

Conclusion

Toward a Caring Society

Twenty years after the first large-scale conditional cash transfer programs were rolled out in Mexico and Brazil, imposing conditions is no longer the exclusive terrain of governments, and children's health and education are no longer the only targets for improvement. Thanks to the wonders of mobile money and the popularity of conditional aid among a growing range of nongovernmental organizations, social enterprises, research institutes, and philanthropists, you, too, can reform the misguided behaviors of a poor person. For instance, the award-winning social enterprise New Incentives offers you the opportunity to motivate a woman in rural Nigeria to give birth in a health clinic—which you can do from the comfort of your armchair. And you can trust that your incentive will have the desired effect, because New Incentives will disburse the cash only after they have verified with clinic staff that the mother gave birth as required.¹ Or, if sanitation strikes your fancy, you can incentivize a man in India to install a toilet. Reproductive health? A pilot program in Tanzania incentivizes youth to remain free of sexually transmitted infections. My hope is that, having read this book, you will think twice about the apparent simplicity of making aid conditional.

In undertaking the long and trying ethnographic work of comprehending conditional aid programs from the perspective of poor mothers, I have traveled from an interest in cash transfers, to the more skeptical stance of “thinking twice,” and finally to the view that the contemporary practice of conditional aid is unjust. In the preceding chapters I have offered analytical contributions related to blind spots in our measurement of program impacts, the ironic conditions of clinics and schools, the unpaid work of walking and waiting, and the wild proliferation of shadow conditions. The broader arc of this book's argument is as much about

speaking truth to power as it is as analytical; I have argued that these conditions are unjust.

To the development experts who boldly proclaim that CCTs “are a great thing to do,” this book stands as a rebuke and a plea for humility. One of the appeals of conditional aid is its alleged efficiency, but in practice CCTs are efficient only if women’s time and unpaid labor is worth nothing. When we account for all of the work that rural women are required to do to implement a CCT program, we inevitably uncover a number of hidden costs. CCTs are often rolled out in places where poor people have a difficult time accessing quality services. In Peru, rural mothers do a lot of walking and waiting. In the absence of safe and reliable transportation, and sometimes even roads, pregnant women walk to deliver their babies in clinics, and mothers walk to deliver their children to health appointments and school. They walk back and forth between home and the clinic until they encounter it open and staffed for service. They walk up and down the Andes mountains in the sun and the rain and the cold and the fog. Between journeys, women wait. They wait for attention from school staff, nurses, and bureaucrats in government offices. They wait for politicians to fulfill promises, and they wait for the state to deliver what wealthier, urban regions already have: teachers, doctors, water, jobs, and a sanitation system. They wait as long as the authorities ask them to wait, and in my observations, they wait patiently.

In the case of Juntos, women bore the cost of poor-quality services, and they also bore the cost of an inadequately staffed program. The state employed a cadre of hardworking frontline bureaucrats called local managers to enforce and monitor conditions, but they were responsible for an unrealistic number of households. The only way that local managers could meet their professional responsibilities was to rely on the help of the women they managed. Juntos mothers were required to “manage up.” They attended meetings to save local managers travel time, and they walked and waited to make sure that Juntos maintained an updated database and an accurate list of who had complied with the program conditions. Managing up had a cost for women, who expended their time in service of Juntos rather than on any number of other productive, caring, or leisurely tasks.

In addition to the work of ordinary mothers required to manage up, local managers also relied on the organized labor of a group of “exemplary” Juntos recipients called Mother Leaders. Local managers referred to these women as “the local managers in their communities.” The work of Mother Leaders bore a surprising resemblance to the job descriptions that program headquarters had written for local managers. The Mother Leaders, however, were not paid for their contributions. Here was yet another gendered cost, hidden between the line items of Juntos’s administrative budget. If not for Mother Leaders, the state would have been required to hire many, many more local managers. The unpaid labor of these women subsidized the cost of implementing Peru’s largest social program, which development experts hold up as a “model for the world.”

