

Can Cash Transfer Programmes have ‘Transformative’ effects?

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Introduction to Special Issue of Journal of Development Studies published July 2016

With the eradication of extreme poverty as a priority Millennium Development Goal, cash transfer programmes (CTPs) spread rapidly across the world to reach more than 750 million people in low and middle-income countries in the global south by 2010 (Arnold et al, 2011). As new programmes multiplied, older ones expanded their coverage to reach significant numbers of targeted populations in the lowest decile. Driving the expansion of CTs was their widely acclaimed record of positive results. Evidence from across the world confirmed that well targeted, well designed social transfer programmes were an effective and affordable instrument for reducing the incidence and intensity of household poverty with measureable improvements in child health and educational attendance (Fitzbein and Schady, 2009; World Bank, 2009; Arnold et al, 2011; Soares et al., 2006; Cecchini and Madariaga 2011). One commentator, echoing a commonly expressed view, went as far as to state that they were ‘as close as you can come to a magic bullet in development’¹.

Cash transfers, however, had their critics². Some focused on the various implementation shortcomings, including inaccurate targeting and leakage, and poor quality and clientelist and/or corrupt service provision. While these issues could be overcome with closer attention to CT programme management, other critics went further in questioning the underlying rationale of CT programmes and doubted whether cash transfers were as effective as claimed in tackling poverty. The small size of the transfers, and the lack of linkages to training and livelihood skills for adult household members represented little advance on the minimal safety net or ‘risk management’ approaches to poverty relief³ associated with earlier World Bank policies (Holzmann and Jørgensen, 2000; Slater, 2011).

¹ Nancy Birdsall (when Director the Centre for Global Development), quoted in Adato and Hoddinott, 2010:4.

² For a review of the literature on CTPs see Arnold et al, 2011. Among the continuing debates over CTs are those between opponents and advocates of conditionalities and targeting (see articles by Barrientos (2009) and Lomelli (2009) for contrasting views, and Baird et al u.d. for evidence in favour of conditionalities). For other debates over CTPs see the special issue of Global Social Policy on Cash Transfers, August 2009:9 (2).

³ Even where human development conditionalities were included in programme design (as in the Latin American child-centred programmes) the poor quality of the educational and health services on offer limited the

These latter criticisms of the cash transfer model were accompanied by calls for more far reaching or ‘transformative’ social protection interventions that would bring about positive, lasting changes in the lives of poor and destitute people. This would involve measures designed to help people move out of poverty by providing training and income generation schemes, and designing programmes that addressed the contextual specificity and multi-dimensional nature of poverty and vulnerability. In other words a key aspect of any transformative programme, would be the measures it took to tackle the causes of poverty. For some authors this necessarily also involved empowering the poor to tackle oppressive social relations, and treating poor people as citizens with rights, with a voice in programme design and implementation (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Molyneux, 2006; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Stewart, 2002) Koehler, 2011; Morgan and Yablonski, 2011) Slater and Farrington, 2006).

Recent years have brought changes in the design of CT programmes that go some way towards meeting the above criticisms. Centralised data management systems pioneered in Latin America for example, have done much to reduce corruption and improve the inclusivity and reach of programmes (Ceccini and Madariaga, 2011). In addition, despite initial resistance on the part of donors and governments to expanding the objectives of CTs beyond income support, some of the ideas associated with transformative social protection programming appear to have entered the mainstream of international development policy planning. Discussion over the post- 2015 development goals has seen repeated calls for a transformative and sustainable development agenda that brings ‘tangible results in fighting poverty’⁴, while the World Bank and donor governments have responded by supporting changes in the objectives and design of social protection programmes. At the same time, no longer content to rely only on quantitative indicators of anti- poverty programme successes, there has been increased interest in the on-the-ground findings of qualitative research in order to assess the social impacts of CTs and to increase their effectiveness by making them more closely attuned to local conditions (Adato et al., 2011; Holmes and Jones, 2013).

positive effects (Sandberg 2012, Morley and Coady 2003), while fulfilling the conditionalities imposed additional burdens on the beneficiary mothers (Molyneux 2006, Bradshaw with Quiros Viquez, 2008, Benderley 2011).

