From impact evaluations to paradigm shift: a case study of the Buenos Aires Ciudadania Porteña conditional cash transfer programme

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In response to the economic and social crises in 2001–2002, the Buenos Aires City Government opted for a cash transfer programme, the Ciudadania Porteña: Con Todo Derecho, or CPP, in 2005. This case study looks at three impact evaluations of the programme and how they were used. The evaluations were designed with a dual purpose: (i) to determine how the programme could be made more efficient and thus obtain its goals, and (ii) to build consensus and legitimacy about the strategy of cash transfers in general. The most significant change resulting from the evaluations was the creation of the ‘To study is to work’ component, as of a recommendation made in the first evaluation report of the CPP. In addition, cash benefits for children and teenagers in school were increased and more outreach to teenage mothers was added to help them find childcare options. In addition, there have been changes to the culture of evaluation within the City Government: the evaluations generated immediate improvements in the programme and had significant spillover effects in terms of promoting a new culture of evaluation. Lessons about the connections between the impact evaluations and the CPP policy are (i) trust worthiness of the findings, through rigour and drawing on international expertise, gives legitimacy to study recommendation, (ii) it seems crucial to have a clear communication and dissemination strategy of the results, building understanding and ownership of the study amongst a broad range of stakeholders, (iii) emphasise lesson learning over accountability, and (iv) the evaluation reports should have highlighted more strongly the negative findings to allow further adjustments to address these problems.

Keywords: conditional cash transfer; social policy; impact evaluation

1. Urban cash transfers to improve social inclusion

In November 2005, the Buenos Aires City Council (GCBA) approved a conditional cash transfer programme, ‘Ciudadania Porteña: Con Todo Derecho’ (CPP) that would target poor and extremely poor households within the city.¹

The food programmes implemented at that time by the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) in response to the crisis were not sufficient to cover the complexity of the situation or to meet potential demand. Interviewees emphasise that CPP represented an important advance in the social policies by the Buenos Aires City Government.

Under the scheme, the person entitled to receive the benefit is the woman (mother, household head or partner). The financial aid can only be used to purchase food, school materials, hygiene items and cleaning products and fuel to cook.

The value of the transfer is defined by the value of a basic food basket (BFB), taking as a parameter the ‘adult equivalent’ methodology, which is set by the National Institute of

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Statistics and Censuses (INDEC); the household poverty situation and the household composition. Specifically:

(i) Households with incomes up to 25 per cent above the extreme poverty line set by the INDEC (clause a Article 4 Law 1878/05): the transfer is 75 per cent of the BFB estimated by INDEC.

(ii) Households with incomes between 25 per cent above the extreme poverty line and up to the poverty line (Article 4 Law 1878/05): the transfer is equal to 50 per cent of the BFB.

The average allowance paid to households on January 2011 was ARS $ 455 (US$ 110.97) per month, ranging from a minimum value of ARS $ 193 (US$ 47.07) to a maximum of ARS $ 1259 (US$ 307.07).

Beneficiary households must fulfil certain conditions to enter and remain in the programme:

(i) Education commitments: children from 5 to 18 years of age have to attend school; beneficiaries of Studying is Working (SW) have to attend and graduate at the level where they are studying.

(ii) Health commitments: monthly medical check-ups for pregnant women; prenatal and post-natal medical visits; periodic medical check-ups and nutritional development of children up to age 18 living in the household; and to comply with the immunisation calendar.

(iii) Commitments regarding child labour: families are committed to comply with the law that prohibits child and adolescent work.

(iv) Documentation: each and every member of beneficiary households must have Argentine documentation, permanent or transitory (precaria). In addition, beneficiaries also need to have Unique Labor Identification Key (CUIL), which is used for social security and fiscal purposes.

In 2008, a new component of the programme, ‘Studying is Working’, was created in order to foster the inclusion and/or retention in the educational system of young people from 18 to 29 years of age. SW provides a monthly income of ARS $ 275 (US$ 67.07) for young people who attend institutions of formal education and whose households are beneficiaries of CPP. Thus, households with young people received an average of ARS $ 730 (US$ 178.05), including the average amount of CPP and the SW transfer.

At the time of the first impact evaluation, in January 2007, the programme covered around 66,500 households and 240,000 people.²

1.1. Social policy paradigm shift

The political decision of Jorge Telerman, vice-chief of the City Government at the time the bill for creating the CPP was being debated, was crucial for the design of the programme and its subsequent approval in the City Council.² He convened a team of policy experts in early 2005 to design a social programme to eradicate extreme poverty. This technical team promoted a paradigm shift in social policy and the institutionalisation of monitoring and evaluation functions.

Debates at the city level, seminars and specific courses were organised to discuss policy proposals and we also participated in various national and international seminars in cooperation with other policy makers, Coordinator of the City Council and view for this project.

