

Basic Income and Dependency

Improving social relationships in Madhya Pradesh

empower

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ABSTRACT

The most heated debates over the effectiveness of basic income programs revolve around the question of whether basic income fosters dependency. Critics of social assistance view dependency as an intrinsically negative state to be in, linked to “laziness” and oppression. They argue that basic income programs create dependency between the recipients of the programs and the provided service, and that this would reduce beneficiaries’ incentives to work. This paper contributes to the debate over the effectiveness of basic income programs by specifically analysing their impact on relationships of dependency. Throughout this analysis I will challenge the thesis that basic income fosters dependency by analysing two basic income pilots conducted in Madhya Pradesh, India.

This paper finds that the fundamental assumptions underlying the concern that basic income fosters dependency in Madhya Pradesh are flawed. Relations of dependence are already present in the social fabric of rural India, and they are not intrinsically negative but instead represent ways through which people actively improve their position. Therefore, the question of basic income creating dependency is not the primary concern, and a more relevant policy question arises: how does the provision of basic income shape pre-existing relationships of dependency? I will show that basic income can play a transformative role in allowing people to improve their relationships of dependency.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of a basic income (BI) is gaining a lot of traction as a tool for development policy (Hickel, 2017; Standing, 2013, 2017). BI is a form of social assistance in which every citizen receives a regular sum of money from the government or another agency of an amount that is designed to cover his or her basic needs (Davala et al., 2015). It differs from other programs of social assistance, such as conditional cash transfers or food subsidies, because it does not come with any attached conditions of eligibility (Barrientos, 2014).

The call for greater social assistance comes from the acknowledgement that much of the recent economic growth at a global and national level is not inclusive: inequality is on the rise, and the benefits of growth are not trickling down to low-income groups, who are experiencing increased precariousness and food insecurity (Townsend, 2009; Barrientos, 2014; Sinha, Kumar, 2017; Har- doon, 2017). For instance, this is the case in India (Maiti, 2012; Krishna, 2013; Awasthi, Shrivastav, 2017; Bear, 2015), where the trend in past decades has been a 'jobless growth' (Joshi, 2010). In this setting, social assistance is considered even more pressing as a way of tackling poverty (Barrientos, 2009; Townsend, 2009).

However, BI is extensively debated around practical issues of implementation, such as the source of funding for BI programs, and around questions of effectiveness (Standing, 2017; Frota, 2017; The Economist, 2016a; Tcherneva, 2012). What has been considered the biggest drawback is that BI could encourage dependency, which is seen as intimately linked to 'laziness' (The Economist, 2016b; Financial Express, 2016; Aizenman, 2017). Unconditional cash transfers are feared to benefit the 'undeserving poor' i.e. those who are stuck in poverty from lack of effort and not bad luck (Alesina, Giuliano, 2009), and of encouraging those who were previously trying to earn an income to reduce their efforts and live off these cash transfers (Ferguson, 2016; Davala et al., 2015:20; Card

et al., 2007). In response to this concern, experimental pilots have been collecting data to answer empirically the question of whether BI fosters dependency (McFarland, 2017).

This paper inquires into the impact of BI on dependency using as a case study the BI pilots in Madhya Pradesh, India. It will challenge the argument that BI fosters dependency and that it is an intrinsically negative state related to “laziness”. The analysis will build on a deeper understanding of the social and economic life in rural India to show that relationships of dependence are important and effective parts of people’s active strategies of survival and that they are already embedded in the local social fabric independently of BI programs. In this context, the concern over whether BI creates dependency loses relevance. A more interesting policy question arises: how does the provision of a BI shape pre-existing relations of dependency? Following this line of enquiry, which no research to date has addressed, I find that there are very different forms of dependency, that these differences matter, and that BI can play an important role in transforming relationships of dependence for the better.

The structure of the paper is the following: firstly, I discuss anthropological insights to BI, including Ferguson’s (2013, 2015) work, which I will use as the theoretical framework for the discussion; secondly, I discuss the Madhya Pradesh BI pilots and their results; thirdly, I analyse the role that relationships of dependence play in the lives of the inhabitants of rural India; and fourthly, I discuss how these different kinds of relationships of dependence could have been shaped by the introduction of a BI.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to investigate the effects of BI programs on dependency, I use an empirical approach: I investigate the social context of the Madhya Pradesh BI pilots using ethnographies. These are systematic studies of local realities, aimed at understanding their

patterns and meaning, usually carried out by anthropologists and gained through research employing participant observation. Insights from ethnographies, especially anthropologist Ferguson's (2013, 2015) work, offers an important and empirical basis to discuss the impact of BI programs on dependency, and therefore form the theoretical framework of this paper, which I outline in this chapter. Firstly, I discuss the key assumption of the dependency critique of BI, and secondly I show how some anthropological works challenge them and provide a theoretical framework for this paper's analysis.