⁴ See for example the opening address by the President to the 69th Annual Session of the UN General Assembly <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48729#.VPH092ZcSDo> (accessed 28.2.2015).

This special issue of *JDS* considers the conditions under which cash transfers can have transformative effects, - whether as the result of deliberate policy design or as spillover effects. Among the issues addressed are whether CTs are associated with positive social consequences for beneficiaries, their households and communities, and if so what are these, and how meaningful and how sustainable might they be? And in what ways can CTs contribute to broader goals of transparency and accountability and enhance citizenship awareness? In other words can CTPs be catalysts leading to positive changes, material, subjective and relational, in the lives of poor people, and can they foster horizontal relationships within communities and vertical relationship with the state?

Much depends of course on what is meant by the term ‘transformative’. Like its cognate ‘empowerment’, the term transformative has joined the lexicon of current development policy without any consensus over how to define it. This fuzziness may account for its ubiquity, with ‘transformative’ appearing in different guises in scholarly journals and in ‘theories of change’ manuals that require development practitioners to forecast what the pathways towards specified transformational goals will be. ‘Transformative’ despite its analytic hazards, has become the idiom of choice to distinguish between different orders of policy intervention, between those which are deemed to lack a positive change dynamic and leave basic conditions much as before; and those which introduce changes that are expected to result in positive effects because they tackle some of the factors that prevent change⁵.

In terms of social protection the common distinction between transformative and non-transformative interventions can be summed up as between those providing palliative measures that smooth over the effects of poverty (for example simple cash transfers or food aid programmes); and those that aim to enhance the potential of poor people to move out of poverty (for example by investing in their capabilities, changing their behaviour, and helping them to overcome disabling/oppressive social relations). Whether the expected changes occur, and if they do, whether they are the result of these programmes, and whether they have lasting effects, are of course based on theoretical assumptions but they are also empirical questions on which only longitudinal data would be able settle⁶. In the meantime, a body of

⁵ Of course all interventions have effects so there is much scope for disagreement, depending on the theory and evidence offered over whether the changes are significant or not.

⁶ For one of the few studies of CT effects on social mobility see Sandberg, 2012.

research is emerging which has begun to cast some tentative light on how change dynamics might occur and in what measure.

Innovations in CT design

As CT programmes have evolved over time there have been some positive changes to their design. Some are explicit in aiming to go beyond the basic safety net approach and have begun to incorporate elements aiming to develop beneficiaries' skills and knowledge through training and awareness-raising⁷. More attention too has been paid to treating the causes of poverty and vulnerability as multidimensional which has led in some cases to more gender-aware programming (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Latin America's cash transfers were the first to include human development conditionalities that required children to attend school and health checks. These (or the simple fact of having the cash) have resulted in improvements in children's nutritional levels and child attendance at school and health clinics (Fitzbein and Schady, 2009), although success in meeting their objectives can be undermined by poor quality schooling and health provision (Morley and Coady, 2003; Reiners et al., 2005), while fulfilling the conditionalities has imposed sometimes onerous burdens on the beneficiary mothers (Molyneux, 2006; Bradshaw, 2008; Benderley, 2011; Gammage, 2011). However in some initiatives, such as Mexico's Prospera (formerly Oportunidades), beneficiaries are increasingly offered employment training and income-generating opportunities, as well as being provided with subsidised childcare through the *Estancias* subsidised crèche scheme (Holmes and Jones, 2012). Similar complementary services exist in Brazil's Bolsa Familia programme (Fultz and Francis 2013).

Participation and citizenship in Social Protection

A different order of innovation in CT programme design involves measures that promote beneficiary rights, citizenship and participation. While the first generation of CTs were, as some saw it, merely managing poverty or even depoliticizing the condition of poverty, the more recent programmes have increasingly also been designed to 'empower' poor people by promoting citizen voice and participation through social accountability and social audits.