Broad-range studies and documents on the subject of poverty ‘We gathered a large amount of data from the City’ (Sergio Beros. May 2009).

With CPP, we are working in a past, present and future of the city: ‘one of universal and specific policies and needs’ (Sergio Beros. May 2009).

When the programme was designed in the city, the future growth of the city was not foreseen because of the economic crisis.

The coexistence of universal and specific policies and programmes comes from social action strategies’ (Puccirelli, City Government’s social policy coordinator).

2. Evaluation

2.1. Technical framework

The CPP directive was designed months after the Law was approved and the designers wanted reliability and the ability to appropriate an effective monitoring system. Also, the directives on how to evaluate and validate it with good practices in an uncertain environment were needed. The CPP was designed as the result of a whole administrative and participatory process.

The City Government faced the question of rigorous evaluation, and evaluation is also political.

The initial public pressure to perform and see results that would prove that the programme was providing results and that this monitoring was effective was a key element to measure outcomes: ‘The development of extreme poverty’ (Sergio Beros. May 2009).

At that time, before and after the CPP was defined the evaluators were already established in the city.
seminars in order to compare different intervention and evaluation strategies along with other programmes of similar characteristics. recalled Irene Novacovsky, Coordinator of the Information, Monitoring and Evaluation (IME) Unit, in an interview for this study.

Broad-ranging participation was paramount in the design of the programme. Different documents on the design of CPP were submitted to the Social Council for discussion. 'We gathered a Social Council of the city composed of universities and churches,' recalled Sergio Beros, at that time Secretary of Social Development.

With CPP, policy-makers wanted to develop a social protection system independent of past, present or future adult participation in the labour market. The policy rationale was 'one of universalism, understood as the objective of reaching those excluded from existing policies and establishing minimum common procedures and benefit levels' (Bastagli 2009, 4).

When the discussions in the Council ended, the largest budget ever for social protection in the city – 117 million pesos – was approved for launching the CPP. The significant growth of the budget, however, produced tensions in the political and institutional systems because of the redistribution of city resources it required.

The coincidence of three factors – a post-crisis context, a new generation of social policies and pioneer politicians and policy promoters – made possible the paradigm shift from social assistance policies to a concept based on the notion of rights. As Pablo Pucciarelli, CPP General Director explains, CPP 'represents a before and after' in the City Government's social policy.

2. Evaluation findings

2.1. Technical and political motivations can be positive

The CPP director's office commissioned the impact evaluations; the first in 2007 (nine months after the programme was launched), and the second in 2009. The director's office wanted reliable evidence of impact in order to know if the policy parameters were appropriate and as efficient as they could be or how the programme could be improved. Also, the directors wanted to know how successful the CPP was proving to be, in order to validate it with the Minister and the City lawmakers. As 2007 was an electoral year, with uncertain electoral results anticipated, having rigorous evidence of positive impacts from the CPP was crucial to guarantee the continuity of the programme in case the Minister or the whole administration changed, as indeed did happen.

The Ciudaddania Porteña example suggests that politics are least likely to interfere when rigorous technical analysis exists, and if the officials commissioning impact evaluations are also prepared for possible negative results.

The initial design of the CPP contained provisions for periodic monitoring of its performance as well as generic plans for impact evaluations. The policy-makers and designers knew they would need to track the impact in order to learn how to better streamline or improve the programme and achieve true reductions in poverty. They wanted coverage to be effective. The monitoring was to focus on coverage, benefits and budget, while the impact evaluations would measure outcomes in terms of achievement of the objectives: reduce inequality, poverty and extreme poverty, increase school attendance and eliminate child labour.

At that time, the city administration had no official monitoring and evaluation unit, but the CPP was created with a small M&E division built in. An IME Unit eventually was established in 2008 within a newly created MDS.
2.2. Independent assessors required

An external team led by specialists from the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI) and the Unit of Information, Monitoring and Evaluation (UIMyE) conducted the impact evaluation reports. UIMyE was created in 2008 and is part of the MDS of GCBA. Its main responsibilities are: to assist MDS in the design, development, planning, monitoring and evaluation of plans, programmes and social projects; and to develop and coordinate social information systems.

The methodology used was a quasi-experimental design that allowed comparison of the results and impact of the programme among a control group (CG) and a treatment group (TG) (that is, the general population and the households within the programme). It compares the situation of the target population at the beginning of the programme and again during its implementation (difference-in-difference estimator).9

CPP has a baseline and two impact evaluations, which use a quasi-experimental model with a TG of beneficiaries and CG that was statistically constructed. The evaluation has a triangular design, comparing the situation of the population at the beginning of the programme (T0) to the same population during its implementation (T1), measuring both TG and CG. The difference between T1 (TG) – T1 (CG), known as the 'difference-in-difference' estimator, allows determining the impact of the programme.