The assumption underlying the concern that BI causes dependency is that dependency is a negative state produced by social assistance and laziness. This view makes BI and social assistance less attractive as policies (Aizenman, 2017; Besley, Coats, 1992; Caputo, 2012), and traditionally restricts cash transfers to a narrow gender and age pattern (Ferguson, 2015). Cash transfers are judged acceptable to those we usually consider as 'dependent', such as the elderly, the disabled, children, and single mothers, but not for those who are considered able-bodied breadwinners and should be instead independent subjects (Ferguson, 2015; Molyneux, 2006). Therefore, adult and young males tend to be left out of social assistance (Aizenman, 2017), which has negative effects on their sustenance (Ferguson, 2015). In places where adult and young males are also excluded from employment because of limited employment opportunities, these effects are intensified: males are left without a form of income and also have to shoulder the burden of shame, as they feel that they should have been able to provide an income for themselves and their families (Ferguson, 2013).

This paper challenges these assumptions over the nature of dependency by building on the work of anthropologists who studied these relationships, in particular Ferguson (2013, 2015) and his analysis of debates over BI in South Africa. Ferguson (2013, 2015) shows that dependency is not fostered by development programs but is an ingrained and important characteristic of the social fabric

that predates programs of assistance in their regions of fieldwork. Other scholars had similar findings in their region of fieldwork: Sub-Saharan Africa (Haynes, 2013, Scherz, 2014), Egypt (Elyachar, 2005), Bangladesh (Gardner, 2012), Southeast Asia (Li, 2103), and South America (Bonilla, 2013). Ferguson (2015) also shows that seeking dependency is neither a passive state for people, nor a regressive tendency driven by nostalgia for the past, nor merely a form of oppression, as it is assumed in the debate over BI. It is instead a ‘mode of action,’ an active strategy used throughout history to survive the constant struggle for security and survival, spanning from the safety of belonging to a state in times of war, to the security of a wage for miners (Ferguson, 2013:223; Elyachar, 2005). Moreover, dependency is not only prevalent in the third world, but it is also a key feature of Western modes of life, where people benefit from the welfare state, social assistance, and public infrastructure provision.

This paper builds on these anthropological insights to reframe the ‘problem of dependency’ in the debate over BI, to challenge the incorrect assumptions that drive it. In particular, it will go beyond Ferguson (2013) and give greater attention to the different forms that relationships of dependence can take and how they affect people’s lives (Bolt, 2013). It will use an evidence-driven approach to investigate the possibilities that dependency can bring and the role that BI can play in Madhya Pradesh and beyond.

PILOTING BASIC INCOME GRANTS IN MADHYA PRADESH

Various pilots have been designed to contribute to heated discussions over BI’s purpose, effectiveness and feasibility both in developed (Finland, USA) and developing countries (Namibia, Kenya, India) (McFarland, 2017; Pechman, Timpane, 1975; Osterkamp, 2013). Two pilots, using randomised control trials, were launched in 2010 to trial BI grants in Madhya Pradesh with

the collaboration of UNICEF and SEWA (Standing, 2013). This chapter discusses the two pilots, and how the reports use their evidence to determine whether BI fosters dependency. Specifically, this chapter analyses their methods and results and points out their assumptions, flaws and gaps.

The first pilot was the Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfers (MPUCT), which provided every inhabitant of 8 villages with monthly cash grants and used 12 similar villages as control groups. The second was the Tribal Village Unconditional Cash Transfers (TVUCT), which gave grants to all inhabitants of one village and used another one as a control. The cash grants were provided to about 6,000 individuals and amounted to 200/300 rupees per adult and 100/150 per child, which were calculated to cover basic needs almost at the level of the poverty line (SEWA, 2014).

Data was collected before, during and after the BI trial period. There were four rounds of statistical surveys covering a total of 15,000 individuals, in which the researchers carried out interviews, community level surveys, a hundred in-depth case studies of the recipients, and tracked children's nutrition as well as their attendance and performance in schools (SEWA, 2014).