On paper, conditionality seems like a simple technical arrangement. Yet in the real world of unequal resources and social hierarchies, a well-intended incentive can unravel into a coercive exercise of authority. Once Juntos arrived in the places it was meant to improve, conditionality became a tool for more authoritative groups to exercise power over subordinate groups. Experts in Lima intended for Juntos mothers to meet a strict schedule of health and education conditions, and they did. But they also complied with a host of additional directives put in place by Juntos's frontline staff and other local authorities. These "shadow conditions" were enforced through threats of suspension and accusations of irresponsible motherhood.

Although undoubtedly well-intentioned, Juntos was an example of development by *susto* (fear). Local managers yelled at mothers, telling them they had to take their children to school or the state would take Juntos away from them—and to an extent, this threat was based on official policy. But they also demanded that mothers use the state-run day care, keep tidier houses, participate in parades, and give birth in clinics. In theory, these were not things for which women could rightfully be suspended. In practice, there were no substantive checks on abuse of power. And so women bore the cost. They went running from one appointment to another, unsure of what was actually required of them. Shadow conditions were a manifestation of the coercive power of incentives; the limits of this power were unclear, its effects practically immeasurable. This is perhaps the most striking of the reasons that I call conditioning aid unjust.

Nearly a year after the fieldwork for this book took place, news broke that a group of local managers, in collusion with two cashiers from the National Bank, had stolen approximately one million soles from Juntos recipients' savings accounts.² This systematically organized heist took place over the course of two years and affected an unaccounted-for number of program beneficiaries. According to reports, local managers simply informed the mothers that they would not receive the cash transfer for a given period of time, and subsequently the bank cashiers siphoned the money from the agreed-upon accounts.

Media coverage of this scandal generally treated it as a rare and extreme event. However, I offer an alternative interpretation. The fact that local managers could withhold transfers from hundreds of Juntos women for months at a time with no explanation, knowing that these women had no recourse whatsoever, tells of a broader pattern. In the communities where I conducted fieldwork, the prevalence of shadow conditions stands as evidence that frontline workers seldom face repercussions when they use conditions for purposes that policy makers should be loath to condone. This theft surfaced unequal power dynamics that are widespread and routinely implicated in more ordinary and invisible forms of injustice. Imposing conditions on aid facilitates such abuses. Conditional incentives in the context of deep social and political inequities are not merely "powerful tools" but tools that give the more dominant groups unchecked power over subordinate groups.

Incentives *are* effective insofar as they change behaviors. Yet mothers' accounts of their everyday lives revealed that their children's poverty was less an issue of the women's misguided individual choices, and more an issue of the difficult conditions in which they cared for their families. Instead of focusing our good intentions and resources on motivating poor women to change their behavior, we might instead seek to change the persistent inequities that shape people's broader life conditions. By all accounts, this would require us to ask the challenging "political-economic questions" that simpler, technical fixes so often sideline (Li 2007). A nuanced and substantive way of refocusing on the broader conditions of people's lives is through a focus on care.

RECALCULATING THE COSTS OF CARE

Nearly four years after completing the fieldwork for this book, I returned to Yesenia's house in the village of Bellavista. On this visit, Yesenia looked happy and strong and as though she had been feeding herself well. I recalled how, on my last visit, Yesenia's young neighbor Judit had solemnly remarked that for women of humble means like them, breast cancer meant that you died or hoped that God would save you. Four years later, Yesenia had not died. The sky was dumping buckets on the hillside, and so Yesenia and I sat sipping hot water flavored with *hierba luisa* from the yard and caught up.³ Yesenia recounted how she had traveled to Lima, where she underwent a mastectomy and several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation at the public hospital there. The hospital served low-income people who traveled there from all over Peru, people who did not have health insurance through formal employment, and who could not afford to pay for care at a private clinic. Despite the economic and geographical barriers, the grim prognosis of her neighbors, and her own fears, Yesenia survived the bout with breast cancer.

