To stress the difference between them can be instructive, since both deal with poverty but offer different proposals. According to the basic needs approach, the problem of poverty is the deprivation of material resources, such as food, water, sanitation, etc. Therefore, this approach aims to identify “a bundle of basic consumption and assess whether the population

has adequate access to it” (Wong 4). Roughly speaking, the basic needs approach is a “materialistic” one.

On the other hand, basic capabilities –and, more broadly, the Capability Approach– emphasizes that such basic consumption is not enough. Access to material resources is crucial, but their value is instrumental. The ultimate value is the freedom –or the opportunity– to choose the beings and doings one has reason to value. In other words, the ultimate value is human development.

To basic needs theorists, poverty is the status of consumption deprivation (...). On the other hand, capability approach defines poverty as the deprivation of opportunities (...)” (Wong 9).

In such context, development ethics and, more specifically, the Capability Approach, and even more specifically, the basic capabilities, offer an adequate framework to assess Conditional Cash Transfer programs like the Brazilian one –programs that claim not only to combat poverty, but also to stimulate autonomy and empowerment.

## **CHAPTER 4 – AN ETHICAL DISCUSSION ABOUT THE BRAZILIAN CCT**

### **Sine Qua Non**

By giving cash to poor households, the Brazilian government claims Programa Bolsa Família took out of extreme poverty millions of people (an accomplishment recognized by the World Bank and the United Nations). But what does it mean in ethical terms? What does it mean for development ethics? Is such accomplishment something more than charity?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to remember that Brazil is a country

known by its social and economic inequalities, a country in which people in extreme poverty “live in regions traditionally neglected by the government (...), frequently without access to elementary public services”<sup>17</sup>. [In the areas of extreme poverty] There is a lack of schools, roads, hospitals, cultural centres and places where people can meet (...). Therefore, these people are thrown out of environments that stimulate human development” (Rego and Pinzani 22 - my translation).

That is the dimension of poverty which is not grasped by the ones who evaluate CCTs as mere charity –but can be grasped by the Capability Approach. People in extreme poverty are not only very poor; frequently their whole life was marked by deprivations that prevent them to develop their capabilities, even the basic ones. Frequently the government was not able to guarantee even the right to life and safety for them. And many of them cannot read or write and, therefore, have difficulties to become skilled workers or to manifest themselves publicly and politically. As Rego and Pinzani stresses, these people become ones “without the right of having rights” (23 - my translation).

Thereby, poverty is the deprivation of material resources, but not only that; it is also –and consequently– the deprivation of capacities (Dieterlan). In order to be free to choose what they reason as valuable, human beings in extreme poverty need, first, access to basic material goods. Without the freedom –or opportunity– to escape from poverty, choices and reasoning become extremely difficult or even impossible.

Sen argued that in social evaluations and policy design, the focus should be on what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life which, upon reflection, they find valuable. (Robeyns 5-

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<sup>17</sup> Even though Brazil’s inequalities (simply put, wealth and poverty) can be found throughout the whole country, extreme poverty situation is more common in the North and Northeast regions, in contrast with the Centre-West, South and Southeast (Brazil is divided in these five regions).

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That freedom is what the Brazilian CCT is trying to offer in the short-term: by giving cash directly to the poor, the program aims to alleviate poverty and, at the same time, to create conditions and environments in which human development is possible (and it is in such context that the conditionalities related to health and education should be understood). Therefore, this is a possible answer for what it means, in ethical terms, to take out of extreme poverty millions of people.

### **Paternalism?**

As seen in Chapter 1, there is criticism against CCT's conditionalities. According to researchers like Guy Standing, such conditionalities are paternalistic because they assume "that a poor family must be irrational or incapable of knowing what is in its long-term interests or lacks some kind of vital information" (Standing, par. 9). Claire Ichou, in turn, says that the World Bank "explicitly makes use of paternalism when justifying conditionality" (par. 15) and that "CCT programmes may reach their intended targets but fail to improve humanity" (par. 31).

In fact, paternalism is at odds with the ideas of agency and empowerment. That is why the most renowned Capability Approach's authors, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, "want to avoid a paternalistic, let alone dictatorial, government that makes decisions for (adult) people" (Crocker 170). As Ichou stresses, "there can be no development without putting people at the centre" (par. 30). Nevertheless, it is necessary to reiterate that extreme poverty is a very specific situation: a situation in which people become ones "without the right of having rights"; a situation in which frequently there is almost no opportunity or freedom to choose what one reasons as valuable.