⁷ Chile Solidario and its Puentes programme are examples of a multi-pronged approach to tackling extreme poverty, providing a range of services to households from job seeking support to specialized counseling. See Barrientos 2010.

In contrast to other areas of development practice (such as environmental management and rural development projects) social protection programmes were slow to include participatory elements of any kind. However the last decade has seen a growing momentum in the inclusion of participatory processes in social protection programmes. This has been in large part spurred by pressures to make their administration more efficient as programmes designed for the poor have often been prone to poor delivery and corruption, with service personnel overloaded, poorly trained, underpaid and lacking in motivation because of the limits placed on their own capacities to bring about system change (Pellissery, 2010; Rose-Ackerman, 2004; Shah and Schacter, 2004). Social accountability as an idea and set of practices involving the direct participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders, was first officially endorsed for social protection programmes in the 2004 World Development Report, *Making Services Work for Poor People* (World Bank, 2004). This identified the lack of accountability mechanisms as the primary cause of service delivery failures. Noting that the 'long route' to accountability through public officials and elections did not serve the poor, it advocated 'shorter routes' or 'chains of accountability' to be put in place at meso and micro levels, enabling direct accountability between users and providers. By increasing stakeholders voice, and introducing principles of transparency, communities could not only regularly monitor service provision but were also entitled to expect responses to suggestions, complaints and abuses.

CTs have recently begun to include social accountability elements and some of these align with the 'transformation' agenda. In addition to tackling oppressive social relations and forms of exclusion, mechanisms designed to promote voice, rights and justice values are being embedded in programming. In giving more voice to programme beneficiaries, and more rights to participate, claim and complain, a change dynamic is incorporated into CT programme design which some argue may empower the poor and foster collective identity and action (Corbridge et al., 2005).

At the most basic level, social accountability involves establishing grievance channels and creating greater transparency in programme management; but it also extends to using techniques of community or participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E), along with newer tools such as community score cards. When these work well they serve to gain valuable feedback from beneficiaries and other stakeholders about the quality and regularity of service

delivery. Such mechanisms have been shown to have a number of benefits beyond increasing programme efficiency, from strengthening social capital to creating some of the embryonic forms of citizenship that can emerge when recipients of welfare begin not only to ‘see the state’ (Corbridge et al., 2005) but also engage with it and challenge it where it falls short of expectations (Hickey and King, this issue; Ringold et al. 2012). Beyond project and programme levels, however, more institutionalised forms of social accountability that are linked to citizen and social rights are also being established in a number of countries for example in Brazil (Borges Sugiyama this issue) and in large scale social audit processes such as India’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGA).

While these forms of social accountability draw on decades of development theory and practice that has advocated incorporating participation and voice into programming, they differ in one important respect: by promoting civic engagement and citizenship, social accountability approaches mark a shift in development thinking from seeing participatory practices as confined to local project level activities towards viewing them as a key element of the processes deployed by organisations, agencies, and governments to ensure responsiveness to citizens’ concerns. These initiatives resonate with civil society demands for greater accountability and good governance that have been highlighted in debates around the future of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2013b).

The articles that make up this Special Issue address the theme of transformative social protection by exploring some of the ways in which CTPs have introduced change dynamics into the low income communities that they serve. They are divided into sections corresponding to three socio-spatial levels or scales with several articles also highlighting linkages across them. The articles grouped in part 1 deal with the micro-level subjective changes that are reported by programme beneficiaries to have occurred as a result of receiving the transfer. The second part of the Special Issue examines those changes that can occur at meso or community level either as a result of programme activities as well as the effects on the dynamics between programme participants and implementers ; and the final section, Part 3, is concerned with exploring social accountability measures that have implications for citizenship and citizen action at macro or governance levels. Together they span a range of disciplinary perspectives, and present new research from diverse country contexts in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, including the findings from a five-country DFID-funded qualitative

research study on unconditional cash transfers in fragile or post-conflict environments⁸. In what follows, a brief context and introduction to the articles in each section is provided.

