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Basic Income and Time Use Democratization

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Abstract: Time has become a valuable asset within capitalism. "Time is money" is a well known and usually shared principle. As in regard to many other type of assets, the distribution of time is pretty unfair, as well as it is the value consideration of the time allocated for different people to different activities. The distribution of time, as well as what people can or cannot do with their time, is a key issue among feminist debates. The main argument is that time allocation to paid and unpaid work is very different and unfair between genders. Women allocate much more time to unpaid work, and men, on the contrary allocate much more time to paid work. This has a reasonable and direct consequence in terms of income generation. This unequal distribution of time (and work) represents the main obstacle to women's economic autonomy and to overcome gender income gaps.

Keywords: basic income, time use democratization, feminist approaches to basic income, Latin America, democratization

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The problem is that time allocation is not a free choice within capitalist and patriarchal economic and social structures. Traditional mandates in terms of care responsibilities,[1] together with the dynamic of labour markets, restrict

1 The concept of care refers to the set of activities, goods and services that are necessary to satisfy basic needs of people's existence and reproduction, "nurturing" in the sense of

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the options that women and men can make regarding time use. In many developing countries this is still more significant given the weak provision of public care services.

This article tries to provide updated insights to this discussion, taken from evidence from Latin America (and more specifically from Argentina) to discuss whether the implementation of a basic income (BI) can help democratize time use. In this context we understand democratization of time use as the enlargement of women's and men's choices over their time use.

For that, the article: (i) provides a very brief overview of Argentinean evidence on time use; (ii) it summarises feminist debates in relation to the potentiality (or not) of the implementation of BI; (iii) it confronts the arguments for and against vis-à-vis other type of cash transfers in Latin America; (iv) it provides preliminar ideas on the conditions that would transform BI into a positive initiative for time use democratization.

1 Lack of democracy in time use choices

Time use surveys have developed extensively during the last decades in Latin America, providing interesting evidence on the gender gaps in time use.[2] In every country, data confirms that women work longer hour than men, mostly due to the very big gap of time allocated to unpaid work. While this is always true, the length of the working day (paid and unpaid) differs depending on type of households, activity condition and socioeconomic status.

We can illustrate this with evidence from the case of Argentina.[3] In this country, data for 2013 prove that women allocate 6.4 daily hours to unpaid work, while men allocate 3.4. When there are children at home, unpaid work hours are

providing physical and symbolic elements that allow for survival in society. The delimitations of this concept are debated; consensus exists though that at least feeding, hygiene, and maintenance of the home and basic health care are included. The debate also considers whether *care* should only denominate the protection granted to dependent persons (for instance, children, the elderly, sick, or handicapped), or whether it would include the nurturing of those that in fact could be self-sufficient in this regard (such as male spouses).

2 Esquivel, Budlender, Folbre, and Hirway (2008) provides a review of time use surveys in Latin America.

3 This data is provided not by a time use survey but by a module on time use included into the Labour Force Survey in 2013. It is the only available information, which covers near to 70 % of total urban population. The instrument is limited – a review of the limitations of this data can be found in Rodríguez Enríquez (2014) –, though it provides a simple yet reasonable approach to time use in Argentina.

larger. Data shows that when there is no child women allocate, in average, 5 daily hours to unpaid work (while men allocate 2.9 daily hours). When there is at least one child under 6 years old, women allocate 9.3 daily hours to unpaid work (while men allocate 4.5 daily hours). In brief, women and men allocate more time to unpaid work when they have children, though the gap between their time allocation remains.

Surprisingly (or not), women's labour market status makes a difference in their time allocation to unpaid work, but the same does not happen in the case of men. When women are employed, they allocate 5.8 daily hours to unpaid work, while this time increases to 6.8 daily hours when they are unemployed. In the case of men data shows that when men are employed, they allocate 3.5 daily hours to unpaid work, while when they are unemployed, they allocate 3.2 daily hours to unpaid work. Men's overload of time devoted to paid work does not seem to be the reason why they dedicate so much less time to unpaid work.

As a consequence, women have longer working days (for paid and unpaid work), but naturally they need to adjust their time allocated to paid work when their load of unpaid work is very heavy. Data from Argentina reveals that women who work less than 14 weekly hours in paid jobs, allocate in average 7.7 daily hours to unpaid work, while those who work between 45 and 60 h in the labour market, allocate in average 4.7 daily hours to unpaid work. In the case of men, the time allocated to unpaid work is more or less the same (between 3.3 and 3.8 daily hours), regardless the length of their paid work days.