Two sources of information were used:

(a) The Annual Household Survey (AHS) of the city of Buenos Aires: This survey is conducted under the General Department of Statistics and Censuses (DGEyC) of the Buenos Aires City Government. This survey is conducted once a year with a sample of nearly 7000 households. The AHS provides information on the characteristics of the households and its members regarding housing, demographics, education, health, employment and income, among others. The information provided by the AHS 2005, before Ciudadanía Porteña was implemented, was used to build the baseline and the ex-ante CG (T0). The CG after the implementation of the programme (T1) was constructed with the information provided by the AHS 2006 and AHS 2008.

(b) The Beneficiary Households Survey (BHS): This survey uses the same questionnaire as the AHS. It is also conducted by the DG EyC and is applied to a statistical sample of 1000 beneficiary households, selected from CPP administrative records through a simple random sampling with proportional allocation. The first and second BHSs were conducted in December 2006 and February 2009.

Qualitative data were collected with interviews and focus groups to CPP and SW beneficiaries.

We briefly present the findings of these evaluations before moving to the main focus of this paper, that is, the extent to which these studies influenced policy.10

2.3. Major impacts on households in poverty

The main findings from the initial impact evaluation of the programme in early 2007 were:

- Impact on poverty and extreme poverty: The proportion of households living in poverty and extreme poverty decreased by 20 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively.
- **Impacts on inequality**: In the absence of CPP, the difference between the income of the richest and the poorest households (first and last decile) would have substantially increased. Due to the transfers made by the programme, this difference actually reduced.

- **Impacts on poverty in childhood and adolescence**: Without the programme, the proportion of children living in the city of Buenos Aires under the poverty line would have increased by 10 per cent between 2005 and 2006.

- **Health care**: The programme contributes to increased health checks for pregnant women and children, especially among children under 5 years.

- **Impact on access and permanence in the educational system**: CPP increased attendance rates among beneficiaries. The results show a clear comparative advantage in the rate of school attendance of beneficiaries with respect to the comparison group, most notably in the age groups of 3–5 years and 15–17 years, which is particularly relevant because these ages are the most difficult to incorporate into the school system in poor sectors of society.

The second impact evaluation reinforced these positive findings. The third study focused on SW, finding: (i) in 2006, 22 per cent of young people living in CPP beneficiary households attended the formal educational system, increasing to 35 per cent in 2009, (ii) 45 per cent of young people from 18 to 25 years of age had finished high school or were included in the formal educational system in 2006, this proportion increased by 16 per cent in 2009, and (iii) after one year of implementation, the number of young people who return to school after at least one year of dropout, increased by 50 per cent.

The evidence also showed that the programme’s targeting system minimised inclusion and exclusion errors, which proved to be lower than other conditional cash transfer programmes in the region.

3. **Using evidence to promote change**

3.1. **Channelling the details**

The evaluations had the following objectives; mainly: (i) to promote accountability as a standard practice in the City Government; (ii) to measure the impact of expected and unexpected outcomes; (iii) to produce information that could be useful for decision-making about adjustments and new courses of action to improve programme impact; (iv) to disseminate the achievements; (v) to elaborate and defend the budget in the City Council; and (vi) to obtain legitimacy and consensus to guarantee the continuity of the programme.

In order to attain policy influence and achieve those objectives, different channels and means for distributing the evaluation findings, which focused on different audiences, were used.

In order to publicise the findings on how the CPP is having impact and to get support for the programme, the M&E technical team organised formal and informal meetings with legislators, executive officials and experts at various appropriate times, such as budget discussions in the City Council and after changes of local authorities.

Multiple seminars were organised for technical staff from different departments in the City Government in order to expand their awareness on a wide range of issues related to poverty and the improvement of social policies.

Various communication activities were conducted to make the results of the impact evaluations available to the general public, enhancing the downward accountability of the programme. These activities included sending electronic newsletters to technical staff.
and executive officials of the City Government and social policy experts and the posting of the evaluation findings on the City Government's official website.

3.2. The instrumental use of the findings

According to Sandinson's (2005) typology, evaluations can have different uses. In the case of the CPP, the impact evaluation findings were used for instrumental, legitimising and conceptualising purposes. Instrumental use is one that involves direct implementation of findings and recommendations to, for example, (i) help decide whether to continue or terminate particular policy initiatives; (ii) expand and institutionalise successful programmes and policies and cut back unsuccessful ones; and (iii) figure out which programmes to modify and which components of the programme were in need of modification. (Sandinson (2005) quoted in Diaz Langou and Weyrauch (2013))

Commenting on the instrumental value of the evaluations, Irene Novacovsky, the IME Unit Coordinator, found that the strategy for disseminating the results 'was effective because it was always an important means of support when the budget had to be discussed and when there were debates in the Council. And it was important in order to support changes in the programme.'

