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# 'Children's rights and children's welfare in Latin America: What about the workers?'

**JEAN GRUGEL**

**UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**

**SI:D**

*The Sheffield  
Institute for  
International  
Development.*

# Introduction: rights vs. welfare

- Children's rights and children's welfare debate (Grugel 2013)
- Rights rarely considered as template for welfare programmes
- 'Rights for children are important because they should act as a way to claim wellbeing and welfare more effectively, not as an alternative to it' (Children's rights activist, Argentina)
- Have rights advocates always understood the ways welfare regimes are created and operated (Dean 2008)?
- Rights as the burden of individual self-realization – what about state capacity?



# Background

- Where do debates on children's rights and children's welfare sit in relation to working children?
- Rights are unclear – pressure to end children's work comes primarily from ILO (Convention 182)
- Welfare approaches tend to be clearly opposed to children and young people working
- The presentation asks whether the emphasis of the current welfare programmes in LAC (CCTs) emphasis on taking children out of work is always for the best
- Draws on research in Bolivia and Brazil on working children and young people (in the case of Brazil, street working children)
- It is not research, per se, on welfare – the questions underpinning the research are around human rights and the citizenship of poor young people



# Conditionality in LAC

- The rationale for mainstream CCTs is that poverty is a reflection of the inter-generational reproduction of deprivation; this cycle must be broken through investment in ‘human capital’ (Standing 2011)
- CCTs aim to encourage parents to take children out of the labour market and invest instead in their education
- ILO representative in Bolivia: child labor was ‘a cultural problem of understanding rather than just a ‘response to poverty’.
- UNICEF staff officer: ‘there are different scenarios. There are families that are very poor and their children do not work and there are families that are poor and their children work’  
Interviews, La Paz, July 2013 – Grugel and Fontana, forthcoming



# Conditionality and child labour

- Policies to deal with child labour generally inspired by New Household economics (Becker 1982; Basu 1999) – not rights
- Child labour results from rational decisions taken by heads of households in situations where household needs are not being met by income deriving from adult labour
- Agency and preferences of children and young people are not taken seriously
- Work and education viewed as always mutually exclusive



# LAC CCTs

- CCTs come after massive cuts in 1980s/1990s to a welfare system that was already limited, leaving a 'truncated' welfare system (Barrientos 2009)
- By 2008 almost every LAC country had a CCT programme of some sort with coverage ranging from 12% of the population to 100% (Ecuador and Bolivia)
- The 'conditional' element varies, as do sanctions for non-compliance
- With Bolsa Familia in Brazil, generally regarded as one of the most successful of the programmes, non-compliance rarely leads to benefit cuts and is inclusive



# Positive evaluation of CCTs – Brazil

- Bolsa Familia has reached over 53 million since its inception in 2004
- Generally accepted that it has increased the numbers of children in education (primary education in particular) and take-up of health services (Barrientos and de Jong 2006)
- Non-compliance invites a social worker visit (rather than benefit cut)
- Applicants need to be on the electoral roll or have a tax identification number - incentive to citizenship?  
Additional cost?



## But ....

- Health and education services struggle to keep pace with demand – investments in health and schools have increased but still lag behind demand
- Gender impact is unclear – women are engaged as mothers and the burden falls on mothers not fathers (Molyneux 2006)
- Does little to support women's citizenship or gender equality





# Children, street work and education in Minas Gerais

- Data comes from a survey of over 3,000 children working on the streets in state of Minas Gerais (Grugel and Ferreira, 2011)
- 20% of the children without significant family ties – therefore not beneficiaries of Bolsa Familia
- Only around 33% of children claimed they gave all the money they earned to their families
- Around 30% spent it themselves – financial autonomy
- 70% said they enjoyed work – especially 12-16 age bracket



# Children, street work and education in Minas Gerais

- Many reported pleasure in being outside the home, sometimes because of violence, sometimes because of space or boredom
- Most reported that they attended school
- 90% of 10 year olds and 80% of 12 year olds claimed to be in school full time
- Children did not see school and education as incompatible
- Hecht (2002): street work has a positive, as well as negative, role in the day-to-day wellbeing of vulnerable children who sometimes achieve a sense of worth from work that they do not receive elsewhere



# Brazil

- Bolsa Familia : for children, not with them?
- Overall good outcomes for health and education for the poor, quite cheaply – but impact on very vulnerable group, street workers, is not clear
- Brazil survey shows strong evidence of that children and young people are making choices and demonstrating agency, in terms of the decision to enter the street labour market and in terms of how they spent the money they earned – this is not recognized by policy makers
- Brazilian youth seemed to us like Willis' cohort: 'Young people take the restricted and often meaningless available jobs in ways that seem sensible to them in their familiar world' (Willis 1977: 171)



# Bolivian CCTs

- Bono Juancito Pinto (for all children in public schools)  
– just US\$28, so long as they attend 80% of classes
- Bono Juana Azurduy for pregnant women –
- US\$260 for health care
- Renta Dignidad – US\$ 340 pension for those with no other pension (and a % for those who do)



# Juancito Pinto

- Government claims that the drop out rate from school has fallen from 6% to 2%, but data unclear (McGuire 2013)
- Educational infrastructure poor – and not enough investment going in
- Labour migration a problem – common amongst the poorest, especially in rural areas
- Birth registration still a problem in rural Bolivia so many of the poorest excluded



# Juancito Pinto and child labour

- Average child worker thought to earn US\$ 1,452 p.a. so US\$ 28 is not going to go far in persuading parents to take children out of the labour market
- Not clear that Juancito Pinto is about eliminating child labour (unlike in Brazil) but about support for primary schooling
- Contentious politics of child labour in Bolivia: pressure to eliminate child labour is seen internally by some as a violation of national traditions ('usos y costumbres') – Grugel and Fontana forthcoming



# Working children self-organization

- NATS have strong voice in domestic politics: eradication of child labour is 'an inappropriate international agenda ...what we would like more is a policy that reflects the politics of Bolivia because we have our own national reality. We don't live in the same world as other countries'
- 'We don't want labor eradication, we want it to be valued, since at the end we are contributing to the country'
- NATS claim that eradication of child labor is a form of age-based discrimination. Work is a human right – call for training and secure wages
- New Children's Code which is expected this year may lower the minimum age to enter the labour market legally to 12



# Bolivia

- Bolivia : the terms of conditionality are not the only problem - infrastructure, lack of other investments, ineffective state, nature of the labour market
- Nature of family structure: children and young people may be taking on enormous responsibilities for themselves and others and yet denied a voice in policies that directly affect them
- The preferences of young people in work?





# Conditionality and working children's citizenship

- What does social citizenship and inclusive development mean for working children and young people?
- Rights-based responses would argue that children's agency and preferences need to be understood and heard in policy debates
- How can voices of working children be heard – and should they get what they want?
- Should investments in education match pressure to attend school?
- CCTs are, in the end, cheap social policy
- LAC as the region that 'did not learn to tax' (Kaldor 1963)
- Policies on social mobility?