It is worth noting the possible biases in these pilots and reports. The monitoring and evaluation were conducted by the same development organisations that ran the pilots and not by independent researchers. Furthermore, the researchers asked the participants to recall their working routines and income from the previous months. Besides elements of human error, it is possible that the interviewees would consciously or unconsciously adjust their answers to what they believed the interviewers – representing a development organisation – would have liked to hear. Moreover, the randomised control trials may have been affected by the Hawthorne effect (Dapuez, 2016): recipients of the cash transfers would adjust their behaviour knowing that their behaviour was watched, and would attempt to improve their situation to increase their chances of future cash transfers. A certain awareness of the

significance of such a program by the recipients is to be expected and was documented in the Namibian pilot (Haarman, 2012). Although these issues might have caused errors of measurement and thus have led to overestimating certain effects, they do not undermine the trends identified by the pilots, which remain valuable objects of study.

The surveys' result indicated that BI had a significant impact on economic indicators of poverty: the income of many recipient households increased by more than the received cash payment (SEWA, 2014). BI provision gave rise to new patterns of labour: on average people worked more days and fewer hours per day, worked more on their own farms rather than as wage labourers, tended to diversify into a second activity, and it was less likely that child labour would clash with school times.

These changes were attributed to increases in 'entrepreneurial' activity enabled by BI's steady provision of capital, which provided a safety net and thus decreased entrepreneurial risk (Davala et al., 2015). In the reports, entrepreneurship is portrayed as the trigger of all the benefits found, but this idea has not been proven satisfactorily. I will later challenge the assumptions behind the idea that they become 'self-reliant' entrepreneurs and that this was the main driver of change in economic indicators.

The pilots' surveys also found changes in the patterns of migration: in the TVUCT, rates of migration increased for educational purposes and decreased for labour, while in MPUTC they were stable (SEWA, 2014). The report elaborates with assumptions about the benefits of these choices for development, such as increased remittances and employment in rural areas, but does not inquire into why they happen.

The reports also found a significant impact on the borrowing patterns among the recipients of BI. Debts tended to be paid off more frequently, and the take up of medium and big debt decreased while investment in savings and productive assets increased (SEWA, 2014). The reports noted that people started bor-

rowing more from relatives and less from moneylenders; in particular, they state that the incidence of bonded labour decreased. The researchers arrive at this conclusion because the surveys found a decrease in the incidence of ‘working for free to pay off a debt’ – the definition of bonded labour that I will discuss in the next chapter. Thus, they argue that BI resulted in people taking up more benevolent forms of debt, avoiding the ‘risk of dependency’ (SEWA, 2014:35). However, the reports do not consider that people are still taking up debts and thus building different relationships of dependence rather than avoiding them altogether.

BI also had a significant impact on well-being: nutrition, education, health, drinking water and toilet facilities all showed improvement (Davala et al., 2015). Overall, the increase in health and education is considered as, but not proven to be, a way of breaking through inter-generational poverty and therefore avoiding dependency (SEWA, 2014).

The reports used this evidence on changing patterns of labour, debt and wellbeing as a way of proving that BI does not create dependency (Davala et al., 2015). The reports sought to answer the normative question of whether BI fostered dependency because they assumed that dependency is a negative state. However, there is little enquiry or evidence of what dependency looks like in rural India, of the mechanisms through which BI fosters change, or of whether the achievements of the pilots can be considered as a decrease in dependency. This paper instead delves into these questions.

INVESTIGATING DEPENDENCY IN RURAL INDIA

What does it mean to be dependent in rural India? To investigate the nature of dependency, this chapter builds on Ferguson’s (2013, 2015) analysis of South Africa and demonstrates that social relationships of dependence also permeate the social fabric in

rural India. Due to local differences in the views over dependency, with people in India considering it less positively than South Africans and shying away from bold declarations of dependency (Shah, 2013), this paper does not assume that Ferguson's (2015) work applies directly to the Indian context. Therefore, I use Ferguson's (2013, 2015) insights and questions as a point of departure, and find the answers in an empirical investigation of the specific features of social life in rural India.

This chapter thus discusses the nature of dependency in rural India. To do so, it uses ethnographies that detail social and economic relationships in rural India, focusing in particular on the bottom of caste and economy, as those are the intended beneficiaries of social assistance programs (Barrientos, 2009). Firstly, I look at the roots of dependency found in precariousness of living in rural India. Secondly, I examine the forms that these relationships take for poor people, in particular focusing on vertical relationships and debt. Thirdly, I consider the persistence of, and the similarities between, relationships of dependence in the reality above the poverty line.