Part 1: *Micro-level subjective transformations*

What are here referred to as the ‘micro-level’ effects of CTPs concern the individual experiences and subjective changes that appear to follow from participation in cash transfer programmes. With a few notable exceptions (Adato 2000 and this issue, Gonzalez de la Rocha, 2006) much of the evidence of CTPs’ social effects draws on the more easily quantified data on their physical benefits (Copestake 2008). However, in response to a growing literature on the importance of subjective and relational dimensions of human wellbeing (MacAuslan and Riemenschneider, 2011; Pouw and McGregor, 2014; White et al. 2013, Ferguson 2014), analysts have begun to examine the psycho-social effects of cash transfers. These include improvements in individuals’ feelings of dignity, respect, self-confidence and self-esteem; and reductions in feelings of shame and hopefulness, and relief from worry and stress. Some studies have also drawn on quantitative datasets that include measures of mental health (Baird et al., 2011; Haushofer and Shapiro, 2013); however these tend to rely on a narrow range of indicators and do not adequately capture the complexity of psycho-social wellbeing.

The articles in the first section of the Special Issue find that CTPs have largely positive outcomes including enhanced self esteem at the individual level, as well as enabling greater participation in social interaction. However in some cases there can be negative side-effects of being part of the programme such as feelings of humiliation, stigma and shame due to reliance on the transfer for support. The article by Samuels and Stavropoulou discusses findings from the Transforming Cash Transfers project in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East; that by Attah et al. draws on evaluations of CTPs in East, West and Southern Africa, while Adato et al focus on a South African case study. There is evidence in all three articles of the effects of cash transfer programmes on psycho-social health and behaviour. Both Attah et al. and Samuels and Stavropoulou look at how psycho-social wellbeing affects both individuals and their relation to others. Attah et al. present findings from a mixed method evaluation of a cash transfer in Kenya, and from cross-country qualitative research from

⁸ The five case studies and other reports of this research project can be found at <http://transformingcashtransfers.org/>. Maxine Molyneux was the project Research Director, and Nicola Jones and Fiona Samuels led fieldwork teams in Africa and the Middle East.

Ghana, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. They pay particular attention to the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of psycho-social wellbeing showing that cash transfers can have positive impacts on psychosocial wellbeing leading to further positive impacts on educational performance, participation in social life and empowerment for decision-making.

Samuels and Stavropoulou draw on sociological frameworks to highlight the limits of a one-sized fits all approach to understanding psycho-social wellbeing arguing that each vulnerable group is targeted by different social protection programmes and is likely to face different types of psycho-social stressors. Older people for example may find social isolation the main problem whereas for young people the mismatch between future aspirations and available opportunities may lie at the root of their psycho-social ill-being. Similarly, different vulnerable groups may have access to different sorts of coping strategies, depending on their immediate and broader contexts. This makes it necessary to take into account not only the specific psycho-social vulnerabilities of different vulnerable groups, but also the contexts in which they find themselves, and the range of formal and informal coping strategies that may be available to them.

Adato et al. examine the extent to which the Child Support Grant (CSG) in South Africa responds to the material and symbolic needs of adolescents, and particularly its effects on school participation and involvement in risky behaviours. Cash transfers are typically seen to promote change through the economic benefits they confer but Adato et al argue that this theory of change fails to account of the complexity of poor people's lives. They examine hidden behavioural drivers such as shame to account for expenditure preferences and higher drop out rates from school. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of 'capitals' they identify three levels of need: basic subsistence, basic symbolic and consumptive symbolic, arguing that the CSG contributes most in the first sense, moderately in the second, and very little in the third. Therefore, like Samuels and Stavropoulous, Adato et al. emphasise that CTs should not be expected to address all developmental vulnerabilities, and in fact it may be necessary to look at different types of complementary interventions that can more effectively address drivers of psycho-social ill-being, such as shame and loss of dignity.