The city's Social Development Minister, Maria Eugenia Vidal, echoed her view:

'...The evaluation results...are still primarily a useful tool for the teams that work on the programme; for those who make decisions...for the discussion of the budget, when you have to ask for more funds.... During budget discussions in the Council, I have also brought the evaluation findings so as to show what we are doing.'

Additionally, a system of planning, information, monitoring and evaluation has been institutionalised since the creation of the programme, leading to adjustments in its design and implementation based on the evidence found through the monitoring studies and/or impact evaluations.

3.3. The outcome of the recommendations

The first CPP evaluation report contained numerous recommendations, including: (i) the need for adjusting bi-annually the amount of the benefit in order to avoid the loss of its purchasing power, (ii) a minimum payment for all children younger than 18 and particularly for youth aged 15–18 years, in order to help them stay in school and induce the completion of secondary school; and (iii) the creation of a component to promote higher education among youth. These and other suggestions were adopted. For example, the 'To study is to work' component, was launched a year after the first evaluation and is considered a significant achievement of the impact evaluation.

3.4. Evaluation leads to a new component targeting youth

As just mentioned, the component 'To study is to work', whose aim was to promote the inclusion and retention in the formal education system of youth aged 18–25, was introduced as a result of the first evaluation. By December 2010, 'To study is to work' reached nearly 6000 youth, providing them a monthly income of 275 pesos (US$69). To remain in the programme, the beneficiaries must attend and promote the level where they are a part of the programme. The purpose of the programme is to raise the educational aspirations of the youth and to avoid dropping out of school.
are studying. Few cash transfer programmes globally target such a population with the purpose of supporting higher education. Through this new component, the policy-makers wanted to create conditions to encourage social mobility and inclusion in order to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality.

OEI also conducted an impact evaluation of 'To study is to work', also using a quasi-experimental design, combined with a qualitative approach through interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries, the findings of which were discussed above.

3.5. Programme strategy adjusted

According to officials interviewed, the CPP director followed up on the recommendation to increase the amount of the cash transfer for each school-aged household member. However, the results presented in the second evaluation report showed that such an increase was insufficient to fully cover the opportunity cost of entering the job market for adolescents aged 15–17 years, even though the incidence of school dropouts had decreased by 38 per cent since 2005. It could be argued that since the recommendations put insufficient emphasis on this deficit, the benefit increase was inadequate to retain a larger proportion of adolescents in education.

Additionally, in accordance with study recommendations, a system for monitoring children and teenagers of school age was developed in order to better prevent them from dropping out of school and/or to improve their return to the educational system. Also, through institutional coordination with the Ministry of Education, a network was established to allow beneficiaries obtain information on vacancies in primary and secondary schools, thus providing them easier access to education opportunities.

The need for an increased access to educational vacancies for preschool children, a recommendation in the first report, was not sufficiently considered. The supply of new places was insufficient to include all poor children in early schooling. In the same vein, the second report indicated the need to increase the supply of early education opportunities for CPP beneficiaries. Even though the MDS eventually set up 20 early childhood centres for children aged 45 days to 4 years between 2010 and 2011, supply still remains insufficient to meet demand. In addition, there are no established mechanisms to prioritise the entrance of CPP beneficiaries to the early childhood centres and other nursery schools financed and/or administered by the City Government, even though the poorest children are the ones who face greater problems in accessing early education.

A system for detecting domestic violence was also established, and cases are informed to the services provided by the General Division of Women, within the MDS.

Another issue raised by the evaluation was the problem of pregnancy and early motherhood among teenagers and young beneficiaries of the programme. Considering how this factor contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty, a system of monitoring and support was implemented to better help these beneficiaries continue their education. This system also includes referrals to specific programmes and assistance in the search for vacancies in nurseries and kindergartens, although as noted, the supply of vacancies was insufficient.

Given the supply shortfalls that the second evaluation noted, it seems that the evaluation reports did not sufficiently emphasise the need to increase educational opportunities for the poor. They should have also emphasised the lack of coordination between the city's MDS and the Ministry of Education on having established mechanisms that could prioritise access to early education for the poorest children in Buenos Aires. The lack of sufficient emphasis seems to have downplayed the urgency or the seriousness of the gap.
3.6. The use of findings to legitimise policies

Beyond the instrumental use of the findings, there was also a legitimising factor, which according to Sandinson, is the intent to ‘corroborate a decision or understanding that the organisation already holds, providing an independent reference’ (2005 quoted in Díaz Langou and Weyrauch (2013)). As previously noted, at different stages, formal and informal meetings with the City Legislators, executive officials and experts were organised with the objective of publicising the impact of the programme.

In an interview for the case study, Pablo Pucciarelli, CPP General Director, extolled the importance of having that reliable evidence of impact in order to obtain legitimacy and consensus for the intervention. ‘In all areas, from academic to more political, I used the information of the evaluations to legitimise my point of view…. And of course, it brings solidity and consistency to the arguments that would have been impossible to sustain if there had not been evaluation reports,’ he explained.