The roots of dependency: living through precariousness

The persistence of dependency, and the inability of people to bargain for better forms of it, are rooted in the precariousness of living at the edge of survival (Scott, 1977; Wood, 2003). Self-sufficiency provides little security against risks and hazards (Srivastava, 2009). Moreover, the lowest castes have mostly been excluded from land ownership after the enclosure period, and those who do own land often do not have enough to make it productive, either because they lack economies of scale, or because they are not able to afford the productive assets to make it so, whether animals or machines (Bremen, 1996). The average peasant manages to find work for only 260 days a year due to lack of demand for labour

(Breman et al., 2009). The external economy rarely offers full time, permanent opportunities, and it is instead a risky environment of casual hire characterised by seasonal rhythm, hazards and shocks (Singh, 2015).

There is an inherent fluctuating rhythm in rural work (Wood, 2003; Scott, 1977). Not only is agricultural work seasonal, requiring manpower only in parts of the year while demand is hardly existent during the “lean season” (Agarwal, 1990), but also other types of work available to rural villagers are seasonal, dictated by the monsoons (Breman, 1996; Breman, 2012). For instance, the brick kiln industry, a very common non-agricultural employer, hires and produces only in the dry season (Guérin, 2009).

This is one of the many hazards that rural people have to deal with; there are others, such as health and education expenses (Basilé, 2016), and droughts or famine (Agarwal, 1990). A very common one is social functions, such as marriages and funerals, to which large expenditures are devoted. This arises because people are not just ‘empty stomachs’ and also need to partake in social and community events, and because of increasing pressures to spend from rising consumerism (Fernandez, Gopal, Ruthven, 2016; Basilé, 2016; Cavalcante, 2016). Moreover, very little economic mobility is achievable for people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, due to little opportunity to increase skills or attain higher skilled jobs, and to caste-related restrictions that fall upon many of the rural poor (Mosse, 2010; Harris-White, 2016b; Corbridge, 2000). Therefore, marrying into families of higher status is used as a strategy to climb up the social ladder and to gain access to more opportunities for employment and borrowing. This pattern explains why people continue to invest great sums in marriage ceremonies and dowries (Harris-White, 2016a).

There is also the risk of shocks, of unexpected misfortunes that can ruin a family (Chambers, Conway, 1992; Hulme, Shepherd, 2003). For instance, illness or injury – recurrent incidences given the sub-standard work conditions most workers suffer – can

leave a household without a breadwinner and source of income, while increasing the burden of hospital care and medicine expenses (Picherit, 2012; Breman, 1996). When injuries cause disability, or when an illness results in death, the household not only has to cover high expenses, but it is also left without the means to repay the debts taken on to cover them (Breman, 1996).

Forms of dependency

In order to manage these insecurities, people rely on horizontal, diagonal and vertical relationships of support and dependence to obtain help, often in the form of loans. People constantly exchange objects, resources, cash and loans between relatives, fictional kin or neighbours of similar condition and caste, laboriously reproducing horizontal ties (Singh, 2015; Harris-White, 2016b; Yadav, 2016). The amount that can be exchanged is limited to the level of affluence within the network, which can sometimes be too low and force people to instead rely on diagonal ties and request loans from moneylenders (who are infamous for their high rates), shopkeepers, or other wealthier members of the community (Singh, 2015). These are diagonal forms of dependence, not in the form of patronage but as contracts between unequal powers (Harris-White, 2016b). A complete track of everyone's debts, solvency and reliability is shared in the village and drives how much and at what rate people are willing to lend to someone in need (Singh, 2015).

Larger debts are incurred through vertical relationships (Mohapatra, 2009). One of the oldest forms of vertical relationship is patronage (Srivastava, 2009; Singharoy, 2014; Breman et al., 2009:127-8). Patronage relationships were typically organised along caste lines, that would see long-standing intergenerational ties between clients and patrons: the former providing labour, loyalty and political support, the latter providing in-kind help and protection when needed by the client, securing their subsistence (Srivastava, 2009, Singharoy, 2014). Some forms of it are still prac-

ticed, especially in exchange for political support (Sbriccioli, 2016). The most infamous is bonded labour, in which lower caste individuals receive financial aid from a patron and, in exchange, they pledge their labour to pay it off: they are at the patron's call to work whenever needed and their contribution is calculated in wages below the market value (Srivastava, 2009; Singharoy, 2014; Brass, 1986). These contracts, usually organised along caste lines, can also include the pledge of a family member's labour, and can even become intergenerational bonds (Singh, 2015; Breman, 1979).