Part 2: Community impacts: social capital and social inclusion effects

A critical component of wellbeing, even survival, is its relational dimension, that is, the way in which individuals relate to others both in their immediate (e.g. family/household) and broader (e.g. community/neighbourhood) environs. As Ferguson has expressed it: ‘cash in the pocket (...) is related (...) to multiple socialities and mutualities that are all (quite literally) a matter of life and death’ (Ferguson, 2015: 137). The second section of the Special Issue focuses on the meso-level community effects of CTs. CT programmes can enhance participants’ social capital and social inclusion as is found in Adato et al’s article on El Salvador, Bukenya’s on Uganda and Pavanello et al’s article on the social capital effects of CTs in post-conflict settings. As these authors emphasise, any effects that occur at the meso-level will be shaped to some degree by the nature of the communities concerned, and how they are governed, whether for example, by village elders whose authority is sanctioned by appeals to customs and norms, or those in which the decentralization of power and resources has been brought about by legislative processes effected through local government and administrative institutions.

Social transfers can provide vulnerable and stigmatized groups with the means to become participants in their communities through for example, being able to engage in relations of reciprocity. Pavanello et al.’s article, drawing on concepts of social cohesion and social inclusion, shows that even small amounts of regular cash can allow participation in traditional and family ceremonies (e.g. marriage, birthdays, funerals) by enabling the purchase of gifts, clothing or even soap to improve hygiene practices that are necessary for taking part in community/family events.

However, bonding social capital, (Putnam 2000) the horizontal linkages that can exist between community members, does not always result from cash transfer programmes. In a number of contexts recipients of transfers report experiencing stigma or are the object of envious gossip by non-beneficiary neighbours who feel entitled to transfers and other benefits that the programme may confer, but do not qualify (Macauslan and Riemenschneider, 2011; White and Ellison, 2006). Even so, such concerns about unfairness do not always arise: Pavanello et al. find in their review of five cash transfer programmes in Africa and the Middle East, that grants targeted to children and the elderly seem quite uncontroversial as these groups are seen as the deserving poor. They note, however, that accusations of unfairness arise where there is little understanding of the rationale of the programme and where inclusion errors are also high. This supports findings elsewhere and underscores the need for CT programmes to ensure that the principles of targeting are adequately publicized and that there are

mechanisms in place to allow abuses to be effectively dealt with (Ringold et al., 2012; Arnold, Conway and Greenslade, 2011).

The extent to which any re-entry into society by previously excluded groups is transformative or merely palliative depends on the degree to which individuals gain some capacity to tackle the social relations that produce or reinforce their vulnerability and exclusion. Pavanello et al. argue that this may result from an increase in confidence and dignity or from gaining access to other services, rights and forms of collective endeavour. By and large, however, their findings indicate that there is less evidence of bridging social capital, as vertical linkages between citizens and authorities remained weak or non-existent.

Bukenya's study of the Ugandan *Aids Support Organisation (TASO)*, an NGO-led social assistance package targeted at HIV-positive communities highlights the significant role of outside actors in fostering the confidence of beneficiaries and helping to develop vulnerable groups' collective capacity for agency. Bukenya documents the aggregate outcomes of what Hossain (2009) calls 'rude accountability' or informal contentious actions. When twinned with a complementary emphasis on empowering excluded and stigmatised individuals to speak out against poor service provision, programme participation did help to promote a collective dynamic. Moreover, part of the TASO approach was to reorient HIV-affected communities towards accessing—and thereby increasing demand for—public health services rather than focusing solely on the provision of alternative private sector services. Bukenya concludes that NGO-led social assistance is not necessarily depoliticising as some have maintained, especially if it is proactively mediated through a set of interventions, including awareness-raising and confidence-building initiatives. Programme participants can be encouraged to engage in citizenship practices and demand-making and can effect positive changes in service delivery, sometimes reaching beyond community level to local government.