It was not only the benevolent support of the state's public care that got her through the illness. Survival required a steely amount of grit and determination on Yesenia's part. She endured multiple eighteen-hour bus rides from her home to Lima to obtain the surgery and for rounds of chemotherapy. Along with all of the other low-income people seeking affordable medical attention, Yesenia waited for care. She stood in line outside the hospital for hours, in the rain and the sun, while she patiently awaited her turn for attention. In no small part, Yesenia also owed her survival to the unpaid caring labor of her sister, who had migrated to Lima many years previously to look for work and continued to reside there. Yesenia's sister housed her, fed her, and nursed her throughout the course of her treatment.

Like women all over the country today and throughout history, Yesenia's sister stepped in where the state had retreated or, perhaps more accurately, had never really been present for people like them. While her sister's care work saved Yesenia the cost of lodging in a foreign city, she still had to pay for travel to and from Lima and within it, as well as for medication. Once she had completed the rounds of

chemotherapy in Lima, she had to continue with oral treatment. The five-month course of medication that the doctor prescribed cost Yesenia eight hundred soles (approximately UD\$245). For a household that falls below the poverty line, this was an enormous cost.

Development experts consider CCTs to be an important part of the social safety net, providing households with a cushion against unexpected shocks. Cancer is not an uncommon shock; and for women like Yesenia, the cost of the cure was substantial. The hundred soles that Juntos provided Yesenia every month helped her buy school supplies, mobile phone credit and chickens, and it surely softened her fall. Yet the absence of other vital social supports, including accessible and affordable health care, amounts to a barrier that for many is insurmountable. If Yesenia had not had the available caring labor of her sister in Lima, and her husband at home who cared for their children in Yesenia's absence, Yesenia would have been forced to "choose" not to access medical attention. Yesenia's neighbor Lydia had not fared as well. She had received a similar diagnosis and had not survived. The safety net available to Yesenia and her neighbors remains far too patchy.

Within the next two years, Yesenia will be disaffiliated from the Juntos program because her youngest daughter will graduate high school. During our conversation, I was reminded again what it meant to be a responsible mother in rural Peru. This time, I had walked up to Yesenia's house with Verónica, Judit's younger sister. Verónica was eleven years old and very studious. During our visit, Yesenia asked her all about her classes and which she preferred and why. When Verónica told us, gloomily, about a girl in her class that copied off Verónica's paper and ended up getting a very good score, Yesenia offered some advice. She recounted to Verónica a time when a student cheated by copying the work of her eldest daughter, Silvia. When this happened Silvia was very upset, but Yesenia told her that she had to keep studying, "because you cannot get ahead in life by cheating." She said to Silvia that she had to keep working on herself until she was the one receiving the top marks. Today, Yesenia told us, Silvia was studying to be an accountant at a technical college in the city. She had earned a scholarship on account of the many times she had won mathematics competitions—without cheating. Verónica sat listening, eyes glued to Yesenia.

On the walk home from Yesenia's house, Verónica listed the many kinds of books she liked to read, thoughtfully considering the idea that while mathematics was not her favorite, perhaps she could become a doctor or a nurse. I could not help but think that, once again, Yesenia had displayed precisely the kind of caring, responsible motherhood that governments, development experts, and the CCT programs they devise do too little to recognize or support.

Care work involves educating children and ensuring they have access to basic medical care. It also involves much more than this. Good care requires physical and emotional work, it requires significant expenditures of time, money, and

effort. While the benefits of care work are disbursed broadly and benefit society as a whole, the costs of caring are disproportionately borne by women (Razavi 2007a, 12). We cannot reasonably expect women to “lift families out of poverty,” as the popular adage goes, if we fail to account for the relationship between women’s subordinate social status and the fact that care work is typically unpaid or poorly paid. All too often the way that we structure economic and social policy fails to recognize the value of care and the gendered costs of accomplishing it.