Although this kind of bonded labour is fading, another kind is on the rise, where wage advances for labour are paid to migrant workers (Guérin, 2013; Deshingar et al., 2008; Prakash, 2009). These workers migrate periodically to neighbouring areas of India to work in sectors such as sugar cane or brick production, or in factories in urban areas (Guérin, 2009; Guérin et al., 2009; Breman, 1996). They receive wage advances on their labour during the lean season, which allow them to survive and contribute to large expenses such as marriages and funerals (Breman, 1996). They then work for the contractor for a season, during which they receive a living allowance. At the end, their work is added up on a per piece basis, and their advance and expenses are subtracted (Breman et al., 2009). They receive whatever is owed to them or, if in still debt, they remain bonded to work the following season (Guérin, 2009).

What makes these workers 'bonded' are not physical chains but the conditions of precariousness that force them to take on debts, which results in unequal power relations that hinder their efforts to bargain for wages or move elsewhere for employment (Guérin, 2009). Workers have to work off their debts and then wait according to the contractors' preferred timing to receive withheld wage payments (Breman et al., 2009). Around 80 per cent of migrant labourers are in debt to their contractor and all debtors are bonded labourers (Breman et al, 2009; Singh, 2015). The conditions of work are appalling, with no access to food or shelter, little privacy, and inhumane hours (Breman, 1996). Wages are also very low; for

instance, they have remained frozen in brick production despite the increase in price and profit in the industry (Breman, 2007). The workers nevertheless attempt to resist: they collectively strive and negotiate to increase their advance, and individually engage in strategies to raise their profile, for example by frequently changing workplace where possible, to avoid being labelled as too docile and exploitable (Guérin, 2009). However, given the unequal power relations, they are often unsuccessful (Guérin, 2009).

If this is a common form of labour in the lower castes as the literature testifies (Breman et al., 2009), then why does it seem to have a lower occurrence in the pilot villages, averaging 5% of the workforce? The survey uses the definition of bonded labour as 'working for free to pay off a debt' (SEWA Barat, 2014), which, as discussed above, is not precisely what happens in this new form of bonded labour. Moreover, although advance labour is considered a form of bonded labour for the lack of mobility and low wages that characterise it, the local names used to define it are different from the terms used for older forms of patronage which have been used in the surveys (Srivastava, 2009). Furthermore, there is a level of shame attached to bonded labour and the exploitative dependent relationships that come with it, so individuals would tend to downplay their dependency and bonded status (Guérin, 2009). It thus seems likely that some workers engaged in advance labour would not identify themselves as 'bonded labourers' per the definition of the survey, and thus would be counted in the ranks of those categorised as 'wage labourers' – the occupation of more than 50% of the interviewed in the baseline survey (SEWA, 2014).

Persistence of dependency above the poverty line

The SEWA (2014) reports assume that as soon as people are above the poverty line, and have an education and good health, they become 'free' to pursue entrepreneurial dreams and to avoid relationships of dependence. However, this 'freedom' from de-

dependency is not necessarily a desirable state and relationships of dependence do not disappear when people are above the poverty line. 'Entrepreneurship' which SEWA (2014) portrays as the ultimate expression of economic freedom, is often just a means of survival and indeed petty entrepreneurs are neither the most successful nor the most affluent people in the village (Singh, 2015). The most sought after jobs are in government and services, because they provide prestige and job security: a stable and remunerative relationship of dependency with the state, with significant wages and little exploitation (Bremman, 1996). These jobs not only require an adequate education, but also the right connections to secure the position (Bremman, 1996). Therefore, the government servant-to-be needs to engage with local patrons and powerful politicians in order to gain their support through a form of patronage (Bremman, 1996). In this way, they also engage in forms of dependency.

Thus, given the importance of dependency for improving livelihoods and social progression, it is incorrect to think that it is a negative state and synonymous with 'laziness'. The conditions of vulnerability are oppressive, and people are forced by the vulnerability and precariousness of their circumstances to incur a debt. However, creating relationships of dependence is not necessarily an act of oppression but an exchange, albeit unequal. I have shown that relationships of dependence come in different forms, and that some are better than others: peasants prefer the security of government posts and the leniency of kin, while they consider debts to moneylenders and bonded labour as more disadvantageous (Scott, 1977; Bremman, 1996). Therefore, as dependency can be a positive force and permeates the social fabric before the introduction of development projects, the evidence undermines the relevance of the policy concern that BI fosters dependency.