Adato et al's research on El Salvador's Red Solidaria CT programme reports on an unusual case of 'citizen promotion' through a social protection programme. Using data from two rounds of fieldwork in El Salvador, Adato et al. are able to capture what can happen in a CT programme when there is an increase in political commitment to citizenship agendas as part of a broader poverty reduction strategy. This occurred during a particular political moment in El Salvador that favoured rights and citizenship promotion following the new left Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) government's election in 2009. Participation

increased in community committees and NGOs were given an important role in promoting linkages between CT beneficiaries and municipal committees. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that even with a long history of civic organization and strong government backing, community-level programme committees struggled to convert greater opportunities for beneficiary voices into wider citizen engagement with political authorities. As such, due to the committees' limited capacities and lack of formal authority with respect to programme management, broader transformations in state-citizen relations were not realised.

Part 3: Governance, citizenship and social accountability

The articles in the third section of the Special Issue explore the conditions under which CT programmes can have a transformative effect on state-citizen relations and the social contract. While the earlier generation of CT programmes arguably focused primarily on individuals and households, thus limiting the potential for broader spillover effects on state-citizen relations, CT programmes have increasingly adopted a range of social accountability and citizen engagement mechanisms, repositioning participants as active citizens rather than as passive beneficiaries of these interventions. Such initiatives range from light-touch mechanisms to more high-intensity approaches. The lighter-touch end of the spectrum includes information provision to citizens and the establishment of grievance mechanisms, while those at the other end of the spectrum encourage more sustained engagement between citizens and service providers, for example through social audits, participatory monitoring, and community score cards.

The core principles of social accountability are those of good governance, and as Malena et al (2004) have noted social accountability is seen as having potentially four positive effects – strengthening policy effectiveness, improving the quality of governance, empowering poor people within the policy process and ensuring government responsiveness⁹. But how far are these optimistic expectations of CTs realised? Do the new social accountability mechanisms contribute to the process whereby poor people acquire the resources, financial, subjective and social, to engage more fully in their communities and societies? Does this in turn enable them to acquire more voice and self-confidence to participate in the practices of citizenship and

⁹ For overviews of the impacts of Social Accountability see Claasen and Alpin-Largies, 2010, Goldring et al. 2012, and Malena et al. 2004.

render policies and governments more responsive to their needs? Or are these new developments just ‘old wine in new bottles’ and doomed to fail¹⁰?

Natasha Borges Sugiyama examines these issues at the subnational level in North-East Brazil among participants in the Bolsa Família CT programme. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 established a statutory obligation to create mechanisms of citizen accountability, and social protection has its people’s municipal level councils or *Conselhos*. Focusing on the ways in which built-in institutional guarantees for democratic representation operate at the local level, Borges Sugiyama examines whether citizen-driven bottom-up demands or state-managed administrative mechanisms have been more effective in promoting accountability in the Bolsa Família programme. Bolsa Família has incorporated a number of social accountability mechanisms in addition to the *Conselhos* that are responsible for regular monitoring and evaluation. These include measures designed to promote good management practices, fiscal transparency mechanisms and seemingly robust complaints procedures. Crucially, Brazil also has a civic culture that has, over twenty years developed both the institutions and experience of participatory governance. Citizens, including the poorest are aware that they can make political demands and that they have a right to hold power-holders to account.

Borges Sugiyama finds however that while participatory spaces exist, community level engagement is hampered both by a lack of *appropriate* institutional arenas in which Bolsa Família beneficiaries are represented, and by their belief that the councils and collaborative spaces that exist, are not truly available to them for participation, monitoring, and accountability. Nevertheless, the programme did benefit from, and was responsive to, certain monitoring mechanisms such as fiscal transparency, which along with other government-instigated accountability procedures, allowed the media and interest groups to investigate and report poor management and suspected wrongdoing. Social accountability was therefore assured in this case by top-down measures that were incorporated into the administration of the programme, rather than by the active participation by beneficiaries.