The legitimacy obtained manifested itself in the support given to the programme by the consecutive Ministers and Government officials and also by the new City administration that took power, leading to a substantial increase in the CPP budget of around 212 per cent from 2006 through 2010.

Maria Eugenia Vidal, the Minister of Social Development, recognised that the CPP evaluations strengthened its legitimacy: ‘Subsequent evaluations showed that CPP had an impact on poverty and extreme poverty in the city of Buenos Aires, on the decrease of child labour, on the increase in the rate of school attendance…. All this ends up strengthening [the programme].’

3.7. The conceptual use of the findings

The evaluations also had a conceptual impact, because the results had consequences ‘in the form of new ideas and concepts – creating debate and dialogue, generating increased clarity and new solutions in the longer run’ (Sandinson (2005) quoted in Díaz Langou and Weyrauch (2013)).

For example, in the seminars for the City Government staff to discuss the impact of the evaluation findings, the programme’s design and how it helped to improve the quality of social policies was examined, including an analysis of the relevance of mechanisms used to identify and select beneficiaries and the need to make periodic evaluations, to make diagnoses and to build beneficiary records.

Perhaps the single greatest policy uptake of the evidence was the creation of the ‘To study is to work’ component, based on a recommendation of the first evaluation report. The programme’s technical team promoted this new benefit, addressed to teenagers and youth who were studying or wanted to return to study.

Irene Novacovsky, the IME Unit Coordinator, highlighted how the first evaluation made apparent a dangerous interruption in the completion of the secondary education cycle. It also indicated, she explained, that a very large percentage of youth neither studied nor worked.

The Technical Coordinator of ‘To study is to work’, Naomi Wermus, remarked the importance of the impact evaluation. The first evaluation, she recalled, showed a high level of school dropouts, a rising number of youth who had not completed high school due to the need to join the labour market, which was characterised as precarious, with poor-quality jobs and frequent periods of unemployment.

‘As a result of this evidence, Novacovsky et al. (2006) confirmed the success of the programme and the amount of credit that could be raised to recruit potential participants, especially the young mothers who indicated that their children were not attending school.

In a focus group on the ‘To study is to work’ component, participants particularly valued the changes made in their lives, such as accessing the educational programme that was incorporated by the Ministry of Social Development. Additionally, they valued the evidence of school attendance in the reports that provided certification of the programme established a ‘feedback on school attendance.

Qualitative evaluations also led to recommendations for youth. In response, a mechanism for advice and a cooperative structure was established periodically held.

Despite this, however, the programme intends to well document the good results and thus guarantee its sustainability, such as the accessibility of access to nursery schools and youth have been incorporated through the cash bonus and other multiple media campaigns. A large number of

4. Lessons on evaluation

Three elements are at the heart of the economic crisis and social policy for young people: a key role in
As a result of this evaluation, the "To study is to work" proposal was made," Irene Novacovska explained. The separate evaluation of 'To study is to work' in 2009 confirmed the success of the strategy, she added, but emphasised needed changes: increasing the amount of benefit; extending the age up to 29 years; replacing the buying card for a debit card so that the youth have access to cash; expanding outreach activities and recruiting potential beneficiaries; increasing support for educational possibilities for young mothers by guaranteeing nursery, childcare centres or kindergarten places for their children and prioritising them in the early childhood centres.

In a focus group discussion, teenager and youth beneficiaries of the 'To study is to work' component applauded the programme, for helping them to continue their studies, especially the reform, which allowed them to withdraw their benefit in cash, one of the changes made after the separate evaluation of the component. Some of the group participants said they did not know that the age limit to receive the transfer had been raised. Their comment reiterated a weakness reported by the evaluation. In fact, the report's recommendations noted the need to improve the communication strategy and prompted the use of new channels, such as email and Facebook. Access changes were also incorporated based on the report's recommendations. As of 2011, registration for the programme is done independently of the CPP and includes online registration. Additionally, the report recommended tightening the controls concerning the conditions of school attendance. To monitor the compliance with the conditions, beneficiaries must provide certificates that endorse that these conditions are fulfilled. Moreover, the programme established agreements with the educational institutions to regularly provide feedback on students' attendance.

Qualitative studies that complemented the impact evaluation of 'To study is to work' led to recommendations for more preventive efforts targeting family violence among youth. In response, printed materials were distributed among the beneficiary population; and a cooperation agreement with the General Division of the Women, within the MDS, for advice and referrals for victims of violence was established.

Despite these important and significant advances, coverage of 'To study is to work' has not yet reached the total target population. There is still a proportion of youth not studying or working. The recommendation regarding the need to increase the benefit periodically has not been considered.