This is perhaps nowhere more stark than in common understandings of economic development. Care work is not recognized as “productive” labor in most aggregate measures of economic activity, such as the gross domestic product.⁴ As a result, when we build policies to achieve economic growth, care and the majority of women who do it are omitted from the equation (Waring 1988). Some countries have taken steps to change this. In 1993, the System of National Accounts was revised to include undercounted (unpaid family work, home-based work, self-employment work, and informal-sector work) and uncounted (subsistence) work in GDP calculations. This was a considerable achievement, but it could go much farther. The System of National Accounts does not count important areas of unpaid care work, including homemaking; caring for children and sick, disabled, and elderly household members; and volunteer work. Some countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Australia, decided to value these activities through use of “satellite accounts” (see Razavi 2007a, 5). These attempts to “count” care work recognize that the unpaid contributions of women like Yesenia are valuable.

In the context of international aid and development, we can use care as a touchstone to assess the substance and sustainability of agendas invoking women and their empowerment. As a Canadian and a feminist, I have tracked, celebrated, written letters about, and raised the occasional eyebrow at my current government’s Feminist International Assistance Policy. It is still too early to tell what gains for women this self-proclaimed feminist agenda might deliver, but I’m optimistic. Having the courage to use the political term *feminist* already demonstrates a commitment to meaningful social change.

Something we might watch for is whether this new agenda positions women as a means to an end or as an end in themselves. There is little if anything feminist in the status quo approach to international development that views women and their labor as tools with which to benefit others, always others (the community, the economy, children, the nation). Investments in women and their empowerment are all too often crafted to achieve economic growth, better returns for philanthropic investors, bigger impacts for social entrepreneurs, and greater outcomes for foreign aid donors. Considering how often women’s empowerment is evoked in relation to some other suffering group or ambitious cause, one could easily make the mistake of assuming that women already enjoy full social, political, and economic equality with men. But it was precisely by approaching women and their

caring labor as free-of-charge resources that experts offering CCTs generated a host of gendered and unjust costs.

We might also assess the transformative potential of feminist international development assistance by how it recognizes and reduces women's unpaid-care burden. In addition to documenting the hidden costs of care, this will entail attending to the broader conditions of caring. Mothers in rural Peru still have to overcome a host of economic and geographical barriers that people in wealthier and better-served places do not. In the following paragraphs I offer a few reflections on the future of cash transfer programs and the prospects for a meaningful social safety net in places where development remains starkly uneven.

UNCONDITIONED CASH AND A STRONGER SAFETY NET

In the nearly four years I had been away, the village of Sonsonate had changed so dramatically that it was almost unrecognizable. The district government was finally fulfilling its promise to extend water and drainage pipes to all of the houses in the village. A grumbling excavator turned dirt roads and brushy pathways between houses into muddy canals, and long pipes lay waiting. Paloma, who had arrived in Sonsonate forty years previously, was happy about the forthcoming water services. She would no longer have to wait her weekly turn to irrigate the garden. As Paloma's three youngest children staged an impromptu photo shoot with my iPhone, we chatted about all of the other things that had changed in the village. Two new food-processing plants had set up shop, one on either end of the village, and the enormous white buildings stood in sharp contrast to the mostly concrete and adobe houses. One of the plants processed fruits and grains for export abroad. Paloma told me that it did not source the fruits and grains locally, however. Most people in Sonsonate were subsistence farmers, and their yields were too small to attract the plant's buyers. In any case, the plant paid very poorly for the produce and grains, much less than the going rate in the local market. Authorities had also promised the arrival of new jobs with the two plants, but neither of them appeared to be hiring locally.

It seemed that almost everyone that I talked to, whether in Cajamarca city or the villages outside, lamented what they perceived to be an increasing shortage of paid work. Paloma's kind husband, Edison, was among them. On both occasions that I got to visit with him on this return trip, he was dressed in a hard hat and safety vest and was covered in mud. Edison had gotten work helping install the village's new water and drainage system. The project was commissioned by the government, but it was a private contractor who hired him and a number of other able-bodied men from the community. Edison used to work as a day laborer in construction in Cajamarca city, but in the past three years the work had all but dried up. He told me that the work in the village was poorly paid, in large part because it was through a contractor, and contractors frequently paid wages well

under what should have been the going rate. The job was temporary, expected to last for only three more weeks. While he was visibly disheartened, Edison took the work without complaint. What other choice, he asked, did he have?