These findings underscore a widely acknowledged view that programmes which rely solely on beneficiary participation to ensure accountability risk failure particularly in the very deprived social contexts that are precisely the ones served by anti poverty programmes (Fox, 2013,

¹⁰ As Gupta has argued in his analysis of Indian anti-poverty programmes, if these have no links to political processes they can serve to ‘shore up the legitimacy of ruling regimes’ (Gupta 2012: 278).

Mansuri and Rao, 2013, Engberg-Pedersen and Webster, 2002: 255-271; McGee and Norton, 2000). Where extreme poverty and social exclusion prevail, the scope for active and independent engagement is often limited as the most vulnerable are not always able or willing to provide feedback on programmes, let alone complain to higher authorities, often fearing reprisals. In these circumstances, closer attention to administrative forms of accountability to secure transparency and ensure the proper procedures and conduct of officials is especially necessary.

Jones et al. explore some of these social accountability mechanisms within three programmes with considerable longevity and scale in conflict-affected contexts: Mozambique's Basic Social Subsidy Programme (PSSB), Palestine's National Cash Transfer Programme and Yemen's Social Welfare Fund. Their findings highlight that even in very challenging conflict-affected contexts, there is demand for greater voice and spaces for involvement from beneficiaries in programme governance. This said, there are a range of design and implementation problems that more technocratic approaches on the part of donors in particular are failing to address. Even if poor people engage in accountability mechanisms, the authors question the degree to which their complaints or suggestions receive a positive response from social programme authorities. The Palestinian National Cash Transfer programme for instance has invested in recent years, with World Bank and EU support, in a state-of-the-art proxy means test poverty targeting system and a computerised single registry database, but by contrast the processing of beneficiary complaints from local to national level remains un-computerised and significantly under-resourced. It is also unclear whether efforts to embed social accountability approaches and tools within contexts where consolidating good governance and understandings of citizenship rights remain longer term endeavours ever achieve much success. The authors' findings indicate that programme participants (often among the most vulnerable and excluded in society) are frequently unable to take advantage of social accountability opportunities because they remain ensnared in a clientelistic worldview whereby programme benefits are attributed to governmental (or even God's) beneficence.

A further issue raised by Jones et al. is that programme designers and implementers fail to adequately take into account the effects that the political context can have on programme governance. In particular there are limited incentives for frontline providers and government officials to provide meaningful spaces for the articulation of citizen voices. The findings from the Yemen research indicate that where local communities are highly politicized any over-

reliance on local leaders to arbitrate complaints about programme exclusion errors is likely to undermine citizen trust. These problems tend to arise in contexts of limited institutional infrastructure, including weak data collection and monitoring systems, under-investment in staff capacities, broken feedback loops and lack of institutionalisation.

Recent research by Hickey and King has engaged the broader issue of how welfare programmes might affect state-citizen relations in those programmes that encourage more sustained engagement between citizens and service providers, for instance through large scale social audits¹¹. Hickey and King's article for this issue reviews over ninety studies in the social accountability field aims to identify the underpinnings of 'citizenship empowerment'. Like Borges Sugiyama, they find that there has been a misplaced technocratic over-emphasis on bottom-up accountability mechanisms, and point to a common failure in ignoring how contextual factors, power dynamics and incentive structures affect outcomes. These problems tend to be greatest in contexts of limited political will, or weak institutional infrastructure, including poor data collection and monitoring systems, under-investment in staff capacities, and lack of reliable citizen's channels.

They emphasise the importance of creating synergies between upward and downward forms of accountability, but above all call for greater attention to be paid by policymakers to the specific characteristics of civil society, political society and state-society relations, and the interplay between them. These together determine the likely efficacy of social accountability programme interventions. Social protection in aid dependent countries also tends to be driven by external agencies which limits the opportunities for strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens and inhibits the emergence of coalitions across different social groups who collectively may be better placed to hold the state to account.

