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# Introduction
# Assessing the Effects of Conditional Cash Transfers in Latin American Societies in the Early Twenty-First Century

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Latin America[1] has emerged as a social policy 'laboratory' in recent decades and most prominent among the social policy innovations developed in the region are the so-called Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes (Cecchini *et al.*, 2015; Borges Sugiyama, 2011; Martínez Franzoni *et al.*, 2009). They have been widely promoted by international organisations[2] across the world as policy instruments that enhance human capital and the agency of participants while reducing poverty and inequality and promoting co-responsibility and self-help in the long-term (see Sandberg, 2015; Bastagli, 2009; Lomelí, 2008, 2009).

CCTs arguably constitute the most evaluated social programmes of recent years. Academic literature based on quantitative research has already highlighted the positive short-term effects on consumption levels, school attendance and health indicators, whilst qualitative research has underscored adverse effects of conditionality and targeting. Nonetheless, there are still crucial areas where research on CCTs – and, therefore, our knowledge – is lacking. Largely based on primary data from recent studies and utilising a variety of methodological approaches, the articles included in the themed section analyse the long-term effects of CCTs and their potential to break with the intergenerational transmission of poverty; their impact on the distribution of welfare responsibilities between the domains of public policy, market and family; their consequences for the social inclusion of beneficiaries; and the influence that the public official–recipient relation has upon the wellbeing of benefited families. Articles include two cross-national analyses and four case studies, covering the two oldest programmes of Brazil and Mexico – the largest countries in the region – and two programmes recently implemented in Bolivia and Peru – two countries that traditionally recorded low levels of economic and human development.

The first two articles of the themed section interrogate the achievement of one of the main goals of CCTs, namely the interruption of the intergenerational transmission of poverty by building up the human capital of beneficiaries, particularly of children. As Barrientos and Villa found, research that focuses on the programmes' actual potential to achieve is still scant and, thus, they provide a general account of two fundamental conditions for breaching the 'inheritance' of poverty: on the one hand, the relation between schooling and labour market inclusion and, on the other, the fundamental

importance of the programme's effects on the political inclusion of beneficiaries. While the authors' critical review of available research evidence gives them reasons to be optimistic, they do highlight that the success of CCTs firmly depends on the extent to which these programmes can generate sustainable economic and political inclusion – topics on which further research is urgently needed.

In our review (Papadopoulos and Leyer), we critically discuss the theoretical debates underlying the key policy paradigm that 'framed' CCTs, namely the social investment (SI) approach, and question whether CCTs designed under the influence of the SI approach can generate long-term substantial improvements in social outcomes. Our comparative analysis indicates that CCTs appear to be more effective at reducing poverty when they are accompanied by – or form part of – a wider package of measures that enhance social and employment rights while integrating workers into the formal economy under better conditions. We argue that the potential of social investment policies to combat poverty in the region is substantially enhanced when the structural deficiencies of the political economies sustaining most Latin American welfare regimes are addressed.

In her contribution, Jones focuses on the relation between education and labour market outcomes of the Brazilian programme, which, historically, is the oldest one. In her critical review of the potential of Brazil's *Bolsa Família* Programme for long-term poverty reduction, she questions the notion that CCTs can interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poverty through human capital investments. She, further, highlights, among other things, the limitations of the linearity of the CCT policy model, which does not appear to take into account the complexities of young people's trajectories and the multiple dynamics of intergenerational poverty reduction. She concludes that future CCTs can benefit substantially by incorporating a more holistic view of young people and their trajectories in their policy designs.

The influence that the public official–recipient relation has upon the wellbeing of benefited families in the context of CCTs is addressed by Ramirez. She discusses primary qualitative research evidence from her recent study of the Mexican CCT programme, probably the most evaluated of all at the time of writing. Using the innovative wellbeing approach, Ramirez reveals the way in which the relationship between public officials and beneficiaries affects the achievement of the programme's objectives. Her findings paint a rich picture of the far-reaching effects of this relationship. A negative relationship was associated with lower confidence while more egalitarian and emphatic relationships had opposite effects on wellbeing.