In brief, women work longer hours than men, have a much heavier burden of unpaid work that restrict their participation in the labour market, and therefore face more barriers to access labour and income generating opportunities. This gender gap in time allocation derives from a set of different and interlinked reasons: i) social norms that consider that women have "naturally better" abilities to care; ii) social norms that consider men as principal income earners within households; iii) broader and better quality employment opportunities for men than for women in the labour market; iv) weak, insufficient and poor quality public care services; v) very expensive supply of care services in the market.

Feminists have extensively argued that in order to reduce this gap, to redistribute time and work, to advance social co-responsibility on care, and to enlarge the possibility of people to chose their time allocation, there is need of public policies. Is BI one of such policies?

2 Feminist approaches to basic income proposals

There are basically two opposite positions among feminists when we discuss basic income.[4,5] On one side, those that consider that a BI would, in practice, work just as pin money for women, keeping them from joining the labor market, and confining their work to care responsibilities in the household. In this case, a BI proposal would not help democratize time use. On the contrary, it would enlarge the gender gap in time allocation. The other side unites defenders of the opposite opinion: BI would give women a minimal economic autonomy that would strengthen their position in other spheres, including the household, where they would be able to negotiate the distribution of care-related responsibilities more equally, and in the labor market.

One of the recurrent objections to the BI proposal states that it disincentivizes labor supply. Such a situation might happen when opportunity costs of joining the labor market are higher than the benefit provided by a BI program. This can take place for two reasons. First, because the cost of abandoning "inactivity" is too high (this would be the case, for instance, for women with heavy care responsibilities, in a context of lacking a system of accessible care services). Second, if the marginal benefits in terms of income obtained from a potential labour market would be inferior to those of the BI (this would describe the case of women with low educational attainment, whose average labour income is relatively low). From this perspective, a BI would not be appropriate if the aim is to incentivize women's participation in the labour market as a means of strengthening their autonomy and redistributing time and work.

However, an alternative view is also possible. A BI can help access care services provided by the market, which would free working time for women. A BI could finance vocational training time, thereby improving women's skills for labour and in the long run improving their labour opportunities. A BI could improve women's position within the household, and thus encourage more democratic decision-making processes, which again increase the chances of redistributing time and work.

Another usual feminist discussion refers to BI as a monetary recognition of unpaid care work. This might be considered as part of the larger debate on BI as a way to recognize (and eventually promote) valuable social activities that do not have market value or a monetary compensation.

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4 This section is based on Rodríguez Enríquez (2013).

5 A good synthesis of this debate can be found in the special issue of *Basic Income Studies* (BIS), "Debate: Should Feminists Endorse Basic Income?" BIS 3(3), December 2008.

The notion of recognizing and appreciating other activities besides those that are exercised in a strictly market environment goes hand-in-hand with the necessity of discussing new forms of organization of social time.[6]

Given the economic security provided by a BI as the starting point, people could choose different, less restricted occupational arrangements, including full- or part-time employment in the marketplace, domestic or care work, training activities, and even leisure. According to this point of view, a BI could lead to a more equal distribution of paid work, unpaid care work, and leisure time, between men and women.

This perspective suggests that a BI would function like an "emancipation allowance," which would improve especially poor or low qualified women's bargaining power vis-à-vis their employers and spouses, encouraging the latter to procure part-time jobs and dedicate some of their time to household chores instead.

However, in contexts where care responsibilities are very demanding (for instance, due to the presence of many dependents in the household), or where labour opportunities for women are restricted, or where the symbolism attributed to productive and reproductive tasks by male and female perception is deeply rooted, a BI could indeed lead to a consolidation of the traditional gendered division of labour. From this point of view, and similarly as what was stated regarding labour force participation by women, BI would then function as a "housewife salary" that would permit women to fulfil their "natural" care responsibilities under less economically restricting conditions. However, it is worthy to highlight that while this problem might really take place, the risk is lesser in the case of BI than in the case of a "housewife salary" that is conditioned to effectively take care of domestic and care responsibilities. This is to say, the unconditional nature of BI allows women to take up other economic activities, even when they do not, which is not allowed in the case of conditional "housewife salaries".