In summary, the evaluations provided information that was used to adjust policy and programme implementation. New courses of action were outlined. Achievements were well documented and used effectively to gain legitimacy and consensus of the programme and thus guarantee its continuity. But not all the recommendations have been incorporated, such as the school support strategies and inter-institution collaboration to increase access to nurseries, day care centres and kindergartens. Other recommendations that have been incorporated have not been sufficiently emphasised, including the needed increase in the cash benefit and follow-up activities. Even though some results were publicised in multiple media, it would have been better to highlight other important issues, basically the large number of teenagers who remain out of the school system and in the labour market.

4. Lessons on evidence-based policy-making

Three elements were critical in the creation of CPP: an initial context of national economic crisis and social unrest; the emergence of new forms of intervention in the social policy field; and the existence of policy promoters or political pioneers, who played a key role in proposing and designing innovative social policies and programmes.
First, the crisis of 2001–2002 resulted in high levels of poverty and significant growth of inequality. In this context, decision-makers were open to the evidence from research studies and impact evaluations of policies that could provide solutions to the policy issues to be addressed.

Second, impact evaluations from other countries, including those of Oportunidades in Mexico and Bolsa Familia in Brazil, demonstrated that conditional cash transfers could have a significant role in alleviating poverty. While this case study is an examination of the impact of the evaluations of CPP and ‘To study is to work’, evidence from elsewhere actually set the stage for the adoption of the programme. The findings from other evaluations helped make the case for CPP in meetings between academics and policymakers. The adoption of rigorous targeting systems – a distinguishing feature of conditional cash transfer programmes – offered the possibility of breaking with the patronage previously embedded in social programmes of the Buenos Aires City Government.

Finally, the existence of pioneer politicians or policy promoters, such as Jorge Telerman, Deputy Head of Government at the time, was crucial for the design of the programme and its subsequent approval in the City Council. Pablo Pucciarelli, CPP General Director, praised Mr Telerman for convening a team of policy experts in early 2005 to design a social programme to eradicate extreme poverty. The evidence collected shows that the programme’s technical team had, since inception, an instrumental role as policy promoters and managers of knowledge.

The organisation of events, international seminars and meetings between academics and policy-makers were channels chosen by the technical team specifically to promote change and raise awareness among the political actors and representatives of civil society organisations and academia in Buenos Aires. This included an international seminar organised in the Argentine capital prior to the creation of the programme in which the successful experiences of Brazil’s and Mexico’s conditional cash transfer programmes were presented.

From the beginning, the technical team promoted a paradigm shift in social policy and the institutionalisation of the monitoring and evaluation functions. According to Irene Novackovsky, ‘debates at the city level, seminars and specific courses were organised to discuss policy proposals and we also participated in various national and international seminars in order to compare different intervention and evaluation strategies along with other programmes of similar characteristics.’

An equally important landmark was that, the impact evaluations have created an ever-hungry appetite for evidence. The City Government has moved towards the institutionalisation of a monitoring and evaluation function and the demands for its services are increasing steadily.

Annual discussions of the CPP budget in the City Council provide a regular and continuing opportunity for the use of evidence in policy-making. Indeed, the ongoing organisation of training workshops and seminars, the publication and dissemination of the impact evaluation reports and other studies on the welfare of CPP and ‘To study is to work’ beneficiaries and the ongoing response to information requests suggest a constructive dialogue between the programme’s managers and both policy-makers and the general public.

During the 2011 budget discussion, the evidence provided by the impact evaluations of the CPP and ‘To study is to work’ – as well as other studies on the potential demand and the update of the benefit amount according to estimates of inflation – were used to obtain an increased budget allocation.
Finally, the continual use of the findings in training seminars for government staff has not only boosted support for progressive social policies but also the importance of and skills for monitoring and evaluation. Since 2008, the IME Unit has organised 13 training seminars for City Government staff. Additionally, the monitoring and evaluation system contributed to changes with the CPP and to the creation of the ‘To study is to work’ component. The results of the impact evaluations, the publication of reports on the social situation of Buenos Aires and the characterisation of vulnerable groups, as well as the ongoing response to requests for specific information, are critical inputs for making decisions regarding CPP and the programmes of the Social Development Ministry in general.

Lessons for policy influence from the impact evaluation experience in Buenos Aires centre around four issues: (i) trustworthiness of the findings; (ii) legitimising; (iii) strengthening the M&E system; and (iv) institutionalising evaluations. Expanding the base of support for evidence-based policy-making may have been beyond the scope of the evaluations of the CPP and ‘To study is to work’. However, it is clear that the establishment and entrenchment of the IME Unit is a spillover effect that will have significant benefit far beyond the CPP programme itself.

4.1. Trustworthiness of the findings
Evidence arising from the three evaluations was reliably supported by the use of rigorous methodologies.

However, the evaluation reports of the CPP do not sufficiently explain the methodology used to assess the impact on poverty. The case study interviews helped to clarify that, in order to estimate CPP impact on poverty and extreme poverty, simulations were performed without the income provided by CPP, according to the methodology proposed by Baker (2000). This detail should have been spelled out in the reports.