When data indicate that the Brazilian CCT has been effective in stimulating children and

pregnant women to attend medical checkups and in increasing school enrolments (see Chapter 2), such data does not suggest paternalism, but incentives to human development. Maybe the mistake in Standing's and Ichou's criticisms is to presuppose that, even in extreme poverty situation, there is the same the same degree of freedom to choose what one reasons as valuable. Or the mistake may be not to realize that extreme poverty imposes limitations in the way people reason, since they "are thrown out of environments that stimulate human development" (Rego and Pinzani 22 - my translation).

One example: as mentioned in Chapter 1, "there is evidence in Brazil that families whose heads worked while they were children are more likely to send their children to work [instead to sending them to school]. In cases like this, conditionality might prompt a cultural change that would protect these children from an early entry into the labour market", since it jeopardizes their chances of getting out of poverty (Soares, par. 3).

Besides, and in contrast to the idea that CCTs' conditionalities are paternalistic, other researchers highlight that many Latin American CCTs prefer to use the term "co-responsibilities", instead of "conditionalities" or "conditions". The use of the term "co-responsibilities" would reflect the idea that CCTs are a new form of social contract (Fiszbein et al. 10).

When conditions are seen as co-responsibilities, they appear to treat the recipient more as an adult capable of agency to resolve his or her own problems. The state is seen as a partner in the process, not a nanny. (Fiszbein et al. 10)

The conditionalities focused on health and education do not undermine agency for people in extreme poverty situation. Instead, conditionalities can stimulate agency (as shown in the next section: *Gender and Empowerment*) for the ones "without the right of having rights". They become aware, for instance, that health and education are their rights.

In this context, the conditionalities focused on health and education are prerequisites for the creation of basic capabilities. As seen in Chapter 3, basic capabilities “refer to the freedom to do some basic things that are necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty” (Robeyns 18). Basic capabilities must not be confused with the basic needs theory, in which poverty is primarily a status of consumption deprivation; for the Capability Approach, poverty is “the deprivation of opportunities” (Wong 9). Thereby, basic capabilities may be described, roughly, as basic freedoms or basic opportunities. And they are not only fundamental to promote human development; they are already part of such development.

### **Gender and Agency**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, most of the people entitled to receive the cash from Programa Bolsa Família are women –approximately 90%, according to official data. The Brazilian government claims that, as a result, the program encourages women’s social inclusion and empowerment. It is one of the most highlighted examples of how the Brazilian CCT stimulates agency.

Such accomplishment has a special meaning for development ethics, not only because sexism is a typical element in poor regions, but because in earlier development models, prior to the 1970s, “neither women themselves nor issues about development’s impact on women were well represented in development policy and planning institutions” (Penz, Drydyk and Bose 131). Furthermore, some authors point out that those earlier models even widened the inequalities between men and women (Tinker). In the case of Programa Bolsa Família, the law which created the program says explicitly that the cash will be given preferentially to women.

According to a paper published by the World Bank, “this preference for payments to

women reflects international experience (...) that suggest that women are more likely than men to invest additional income in improving the education, health and welfare of their family, particularly their children.” (Lindert et al. 17). However, such statement may be controversial, since it refers to social roles that can be associated with sexism and the subordination of women.

In this sense, some studies argue that CCTs appeal to a “maternal” social identity and ignore that “women’s disposition towards involvement in care and household survival, combined with their precarious relationship to the wage economy, helps to make them ‘available’ for this purpose” (Molyneux 64). In this line of thought, the maternal view on women reinforces gender roles and stereotypes (Ichou). Thus, the consequence would be that, instead of expanding social, economic and political spaces for women, CCTs may end up giving just more responsibilities for them –in short, instead of empowerment, more burden.

Part of these criticisms can be summarized in the idea that “executing a liberal feminist perspective by working within the existing social structure is confining in terms of its transformative potential for women” (Papa, Auwal, and Singhal 212)<sup>18</sup>.

Such criticisms cannot be dismissed. They indicate the contradictions of societies like Brazil, where there are not only social and regional inequalities, but also gender inequalities. Nevertheless, even if “the existing social structure” (in which women’s role is a subordinate one) does not change in the short-term, the idea that “human agency, however subordinate, always embodies transformative capacity” (Mumby and Stohl 317) should not be dismissed as well.