Which of these views might prevail depends on a number of factors: (i) the monetary level of BI vis-à-vis the level of wages; (ii) labour market opportunities, available (or not) for men and women; (iii) labour conditions in feminized economic sectors; (iv) the existence and efficiency of public policies to confront gender discrimination in the labour market; (v) cultural values concerning gender roles in productive and reproductive work spheres; (vi) the availability of accessible care services.

6 By social time I refer to the time that people use to carry on the multiple activities that guarantee people's reproduction, social life, as well as the production of goods and services.

Since there is no BI scheme in force there is no possibility of testing these dilemmas empirically. However, cash transfers experiences in Latin America provide some insights that can illuminate the discussion.

3 Learning experiences from Latin America: conditional cash transfers from a BI perspective

Conditional cash transfers programs (CCT) have become the most relevant social assistance policy in the region during the last two decades. Spread in all countries, they reach more than 25 million households and close to the 20 % of the total population,[7] though the scope of the programs differs substantially by country.

Their relevance as well as the fact that in current debates CCTs are considered as a possible path to more universal monetary transfer proposals makes them relevant for the analysis. Moreover, the high level of feminization of these programs provides insights to the specific analysis of their implications for women's life, in terms of access to labour and time use allocation.

CCTs main features are the following: (i) the transfer is in cash, in a few cases complemented by in-kind transfers; (ii) the target population consists of the poor and extremely poor; (iii) households with children and adolescents have priority, but once they are covered other household categories without children are considered as well (for instance, households with older people); (iv) conditionalities concerning children's school assistance and health checks and nutrition control for children and pregnant women have to be fulfilled in order to get the benefit; and (v) preference for granting the transfer is given to mothers.

Different studies have analysed these programs from a feminist perspective.[8] In what follows I focus on those issues that link to the discussion on time use democratization. The questions are: What are the implications of CCTs over labour participation and time use? Can BI strengthen the positive impacts of CCTs and overcome the negative ones?

CCTs have proved to have a relevant impact on women's income, which in time affects women's decisions regarding their labour market participation. Three are the more usual possibilities: i) when the lack of income is a strict

7 See Cecchini and Madariage (2011), and Stampini and Tornarolli (2012).

8 A summary of them can be found in Rodríguez Enríquez (2011) and in Martínez Franzoni and Voorend (2009).

condition to access CCT's benefit, there is a disincentive for women to enter the labour market (or and incentive to quit it); ii) when the level of the benefit is too low, women tend to complement it with labour income (if participating into the labour market does not conflict with receiving the CCT's transfer); iii) when the level of the benefit is more significant, women might prefer to exit the labour market if the level of salaries is relatively low, or if labour participation conflicts with receiving the benefit, or if labour conditions are poor, or if care arrangements make it difficult to balance work and family life.

Providing that enlarging women's opportunities in the labour market is a way of democratizing time use, feminists would call for cash transfers not restricting women's labour participation. As stated above, CCTs might produce a negative effect if there are strict conditions of lacking income in order to access the benefit (the well-known income or poverty trap) or if the benefit is high enough in the context of weak and expulsive labour markets. The issue seems to be avoided when the level of the CCT benefit is not high enough, so women would still want to access labour market to compensate income.

Data from Argentina can help check this. Women's activity rate was 48.3% in 2009. At the end of that year, a broad CCT was established. It was targeted to households with children and adults who were unemployed, inactive, or employed in the informal sector. The benefit reaches almost 3.5 millions of children and is paid to mothers. By the end of 2010 (one year after the implementation of the program), women's activity rate had dropped to 46.3% (the drop was larger among women with low educational background, among which it is assumed beneficiaries are concentrated; for them the activity rate dropped from 24.2% in 2009 to 20.6% in 2010). Afterwards women's participation in the labour market grew again, although at a slow pace and it never reached the level of 2008 again (in 2015 it is 47.8% for total women and 23.6% for women with low educational background).

While we cannot assert that there is a direct link between the implementation of the CCT and the evolution of the activity rate, we can hold a great suspicion on it. In this case, since there is no strict requirement regarding income level, the relationship between the transfer and women's economic participation should be explained through the competence between the level of the benefit and the conditions in the labour market. To which we should add the structural barriers to women's economic participation: traditional patriarchal norms in terms of care responsibilities, gender discrimination in the labour market, poor economic opportunities for women with low educational background.