TRANSFORMING DEPENDENCY WITH BASIC INCOME

Given the range of forms of dependency and how they can be more or less beneficial, we now proceed to investigating a more important question for social assistance policy: how does BI shapes social relationships of dependence. In the previous sections, I pointed out gaps in the explanations of the report. I now use ethnographies of rural India to understand the role that a steady flow of cash could play, and to see what this would mean for the rural poor. I thus 'fill in the blanks' that the reports leave open, discussing the possible dynamics at play. This method leads mainly to the creation of hypotheses: sometimes my discussion adds nuance to the interpretation of the report; at other times, it points to different directions that have not been investigated and that could be further researched. More than giving precise answers about the impact of the Madhya Pradesh pilots, most of the discussion is aimed at raising possible questions that would need to be asked in future studies to shed light on the impact of BI in rural India.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how people struggle with shocks, hazards and seasonality. Increased liquidity would buffer the smaller shocks, help to smooth consumption throughout the lean season, buffer the smaller hazards, and increase security throughout the year. Likewise, this also stimulates lending and borrowing. This would especially increase borrowing from more 'benign' creditors, as shown in the SEWA (2014) report, and decrease borrowing from less lenient non-kin. Building on this change, I will show how a provision of BI seems to increase people's freedom to choose to establish more advantageous forms of dependency, rather than decreasing the incidence of dependency. I discuss firstly the changes in bonded labour, secondly in assets and migration patterns, and thirdly in skilled jobs.

Transforming bonded labour

Workers who receive advance payments only sporadically engage in collective bargaining (Ghosh, 2001). Their rare negotiations are exclusively aimed at the increase of advance payments, and do not work towards improving labour conditions and wage levels, which are constantly kept under market value (Ghosh, 2001; Lerche, 1995; Walker, 2008; Breman et al., 2009; Guérin, 2009). This is because people urgently need advances in order to cover their costs of survival during the lean season, and in order to have liquidity to pay for functions such as marriages and funerals or for health expenses (Breman et al., 2009). Therefore they have to prioritise wage advances over labour conditions and wage levels (Breman et al., 2009).

The introduction of a BI increased beneficiaries' liquidity and coverage of those needs, which resulted in decreased instances of bonded labour (SEWA, 2014). Although the report definition only referred to old types of bonded labour, we have seen that new forms of bonded labour are generated by similar dynamics and needs (Sristava, 2009). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that new forms of bonded labour are likely to have experienced a similar decline.

How will this change labour relationships? There is evidence that people who experience a lean season with better financial means do not need advances or loans as urgently. They will thus avoid bonded labour and seek instead employment in the form of casual labour, characterised by better hours, conditions and wages (Breman, 1996). They have higher bargaining power for wages, as they are free to refuse jobs paid under the market wage and to take up better paid roles in other places (Sing, 2015; Rogaly, 1995). The better means provided by BI transfers might not be enough to allow people to avoid bonded labour altogether, but might allow them to choose types of employment that, despite reduced advance, offers

better wages and conditions, including better living quarters, with a roof to live under and privacy to enjoy (Guérin, 2009). It could also allow children and other family members to stay in their home village as their labour will not have to be pledged to obtain a higher advance (Breman, 1996). These patterns are consistent with the results observed in the report: reduced working hours (better labour conditions), reduced children's labour, and increased income (higher wages).

These better forms of work are all linked to different kinds of relationships of dependence with the job contractors. They still entail dependency: better employment still functions with advances and wages, and casual labour requires the establishment and maintenance of contacts and relationships. However, these are arguably better forms of dependence as they come with higher income, better health, safer conditions, better quality of life and work, and decreased child labour. Interestingly, many of these benefits occur to, or through, male able-bodied workers, who seem to benefit from BI and bring the benefits to the rest of their families. For instance, it can reduce their strain, increase their income, and decrease the chances of their own death, illness or injury, all of which are not only tragic but also expensive to families and a cause of cycles of debt and poverty (Breman, 1979). Therefore 'charity to able-bodied men' (Aizenman, 2017) is certainly not worthless. It allows workers, including men, to choose forms of labour that entail less exploitative forms of dependency.