One example can be found in the study from Rego and Pinzani: “Freedom, Money and Autonomy - The Case of Bolsa Família”. From 2006 to 2011, these researchers conducted interviews with poor women who were program’s recipients and live in the Northeast –one of the

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<sup>18</sup> Papa, Auwal and Singhal wrote this comment in a paper about the Grameen Bank, a community development bank in Bangladesh that makes small loans to poor women in order to stimulate small businesses.

poorest regions in Brazil. The interviews allowed a closer look at the lives of those women. The research –a qualitative one– emphasizes the precarious situation in which such women live, that combines poverty and a subordinate role in their families. But the study also states that the cash those women receive stimulates their autonomy.

As the research indicates, such autonomy is encouraged, for instance, when those women begin to be acknowledged by local shopkeepers and groceries owners as “trustworthy” people –a social recognition they did not have before simply because they did not have access to money and were not entitled to make the shoppings. This acknowledgment happens because, as the titular recipients of the Programa Bolsa Família, they gained access to a regular income, with which they began to make a series of daily decisions they were not used to make. The cash stimulated and allowed those women to break their social isolation and “circulate” in new –and large– social environments (Rego and Pinzani 33). They began to exist as agents.

Another researcher came to a similar conclusion in 2013, in a report for the World Bank about Programa Bolsa Família’s conditionalities and recipients (Coêlho, *Permanência*). He highlights that the capabilities stimulated or enabled by Programa Bolsa Família become clear as poor women play a new role in their families, and as their behavior (as well as the whole family’s behavior) towards the economy and the political system changes: “These families have begun to go to the bank and to understand how banks work. They have begun to organize themselves in micro associations and microenterprises.” (Coêlho, interview)

### **Gateway to Other Capabilities**

As one of the largest CCTs in the world, Programa Bolsa Família has an important database. As the program scaled up throughout the years, reaching an increasing number of

people, so did the amount of data the program provides for Cadastro Único para Programas Sociais (Unified Register for Social Programs). By boosting this unified database, Programa Bolsa Família can have a multiplier effect on other social programs, since such database can inform not only the planning and execution of Programa Bolsa Família, but also can inform any other Brazilian program towards the poor.

As Deborah Wetzel, World Bank's Country Director for Brazil, highlights, this database "is the essential tool that allowed Programa Bolsa Família to achieve these landmark successes. It provides the basis for targeting Programa Bolsa Família beneficiaries, but also links to numerous other social programs and services" (Wetzel, par. 7).

Thereby, this database's improvement reinforces the role of the Brazilian CCT as a "gateway" for other social programs. In the context of the Capability Approach, it means that, apart from offering an exit door out of extreme poverty (and at the same time stimulating basic capabilities), Programa Bolsa Família also produced more and better data for programs that, at least potentially, can stimulate other capabilities.

One example: some recipients of Programa Bolsa Família are using the micro-credit offered by the government in order foster micro-entrepreneurship (Congo). At least in this specific case, it becomes more difficult to criticize the program as a paternalistic one. The use of a database to find potential entrepreneurs has more resemblance with a marketing strategy for banks looking for clients than with a paternalistic policy that stimulates dependency. Besides, the recipients who become entrepreneurs by means of this micro-credit program choose by themselves which business they want to deal with.

## **Towards Democracy**

According to Rego and Pinzani, the problems of poverty in Brazil “highlight the nature of an economic growth with no solid democratic purpose” (23 - my translation). Such criticism is in line with the development ethics’ perception that a straightforward economic view is not enough to produce development; as Sen stresses, democracy is fundamental.

During the military dictatorship (1964-1984), the country accomplished an impressive economic growth, with raising industrial production. In its peak, from 1968 to 1973, such economic growth reached an average annual increase of 11% (Crocitti and Vallance 395); it was called “Brazilian Miracle” or “Economic Miracle”. But, according to Peter Berger, this economic growth also led to the impoverishment of Brazil’s worst-off citizens.

Antônio Delfim Netto, a renowned economist in Brazil who was Minister of Finance during the dictatorship, made famous the catchphrase “Primeiro é preciso fazer o bolo crescer, para depois dividi-lo” (“First, the cake has to grow in order to be shared”). The implicit idea in this catchphrase was that economic growth –and the wealth it produces– can be concentrated in a small fraction of the population; later, somehow, the wealth would be shared with the others.