Would BI be a better alternative? If we compare it with CCTs, the access to which is mediated by people's income level, then BI is a better alternative, since it would at least avoid the income or poverty trap. Being an unconditional transfer, it does not compete against labour income in the access to the benefit.

This way, women can get the benefit and still retain their jobs, get one (if they were unemployed) or enter the labour market (if they were non active in the labour market). However, the positive or negative impact of BI still will depend on labour market conditions. As it was mentioned above, the same pervasive effects that CCT confronts (avoiding negative impact on women's participation in the labour market only if the benefit is reasonable low) would apply for a BI. This will be even more real when fewer are the possibilities to access care services.

It is important to note that promoting women's participation in the labour market does not automatically imply a redistribution of unpaid care work within households. Moreover, women might end up with longer working hours if they are not able to divert care responsibilities to other members in the household, or to other institutions (or people) outside the households.

The care dimension is deeply ingrained in CCTs. The conditionalities imposed by these programs are linked to care activities (education and health care), and there is a clear transfer to women of the responsibility to safeguard these dimensions. Moreover, in the discourse surrounding CCTs, *conditionalities* mutated into *co-responsibilities*, signifying that the beneficiaries themselves are (co-)responsible for breaking out the situation in which they find themselves (let's say, poverty). In this case, mothers are the ones responsible for investing adquately in their children's human capital (by sending them to school and caring for their health), which in turn will result in breaking out the vicious circle of intergenerational poverty transmission (Rodríguez Enríquez, 2013).

Accomplishing the conditionalities might in fact be added to women's unpaid work (for example, in cases where the health centre is far from home, or when there are long queues for accessing health care services). Moreover, even when that is not the case (because access to school or to health care services is easy enough), the symbolic dimension of CCTs "maternalism" goes against time use democratization, as it reinforces women's role as caregivers.

In this point BI is definitely a gain compared to CCTs. Being unconditional, BI does not reinforce any specific social role. The benefit is entitled for being citinzens and not for being mothers. This way, BI would eliminate the meritocratic and paternalistic components of current CCTs. Access to BI is independent of any individual behaviour, family arrangement, or decision taken – individually or as a family – concerning the participation in paid or unpaid work.

Furthermore, while BI might be considered as a monetary recognition of unpaid care work, which from a feminist perspective is controversial, it can also be considered as a monetary recognition of any other activity, such as, for example, education and training. However, which perception prevails depends on the context. In the case of Latin America, where, as it has already been

mentioned, labour opportunities for women with low educational background and heavy care responsibilities are rare, a BI might still reinforce current unfair distribution of paid and unpaid work. Therefore, while BI is a better stand for time use democratization, it will not work properly just by itself.

4 What else do we need besides basic income?

BI has the potentiality to enlarge women's and men's opportunities to make choices on their time use. Providing an unconditional income does not impose any specific gender role (as it is the case when care responsibilities become the conditionality). By providing an income, it simply enlarges people's opportunities to choose whether to work or not, whether in paid or unpaid work, etc.. By providing an income to people who otherwise would not have access to any (as in the case of full-time caregivers), it provides a more robust position in intra-household decision-making processes (as for example in the negotiation to decide time use allocated to paid and unpaid work among household members).

However, once put in context, this potentiality might be neutralized. As the Latin American experience of CCTs teaches, the features both of the labour market's dynamics as well as of the social organization of care might be determinant for the success of BI in enlarging women's and men's choices.

For this, additional public policies are needed. In the particular context of Latin America, where wage levels are low (especially for some type of feminized occupations) and informality and precarious employment conditions form a significant proportion of all available jobs, specific actions to address these labor market conditions are pertinent. This is particularly true for women, who are overrepresented in these ocupational sectors. Furthermore, measures aiming at the elimination of the various mechanisms of gender discrimination that persist in the workplace are also required.

On the other hand, public policies are needed to achieve redistribution of unpaid care work. This will not happen just because women increase their labour market participation. To avoid the former ending up adding pressure to women's time use, a battery of policies is needed to improve work-life balance. This includes paternal and parental leaves, as well as accessible and good quality care services.

Finally, the implementation of a BI proposal would be a cultural transformation. For it to improve democratization of time use, it needs also to be accompanied by a cultural transformation in gender relations, one that challenges traditional gender roles and enlarges women's and men's chances to more equally allocate time to care, time to work and time to rest.

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