Transforming assets and migration patterns

Increased liquidity enables people to buy more productive assets, such as dairy cattle, small livestock, looms, or tools to work the land (Breman, 1996). This trend was documented in the BI experimental villages reported by SEWA (2014). In an employment-scarce economy, assets are very valuable, especially for peo-

ple previously excluded from work, such as many disabled people and some women (Singh, 2014; Sonpal, Kumar, 2012; Prabha, 2000, Bagchi, 1981), who can thus access new forms of work and income as seen in the report (Davala et al., 2015).

Productive assets for the land, including cattle, tools, and irrigation systems, can also play an important role for obtaining an adequate level of land productivity. Often landowners are unable to put land to use because they cannot afford the assets that would make it productive or the irrigation necessary in dry lands (Singh, 2015; Agarwal, 1990). BI transfers have thus been used towards buying these assets, leading to an increase in agricultural work in the experimental villages, which the reports captured in their surveys as ‘diversification of labour’ (SEWA, 2014). Although the reports interpreted increased agricultural self-production as an ‘entrepreneurial activity’ (Davala et al., 2015), ethnographies highlight the upwards and downwards relations of dependence that landowners form. Self-producing households often need intermediaries to provide capital and seeds for the venture, and to help with access to market for the products (Singh, 2015). Moreover, as land becomes productive, households need to hire contract labourers from the village to help work the land, thus increasing employment opportunities (Breman, 1996). These dynamics are also consistent with the increase in agricultural production, employment, income and working days found by the surveys (SEWA, 2014).

This increase in income and employment allows people to stay in the village rather than migrate, which is consistent with the SEWA (2014) report recording a decreased migration rate of 10 per cent in the tribal village (TVUTC pilot). Beneficiaries might choose to migrate due to higher income from the opportunities described in the paragraph above, or, even when the work is less remunerative, due to advantages of working in the village beyond strict economic ones (Breman, 1996). Ethnographies document that people prefer working in their home village because the work-

ing hours and conditions are better (an increase captured by the surveys), there is access to support networks, they are near to their family, and it provides intimacy and privacy otherwise denied in the working conditions of migratory workers in urban and rural settings (Pitcherit, 2012; Breman et al., 2009). Moreover, staying in one's village and not being a migrant allows the maintenance of affective and supportive ties with one's kin and neighbours, while leaving increases the chances of being forgotten (Breman, 1996).

The SEWA (2014) report claims that BI did not affect migration patterns in the villages of the MPUCT pilot. However, the problem with comparing rates without breaking down the data, which is the approach the report followed, is that it is possible that contrasting trends in different strata of population averaged out to a non-significant change. For instance, the pattern discussed above of decreased migration for those who could afford to do it might have been present even in the MPUCT villages and been countered by increased migration of others. This is likely as it is documented that poor people often do not have the means to afford the transport to search for employment outside of the city (Breman, 1996). While sometimes contractors come to pick up their workers in bulk, prospective workers often need to make their way to the urban centre or factory to find employment without assurance of being employed (Breman, 1996). This means that workers need to be able to make an advance payment on their transport costs for daily trips to a neighbouring city, or once a season to further away places (Breman, 1996). In this scenario, a cash transfer will help them to afford the initial capital to search for employment, and have access to more remunerative relationships of dependence with labour contractors in other areas, escaping more exploitative ones in their village or the lack of them altogether. This is consistent with the SEWA (2014) report's finding that recipients' income increased by more than the value of the cash transfers.

Therefore, the provision of BI could have different effects on migration patterns depending on the demographics of people's starting points and desires. Greater liquidity can help cover urgent needs and open up new opportunities, allowing people to pursue and achieve other goals.

These are not descriptions of people becoming free from dependency. Through increased stability, income, and employment people are able to establish relationships that are more useful or appealing to them: better working conditions, more equal relationships with their contractors or middlemen at home, and more attractive opportunities elsewhere. They create relationships of dependence with new labour contractors, or even become labour contractors themselves for a period of time while maintaining their role as employees at other times. The provision of BI is thus an opening of advantageous opportunities that entail preferable forms of dependency.

Increasing access to better jobs

Development projects and discourse usually propose education as the way of improving one's standing on the economic ladder (Davala et al., 2009; Easterly, 2001). SEWA's (2014) results show that education enrolment and attendance are increasing. The pilots lasted only two years so it is not possible to test whether increased education rates thanks to BI would result in increased numbers of beneficiaries accessing higher paid jobs. The research on education policy tells us that policies increasing education attendance have had mixed results on fostering development, and the results were highly dependent on the opportunities on offer (Easterly, 2001). Crucially, in rural India, there are very limited jobs that require education and are accessible to poor people, especially with caste discrimination in place, and securing one is dependent on one's connections to patrons and powerful politicians (Krishna, 2013;

Breman et al., 2009). Only a longer-term pilot could investigate the impact of increased education beyond its intrinsic benefit.