It wasn't only people in the villages who lamented the downturn in local employment opportunities. It was also people in the urban middle class. I had lunch with Ofelia, who had worked for Juntos as the local managers' direct supervisor. Ofelia, like a score of other regional staff, had gone through several bouts of unemployment over the previous three years. She had left Juntos to work for another national social program that provided the elderly poor with unconditional cash transfers, called *Pensión 65*. Ofelia delighted in the work, which she thought was more about *accompanying* the poor than her previous role with Juntos. In large part this was because the unconditional nature of *Pensión 65* meant no time spent monitoring conditions and plenty of time spent getting to know the elderly beneficiaries and what they needed. But the program underwent a series of administrative changes and Ofelia was let go. She looked for work, but to no avail. Ofelia explained to me that since Peru's growth rate had slowed in 2015 (largely owing to reduced activity in the extractive industries), the country's biggest social programs were cutting staff.⁵ The job market was saturated with other people who, like her, had years of experience in public and private social programs and were now unable to find a job.⁶

Ofelia and her colleagues are members of Peru's "new middle class." Many of them came from the rural villages that they eventually managed as social-program frontline staff. Their parents were farmers or domestic workers who labored to overcome the barriers that rural people face and to provide their children with more opportunities than they had themselves. This was, of course, well before Juntos arrived in those very same villages. Ofelia, like others, had studied hard and won a place at the public university, where she eventually earned a master's degree. Since graduating, she had worked for a number of social programs and believed that it was possible to alleviate poverty. When Ofelia and I had lunch, she was in the first week of a new job. It was her fourth in four years, and it followed a stint of unemployment that had lasted just over six months. Ofelia was not sure how long she would be in this new post—would the economy pick up again? For members of Peru's new middle class, poverty was only a short fall away.

In the context of scarce employment opportunities, social safety nets play an important role, not only for the poorest, but also for members of the middle class whose world of work is precarious (World Bank 2017). While CCTs are frequently deployed to prompt improvements in children's health and education, they are also one of the many tools that policy makers use to weave a social safety net that prevents people from hitting rock bottom when they've endured a financial shock.

Following the robbery by employees at Juntos and the National Bank, some Peruvian legislators proposed suspending the Juntos program until all issues of "corruption" were resolved. The appropriately sharp response this proposal elicited from Carolina Trivelli, a rural economist and former minister of MIDIS

(where Juntos is housed), serves as a reminder of the way that Juntos functions as a social safety net—by providing cash that helps buffer some of poverty’s more acute effects on rural families. “Impossible, what are people going to do? Not eat, not buy their medicine, not pay their bills. The proposal does not make sense. These programs are crucial for the people who receive them to have minimum living conditions. There is no way to stop [the programs], it’s not like these are people who have money to spare, they are people who need [the cash transfer] to survive” (*El Comercio* 2015). The Juntos recipients that I spent time with would likely concur with the former minister; when broader economic and political conditions make rural life difficult, every “little bit of help” is deeply important.

In this book I have argued that imposing conditions on cash is unjust. But what about providing cash *without* conditions? Policy makers, politicians, and activists in the global north and south are increasingly making a case for an expansion of the social safety net through cash transfers that do not come with conditions attached. In contexts where development experts perceive that the quality or accessibility of services is too low to require poor people to utilize them, many governments have already implemented unconditional cash transfer programs (UCTs). Today, 130 low-income countries are implementing at least one UCT program (Hagen-Zanker et al 2016). Research shows that UCTs and CCTs can have comparable effects in terms of boosting household consumption and increasing service uptake (Gaarder 2012). UCTs are also an increasingly important component of humanitarian and natural-disaster response.⁷ When governments give UCTs instead of food rations, this allows recipients to purchase food, mobile phone credit, or other basic supplies *as they see fit*. Because UCTs are frequently implemented in places where public services are poor, they do not eliminate the requirement that people walk and wait for the things they need. But because they do not impose conditions, they greatly reduce the administrative burden of monitoring compliance and the abuses of power that result in shadow conditions and the exploitation of women’s time.