Hickey and King see the success of social accountability as dependent on the ways that programmes are implemented, with attention to proactively engendering social belonging and political voice. But while there have been some recent if still fledgling attempts to strengthen opportunities for voice and engagement between citizens and service providers in cash transfer programmes, they argue that so far cash transfer debates have side-lined the broader issues of politics and power. Analysts and policy makers alike need to pay more attention to factors

¹¹ Corbridge et al (2005) were among the first to conduct in depth longitudinal research on social audits finding some evidence of greater citizen activism and contestation on the part of programme members.

such as whether or not there is political will to actively support these initiatives, whether institutionalised political parties exist, whether human resources and bureaucratic capacity are adequate to the task, and whether civil society has the capacity to mobilise and form strategic alliances. All these shape the possibilities for fostering active citizenship and the ability to hold power holders to account.

A realistic appreciation of the highly contingent and political character of social accountability therefore suggests that for all the benefits that it can bring to beneficiaries, there are still formidable obstacles in the way of ‘empowering’ the poor including inadequate political, administrative and financial support. Positive outcomes also depend on efficient administration and attention to underlying structural conditions such as entrenched power relations that may limit the ability of social protection interventions to serve as conduits to citizenship (Hickey and Mohan, 2008).

Conclusions

The shifting of social protection programming parameters away from a narrow focus on tackling income poverty towards promoting broader positive changes has begun to deliver some positive, if as yet inconclusive and mixed results. The articles in this Special Issue show that CTPs have the potential to generate a variety of change processes, from small shifts in people’s subjective dispositions to collective engagement with public policymaking. While beneficiaries of these programmes view cash transfers as an essential component of their coping repertoires, there is evidence that they also tend to increase their sense of self-worth, dignity, and their assertiveness. As a result of gaining some economic security CT recipients report that this has afforded them a degree more financial independence and control over their lives. An awareness of rights and entitlements can also embolden beneficiaries to challenge unacceptable behaviour by officials and make collective demands. At the community (meso-) level, a positive impact on social relations was evidenced where transfers enabled poor households’ engagement in religious, family and social events. This formation of bonding social capital could in some contexts and with NGO support, also lead to horizontal solidarity between beneficiaries over issues that concerned them.

However, in regard to the more ambitious objectives of social protection – ensuring that pro-poor policies are responsive to a broader definition of poor people’s needs, are accountable

to them and foster active citizenship - the evidence suggests more modest achievements. Three points stand out: first, any improvements in well-being and self confidence as may accompany CT programmes have no necessary consequences for citizenship action and hence for politics; second, the circuits that connect programme level activities and the wider spheres of politics and policy appear to be weakly articulated and are not systematically embedded in social protection; third, without robust regulatory mechanisms to ensure representation and transparency, even a culture of grassroots activity and citizen awareness can be ineffective in securing accountability. Nonetheless in some contexts social accountability mechanisms do appear to have helped reduce corruption, improve service quality and empower people (Claasen & Alpín-Lardiés, 2010; Malena 2004)

The evidence offered by Hickey and Borges-Sugiyama suggests that while voice and participation have long been acknowledged as important elements within development practice, meaningful social accountability cannot rely solely upon participatory mechanisms and must take into account the broader political economy and institutional dynamics at play. Without greater attention to these factors, and without establishing the means to provide adequate and accessible information systems, feedback loops and monitoring and evaluation procedures, there will be limited scope for individuals, households and communities to have their needs and priorities heard and responded to.

Finally, securing transformative social protection is resource- and time-intensive, particularly given the need for careful contextualisation in terms of geography, political systems, decentralisation structures and conflict/post-conflict-related dynamics. Indeed, findings from some of the case studies profiled in this special issue make the point that progress towards this goal is unlikely to be linear given the complexities of the political environments in which programmers are working. Broader structural obstacles also stand in the way of achieving transformative results from these programmes. Economic crises and fiscal deficits set up financial barriers to taking programmes to the scale needed; investment in longer-term processes may be discouraged, including in those required to empower citizens and strengthen capacities of service providers. There is therefore some way to go if social protection programmes are to do more than offer some respite from destitution for the poorest and realise the promise held out by 'transformative' social protection.

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