There are other higher skilled jobs in the Indian rural and urban labour markets that are more accessible to poorer people. For instance, working in workshops or in high-skilled factory jobs such as diamond cutting do not usually require education, but a period of apprenticeship, and they still grant higher wages, better conditions, and employment security (Breman, 1996). Although most of these jobs favour certain castes and genders, not all are restricted (Breman, 1996). However, gaining an apprenticeship increases expenses for the family that supports the individual: living expenses during an unremunerated apprenticeship (whose duration ranges from a couple of months to several years), the amount of materials that employers claim 'have been ruined by the apprenticeship while they learn', and the loss of the income that otherwise would have been earned by the family member were they working instead (Breman, 1996). Families are thus often unable to afford an apprenticeship for their children because of financial reasons (Breman, 1996).

A BI might thus mean that more people can afford to establish relationships of dependence with skilled workers and workshop masters to teach their children. The SEWA (2014) report did not investigate these patterns, but future research might want to inquire into the number of apprenticeships and higher skilled jobs that people are able to take when BI is provided.

Middlemen in the job contractor business are also in a higher paying position, with higher status attached (Guerin, 2009; Picherit, 2009). Job contractors employ many middlemen in order to ensure a steady flow of labour force in the working season (Breman, 1996). Middlemen come from village areas, are usually males from the same caste of the workers, and have many links with prospective workers that they constantly utilise and reproduce, forming complex relationships of dependence (Bhukuth, Ballet, Guérin,

2007; Picherit, 2009). They also establish relationships of dependence with contractors, and engage in complicated power struggles; for instance, they collaborate with other middlemen behind the backs of the job contractor, and ‘exchange’ workers between themselves to deal with changes in job contractors’ requests (Breman, 1996). Middlemen are paid a percentage of workers’ wages and while they work during the season they earn a supervisor’s wage (Picherit, 2009).

Being a middleman requires the right social network, but also some disposable income: they need to be able to cover travel expenses to get in contact with contractors (Picherit, 2009) and often also to pay or supplement the advances to workers from their own pockets, only later reimbursed by the contractors (Breman, 1996). A BI could thus result in increased numbers of people being able to choose to work as middlemen, as a result of the greater liquidity they have and the lower advances needed by peasants supported by social assistance. Again, this relationship could be further explored through research.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown the limited relevance of the ‘problem of dependency’ regarding BI in rural India. Relationships of dependence predate development projects, and they are not necessarily a negative burden forced on people merely out of oppression, or driven by people’s ‘laziness’. As Ferguson (2015) argues, they are instead an intrinsically valuable part of people’s lives; we have seen that dependency is a way of creating more security, and thus an important strategy for people navigating precarious conditions and vulnerability to poverty and famine. The discussion has gone further than Ferguson’s (2013) in investigating the different types of relationships of dependence.

These differences matter: some relationships are exploitative and oppressive, while some are more advantageous. People prefer the security of government posts and the leniency of kin, as this allows them to increase their livelihood security and enjoy better working conditions. They consider debts to moneylenders and bonded labour as more disadvantageous, as they represent a higher financial burden for their households. However, we have seen how these are still useful relations in which to engage when struggling to survive through a lean season or between hazards.

This paper has therefore addressed the more interesting policy question of how BI shapes these pre-existent relationships of dependence, and whether it could play a role in allowing people to build the more beneficial forms of them in rural India. Some of the analysis discussed simply adds nuance to the mechanisms driving the results of the pilots: people were able to incur more benign forms of debt and were able to buy productive assets for land. Other effects beyond what had been considered by the reports were the improvement of working conditions, a decrease of advance labour, alterations in migration patterns driven by people's increased ability to choose where to work, and greater access to higher skilled labour.

This analysis has shown that BI could increase people's ability to form better relationships of dependency. Therefore, I have argued that, contrary to what it is feared by detractors, BI can have a beneficial impact on relationships of dependence. I have highlighted the need for further research that empirically investigates these patterns, their frequency and the extent of their impact on people's lives. The question posed here can also play a powerful role in prompting analysis on the impact of BI on dependency beyond the Madhya Pradesh context, ultimately enabling the grounding of policy on practical realities and increasing its effectiveness.

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