Last, but by no means least, two further articles address the broader dynamics of CCTs in terms of their gendered impact on the welfare mix in Bolivia and Peru (Nagels) and the gender aspects of the market citizenship in Mexico (Medrano). Nagels adopts a discursive approach to study two CCT programmes that were recently implemented in Bolivia and Peru and compares the impact of these two programmes upon the distribution of welfare responsibilities among the state, markets and families. She argues that the adoption of CCT programs in these two countries has led to changes, which may lead to the emergence of social investment familialist welfare regimes. Nagels concludes that although cash transfers to women seem to have improved their material situation and their bargaining power inside the household over the long term, CCT programs do not appear to fundamentally challenge gender roles and promote women's strategic interests.

In her article Medrano's qualitative study adopts an ideational approach to explore key values and beliefs in the design of three CCTs for single mothers at the state level



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in Mexico. She argues that the design of the programmes gives primacy to a gendered notion of market citizenship over notions of social need that prescribes the role of working mothers as autonomous, self-sufficient and "active" citizens. Medrano concludes that although in Mexico CCTs constitute one of the few welfare options for women living in poverty, it appears that their design contributes to the reproduction and perpetuation of gender inequalities and cultural bias against people living in poverty.

The final contribution to the themed section is a guide to useful sources that we consider essential for researchers and teachers interested in investigating CCTs and, more broadly, the development of social policies in Latin America.

To conclude, the articles in our themed section aim to expand our knowledge of CCTs in three distinct ways. Firstly, by assessing their impact in terms of social inclusion, gender relations, education and labour market outcomes; secondly, by providing a comparative overview of their longer term effects on productive capacity, employment and political participation; and, thirdly, by addressing their significance for our understanding of the social investment perspective as well as their role in the welfare mix of Latin American societies in the early twenty-first century. We hope the readers will find this themed section intellectually stimulating and an inspiration for further engagement with the study of social policy developments in Latin America.

## Acknowledgment

The inspiration for this themed section was born in the aftermath of the international conference 'the Transformation of Latin American Social Policy: Institutions, Dynamics and Outcomes' (7 November 2014). Hosted by the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at the University of Bath, the conference attracted more than forty academics from ten countries and led to the creation of the Latin America Social Policy Network (now formally associated to the UK's Social Policy Association).

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## Notes

1 The term 'Latin America' is conventionally used to describe both a geographical space and a politico-cultural space. Latin America is used as a descriptor of a region that extends from Mexico and the Caribbean, through Central America, to the southern end of the Southern American subcontinent where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken.

2 Based on an extensive review of the literature, Lomelí (2008: 478–80) distinguished ten 'salient features' of CCTs that appear to be shared among the promoters of CCT programmes: (1) CCT programmes are 'respectful of market principles' although they are public interventions; (2) CCTs enhance the human capital of children through investment in education, nutrition and health; (3) CCTs are innovative by fusing measures inspired by the social investment perspective with traditional social assistance measures; (4) CCTs aim to break cycles of intergenerational poverty transmission and enhance the role of mothers as key agents of change in the domestic sphere and by altering the family dynamics more generally; (5) CCTs focus interventions at critical points in the life cycle, where support with schooling, nutrition, health checkups and income can have a major impact; (6) CCTs aim at changing poor families' behaviour through conditions that, supposedly, will encourage them to become more (economically) rational and efficient decision makers; (7) CCT programmes seek to 'promote education not only by covering the direct costs of



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schooling but also by offsetting the opportunity costs generated by having children go to school instead of work', while simultaneously, via conditionality, avoiding disincentives to self-help and encouraging an attitude of 'earning your way out of poverty' given that the causal assumption behind CCTs is that more education will lead to higher earnings in the future; (8) CCTs are 'budget sensitive' and use selective targeting to efficiently allocate support to the neediest of poor households; (9) CCTs transfer resources directly to individuals and, thus, can be seen as an 'apolitical' measure, avoiding bureaucratic or political intermediaries; (10) the design of CCTs includes evaluation and measures of impact that allow better determination of social programmes' effectiveness.

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