Nevertheless, Martha Nussbaum, one of the most important Capability Approach’s author, disputes the idea that, if a country concentrates its efforts solely in economic growth, this will necessarily lead to later improvements in the population’s quality of life (see Chapter 3, section *Development Ethics*). In effect, the development model during the dictatorship in Brazil was a non-inclusive one. It was necessary the return to democracy in order to implement wealth redistribution policies like Programa Bolsa Família.

Note that “Conditional Cash Transfer programs in Brazil form part of a wider social contract developed in the post-dictatorship era and codified in the 1988 Constitution. The State is

seen as responsible for providing basic human services such as education and health” (Miller 3). And, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (in the section *A Brief Context*), the Constitution approved in 1988 and its vision about the government’s responsibilities were the result of discussions made (and allowed) in a newly democratic environment<sup>19</sup>.

The process described above is in line with the following comment: “Sen’s capability approach to social ethics and international development requires democracy conceived as public discussion as well as fair and free elections” (Crocker 297). Such democracy provides the environment where “political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action. The response of a government to the acute suffering of its people often depends on the pressure that is put on it” (Sen, *Democracy* 7). Note that the idea of agency is implicit here; democracy provides the opportunity for agency.

In this context, the Brazilian CCT may be regarded as the outcome of a development model in which democracy –and agency– is fundamental.

## **Political Game**

On the other hand, the Brazilian program should also be evaluated under a political game perspective, since “social policy is quintessentially political” (Hall 30). As any public policy, a social one is created in a specific political circumstance and may be used to influence the political game –and it is important to understand such process in order to analyze the way in which a policy is planned and implemented.

In the Brazilian case, for instance, some researchers suggest that the conditionalities

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<sup>19</sup> Other factors, not mutually exclusive, also explain the creation of CCTs in Brazil. For instance: according to Coêlho, the political competition among municipalities, states and the federal government –in the context of the Brazilian federalism– was important for the creation of these programs in Brazil (Coêlho, *Political*).

made CCTs politically acceptable, especially “to middle and upper-class voters who are not direct beneficiaries of such programs” (Baird, McIntosh, and Özler 1710). In this line of thought, one of the conditionalities’ goals was to give the program a broad-based support –in a context in which “the left sees the conditions as merely restating citizen’s rights, and the right tends to see them as enforceable contracts” (Fiszbein et al. 62).

Besides, as seen in Chapter 2 (section *Criticism: Electoral Strategy?*), there is a correlation between Programa Bolsa Família’s coverage and the Workers Party’s victory in the last three presidential elections in Brazil. This became one of the more controversial themes about the program. It is not illegitimate for the incumbent party to present its policies and achievements during a political campaign –and to be acknowledged by the voters. The risk, however, is to use the program in a clientelistic and paternalistic fashion, aiming to create a linkage between the incumbent party and the recipients.

A clientelistic and paternalistic use of the program can threaten its human development goal, since they are not compatible with the notions of agency and empowerment. The Workers Party has the merit of scaling up the program to an unprecedented level, but the Brazilian CCT should not be permanently associated with the party. The program must be perceived as a democratic achievement; as a policy that any ruling party would continue to implement –a State policy.

Besides, the program’s “popularity and high political payoff could encourage a short-term perspective in social policy” (Hall 35). In this line of thought, such process happens at the expense of the long-term strategy, which involves, for instance, investments in the infrastructure for health and education.

## CONCLUSION

Does the Brazilian Conditional Cash Transfer stimulate human development? In brief, that is the question –the ethical question– of this paper. And the answer is yes, it does. But note that the concept of human development used here –which involves ideas like empowerment and agency– must be understood in the context of development ethics, in general, and the Capability Approach, in particular. Besides, the answer is not as simple as it may look, since the process in which the Brazilian CCT is involved is quite complex and is definitely not free from contradictions.

With the aforementioned ethical framework in mind, it is possible to understand that extreme poverty is not only the deprivation of material resources that leads to hunger; it is also the deprivation of conditions in which one can develop capabilities. Thereby, people in extreme poverty “are thrown out of environments that stimulate human development” (Rego and Pinzani 22 - my translation). Such lack of opportunities –lack of freedoms– turn them into ones “without the right of having rights” (Rego and Pinzani 23 - my translation). This is one of the gaps that Conditional Cash Transfers like the Brazilian one aim to close. And this is why taking out of extreme poverty millions of people is not mere charity.