Also unclear initially was the use of a quasi-experimental evaluation design instead of a ‘pure’ experimental design, with control groups randomly selected before the intervention. According to the experts interviewed, the quasi-experimental design reflected the fact that the law that created the CPP required that all people living in poverty in Buenos Aires were to be included. Thus, to have used an experimental design with random allocation would have violated the law, denying access to a portion of the target population.

Additionally, the qualitative information gathered in the evaluations has not been sufficiently elaborated. It would be advisable to: (i) combine the information provided by qualitative and quantitative methods in order to capture in the evaluation reports the unintended consequences of the programme and deepen the analysis of some issues that were revealed to be of great importance; (ii) use the channels through which the results of quantitative information were published, to also disseminate the results from the qualitative approaches; and (iii) conduct a qualitative evaluation of the CPP impact on women’s empowerment and to identify if there have been undesirable effects on gender relations within the beneficiary households.

We conclude that political factors are least likely to interfere when the evaluation is based on rigorous technical analysis, when it is conducted by an external agency and if the officials commissioning impact evaluations are prepared for possible negative results.

4.2. Legitimisation
The results of the CPP and ‘To study is to work’ evaluations have been a crucial element in terms of legitimising the programme and the new direction for social policies in the
Argentine context. From the presentation of empirical evidence about the outcomes and impacts of the programme, the three evaluations contributed to building consensus around the intervention strategy.

Certainly, the communication strategy designed and implemented proved to be successful towards legitimising the programme. This included participation in international seminars both in Argentina and elsewhere, training seminars, formal and informal meetings with the various actors and the dissemination of the evaluation findings through electronic newsletters and the City Government website, among others. The continuation of the programme after the change of authorities and the sustained increase in the CPP budget support this observation.

In addition, a series of meetings between the evaluation team and the authorities and technical staff of the CPP and ‘To study is to work’ enabled detailed discussion of the evaluation results, including potential changes that could maximise programme benefits. For this purpose, different feasibility scenarios were constructed. The interaction between the two teams was critical in terms of policy influence, facilitating the instrumental use of the evidence provided by the evaluation reports. As a result of these meetings, the CPP director’s office, in conjunction with MDS, took up many of the recommendations in the three reports.

There was tremendous interest and openness among the CPP technical team to explore, in collaboration with the evaluation team, alternatives that might improve the programme’s impact. This, in turn, helped to reinforce ownership of the evaluation findings.

One important lesson that emerged from the case study analysis is that, to maximise the policy influence of impact evaluations, it seems crucial to have a clear communication and dissemination strategy of the results.

Likewise, it is essential to generate forums for discussion and interaction among the evaluation team, the decision-makers and the technical team of the programme being evaluated so that the results could be articulated, promoting ownership and facilitating the adoption of the recommendations.

4.3. Strengthening the M&E system

A clear consensus among interviewees is apparent on the importance of having in place an M&E system to improve the management and decision-making process, to promote transparency and accountability and, ultimately, to build consensus and legitimacy.

Since its inception, CPP set up an M&E system that includes impact evaluations. The technical team that designed the programme had a solid experience in conducting M&E activities and led from the start. Those who commissioned the impact evaluations had expertise in the field and promoted their use.

The dissemination of the impact evaluation reports among governmental authorities, ministry technical staff and other areas of the City Government, legislators, civil society organisations and social policy experts promoted the use of the M&E function. In turn, such use created new demands, and to meet those demands, it was necessary to strengthen the M&E system. Thus, the use of information provided by the M&E system generated new demand for information, which in turn strengthened the system.

The important conclusions on the M&E system are: (i) the existence of technical flexibility on the part of the IME Unit to guarantee participation and inclusiveness of many actors who are not experts in the field; (ii) the ability to mobilise people users of the system by organising seminars and events, awakening the interest of learning from rigorous evaluation and its evidence-based interpretation; (iii) a strong emphasis on the use of evaluation findings, to a lesser extent, as agenda setters.

In terms of less formal working, the CPP study is to work ‘To study is to work’ in daily management and the formulation of plans ahead is to institutionalise M&E in CPP programmes through the different areas.

4.4. Institutionalisation

The initiatives to formalise the IME Unit and to the ministry level were reported to the Ministry, through the creation of the IME Unit, as a collaborative project. The process of institutionalisation included the M&E system.

The main objective was to institutionalise the management system, including functions to provide a more systematic operating at the local level and to the national level. Nonetheless, they were not officially part of the social policies.

In terms of employment and social policies, findings, such as job training and placement in the labour market, were communicated to the CPP so that they could be implemented. For example, although the IME Unit does not formally function as an employment agency, young mothers are often matched with surplus workers.

Notes

2. As of end 2010.
3. The proposed measures include the IME and IME Act (2006), but the IME Unit, formally called IME.
use of evaluation for management purposes and programme development input and, to a lesser extent, as an instrument of accountability.

In terms of lessons for policy influence, the greatest achievement of the CPP and ‘To study is to work’ impact evaluations has been to promote a new culture of results-based management and use of evaluation findings in the management process. The challenge ahead is to institutionalise a system of monitoring and evaluation of social policies and programmes through an Act of the City Council.

4.4. Institutionalising evaluation

The initiatives to institutionalise the M&E functions have been successful and moved up to the ministry level, through the creation of the IME Unit. María Eugenia Vidal, Minister of Social Development, pointed out that the institutionalisation of the M&E system within the Ministry, through the creation of the unit, ‘had a healthy contagious effect in other areas.’ In fact,

the creation of the monitoring and evaluation area within the Ministry is an initiative of this administration, based on the need to have a much closer and accurate overview about what’s going on with Ciudadania Porteña, given its magnitude; then it extends to ‘To study is to work’ as a component and also to the evaluation of other areas and other programmes.

However, the IME Unit is still a body whose continuity depends on the Minister of Social Development, a situation that makes it very vulnerable to a change of authorities in the Ministry. Thus, although the creation of the unit represents a breakthrough in terms of the institutionalisation of the role of M&E, there is still a long way to go.

The main obstacle that the M&E function must face is the lack of a results-based management system integrated into the City Government structure that allows these functions to provide feedback to the planning system. There are different M&E systems operating at the local and national levels, but they lack coordination and are fragmented. Nonetheless, they all seek to improve the levels of efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the social policies, thus seeking to improve services for those living in poverty.

In terms of emphasis, the evaluation reports could have better highlighted the negative findings, such as the large number of teenagers who remain out of the school system and in the labour market. Some recommendations could have better emphasised the deficits in the CPP so that the adjustments that were made were better suited to address the problem. For example, although there was an increase in the students’ benefits, it was not sufficient to maintain purchasing power. Additionally, the improvement in referrals and outreach for young mothers and children on the importance of early childhood development was not matched with sufficient vacancies in the schools or learning centres.

Notes
1. According to the AHIS from 2005, which was used to construct the CPP baseline, 13 per cent of the city’s population was living in poverty and 4 per cent in extreme poverty. Although poverty levels had decreased in comparison with previous years, they remained high. See Agosto et al. (2012) annex 1 for more detail on CPP targeting.
2. As of end 2010, the programme covered around 62,000 households and 235,000 people.
3. The proposed bill was presented by Jorge Telerman, who at the time of the enactment of the Act (2006), had become the chief (mayor) of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, as it is formally called.
4. The Social Council was created in December 2004 as a permanent collegial body composed of representatives of various civil society organisations gathered to evaluate and suggest policies for Buenos Aires. It convened representatives of the City Government and the following organisations: Arquidiócesis de Buenos Aires-Pastoral Social, Federación Evangelista de Iglesias, Centro Islámico de la República Argentina, Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, Cámaras de la Construcción, Central de Trabajadores Argentinos, Confederación General del Trabajo, Facultades de Derecho, Ciencias Sociales, Ciencias Económicas y Arquitectura de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales and Sociedad Central de Arquitectos y Unión Industrial Argentina.

5. Bastagli (2009) identifies at least four underlying motivations for the introduction of conditional cash transfers: (i) as a compensatory measure, targeting the poorest who are adversely affected by periods of adjustment (the case of the original Programa de Asignación Familiar (PAF) in Honduras and Familias en Acción en Colombia), (ii) to assist the very poorest who are falling through an existing safety net, with the aim of integrating them into a national social protection system (the case of Puente-Chile Solidario in Chile); (iii) human capital accumulation (the case of Progreso in México); and (iv) universalism (the case of Bolsa Familia in Brazil).

6. From 2006 to 2008, Pablo Pucciarelli and Irene Novacovsky were Co-Directors of CPP. In 2008, with the new administration, the ministry was restructured; Pucciarelli became General Director of Ciudadanía Porteña (which now includes CPP, 'To study is to work' and the Ticket Social programmes) and Novacovsky became Coordinator of the IME Unit.

7. In addition to rigorous and robust systems of monitoring and evaluation, systems for identification and selection of beneficiaries are a common feature of the conditional cash transfer programmes in the region.

8. The IME Unit is part of the Ministry of Social Development of the City Government. Its main responsibilities are to assist the Ministry in the design, development, planning, monitoring and evaluation of plans, programmes and social projects and to develop and coordinate social information systems.

9. See Agosto et al. (2012: Annex 4) for more details on the evaluation design.

10. For more on the case study design, see Agosto et al. (2012: Annexes 2 and 3).

11. According to Bird (2002, in Jones et al. (2009)), in some cases, accountability to donors (upward) might be the priority while in other cases, accountability to beneficiaries (downward) may be prioritised.


References