Rego and Pinzani offer an example of human development in their research on a sample of very poor women from the Northeast (see Chapter 4, section *Gender and Agency*). The cash those women began to receive allowed them, for instance, to make the shoppings themselves, and thereby they began to be acknowledged by local shopkeepers and groceries owners as “trustworthy people”. Those women, who generally had a subordinate role in their families,

became entitled to represent their families in their communities and to make decisions they were not used to. As Coêlho highlights, many poor women benefited by the program began to play a new role in their families, and their behavior (as well as their families' behavior) towards the economy and the political system began to change (interview).

In this context, conditionalities play a crucial and complementary role, since health and education are necessary prerequisites for human development. But, as seen in Chapter 1 and 4, maybe their importance is not so obvious. For some researchers, conditionalities are paternalistic and, therefore, cash transfer programs should be unconditional, in order to guarantee freedom of choice for the recipients (Standing). This criticism seems to ignore that poverty and extreme poverty are situations in which people frequently has no opportunity/freedom to choose what they reason as valuable (something fundamental for the concept of well-being as defined by the Capability Approach). The criticism also seems to ignore that poverty and extreme poverty impose limitations in the way poor people reason.

Another criticism on conditionalities has a practical basis: there are poor countries which do not have the institutional capacity and the infrastructure to implement a Conditional Cash Transfer. On the one hand, this is a very interesting analysis: the CCT model cannot be “exported” to any poor country, as Cecchini warns (par. 1). Possibly this is one of the reasons why some researchers advocate Unconditional Cash Transfers for countries with “low institutional capacity, such as fragile and conflict-affected states” (Ralston, par. 1). On the other hand, Brazil is not a conflict-affected state and its institutional capacity may have problems, but is worth noting. Coêlho, for instance, highlights that the Brazilian government –including the subnational levels and the respective bureaucratic apparatus involved in the process– was able to enforce the rules concerning Programa Bolsa Família, especially the ones related to the

conditionalities. As a result, after ten years of implementation (from 2003 to 2013), such process “triggered a positive and political learning, and engendered the institutionalization of the rules” concerning the program (Coêlho, *Regras 2*).

Furthermore, the Brazilian’s conditionalities are ethically and historically interwoven with another fundamental element: democracy. The ethical framework used in this paper supports the notion that democracy is crucial to human development –and it is not a coincidence that Conditional Cash Transfer programs appeared in Brazil after the country went through a redemocratization process. Democracy provides an environment where “political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action” (Sen, *Democracy 7*); it provides an environment which allows and encourages public discussion.

As a result of public discussion (see Chapter 2, section *A Brief Context*), the Brazilian Constitution –produced by the redemocratization process– asserts that it is “an obligation of the State to provide health and education services, (...) the access to which is established as a basic right of all citizens. (Lindert et al. 9). This offers an important interpretation on Programa Bolsa Família: the conditionalities related to health and education are part of a “wider social contract developed in the post-dictatorship era and codified in the 1988 Constitution” (Miller 3).

According to such interpretation, the Brazilian program and its conditionalities, instead of being paternalistic, are the result of democratic achievements –which are “institutionalized” in the Constitution. This is in line not only with the Capability Approach’s defense of democracy, but also with Sen and Nussbaum’s concern “to avoid a paternalistic, let alone dictatorial, government that makes decisions for (adult) people” (Crocker 170).

Nevertheless, as previously stated, there are contradictions. The Brazilian program played

an important role in the last elections, helping the Workers Party to remain in power (see Chapter 4, section *Criticism: Electoral Strategy?*). On the one hand, the incumbent can legitimately show the government's achievements in a political campaign. On the other hand, there is the risk of using Programa Bolsa Família in a clientelistic –and paternalistic– fashion in order to create a linkage between the incumbent party and the program's recipients. In the last, for instance, presidential election, press reports and the opposition accused the Workers Party of persuading people to vote in the incumbent as a response to threats of program discontinuation.

In order to avoid any electoral misuse of the program –at the expense of its long-term strategy– and even any actual threat of its discontinuation, the Brazilian Conditional Cash Transfer needs to be consistently implemented as a State policy (*i.e.*, one that is independent of any party). And it needs to be perceived as a State policy by the actual or potential recipients; it needs to be perceived as a result of a democratic achievement, and not as a paternalistic enterprise.

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