It is not only low- and middle-income countries that are experimenting with UCTs, either. In Canada, the province of Ontario is piloting a “basic income” for four thousand citizens between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four who are either unemployed or earning a low salary (less than thirty-four thousand Canadian dollars, or twenty-seven thousand US dollars annually). The government “tops up” the beneficiary’s annual income by up to nearly seventeen thousand Canadian dollars (nearly fourteen thousand US dollars), with an additional monthly allowance for people living with a disability. The pilot launched in 2017 and will continue for three years. During this time, researchers will assess the UCT’s effects on a number of factors, including beneficiaries’ labor market participation, levels of stress and anxiety, use of health care services, and housing stability (Government of Ontario, 2017).

Unconditional cash transfers are still highly targeted, in that they direct cash to specific socially and economically marginalized groups. However, the way that

development experts think about targeting is changing, and target groups might eventually include middle-class women like Ofelia. In South Africa and Namibia, there is a movement to expand UCTs into a universal basic income (UBI) grant that would be given to everyone, regardless of income bracket, in an attempt to reduce poverty and soften the effects of mass unemployment. Advocates of the UBI suggest that providing cash grants to everyone could form the basis of a more just way of organizing social, political, and economic life in low-, middle-, and high-income countries alike (Standing 2002; Ferguson 2015).⁸

One high-income country experimenting with the UBI is Finland. The Finnish government currently provides two thousand people between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-eight with a monthly payment of 560 euros (607 US dollars), independent of other income sources or status of employment. The experiment, which began in January 2017, will last two years. At the end of the pilot study, researchers will assess the impact of the UBI on the employment rate. They will also determine whether the UBI met another objective: reduction of bureaucracy and simplification of an otherwise complex social security system (Kela 2017).

For some, the UBI is a practical response to automation and an economy that no longer guarantees the majority of people decent, dependable, formal work. It has the potential to be a form of social support that offers a little bit of help consistently, without relying on women's unpaid labor or disciplining their motherly choices. Advocates suggest that the UBI would reduce the potential for abuses of bureaucratic authority, because recipients would not be required to demonstrate to a middleman that they have "earned" it. Universally provisioned cash would modestly reduce income inequality, and it would also reduce the stigma associated with welfare because everyone would receive it. The grant would not be a significant benefit for middle- and upper-class households, but it also wouldn't be a waste; better-off families and individuals would simply invest it back into the economy, probably through leisure activities like going to the movies or dining out.

Anthropologist James Ferguson optimistically suggests that a universal basic income could form the basis of a "new distributive politics." He asks, "What if a poor person could receive a distributive payment neither as a reciprocal exchange for labour (wages) or good conduct (the premise of conditional cash transfers) nor as an unreciprocated gift (assistance, charity, a helping hand) but instead as a share, a rightful allocation due to a rightful owner?" (Ferguson 2015, 178). A universal cash payment based on the notion of a rightful share has compelling implications, especially if we consider it in relation to unpaid care. Ferguson suggests that instead of thinking narrowly about livelihoods in terms of productive labor and wages, a distributive politics could recognize the necessary relationship between care work and a productive society. He writes, "Since childhood (and before that infancy) always precedes adulthood, the slogan of a distributive radical politics might be this: before a man can produce, he must be nursed—that is, the receipt of unconditional and unearned distribution and care must always precede

any productive labour” (45). Ferguson’s proposal could have profound implications for gender equality, reframing how we think about care work and the value of the women who do it.

Could a universal basic income provide the basis for a more caring society? Maybe, and it is certainly a worthwhile experiment. If a new distributive politics such as this is to have substance, it will require material efforts that extend beyond optimism and a new vocabulary. Ferguson suggests that, instead of being a handout, the cash could be conceived of as a rightful share. Language is powerful, but as I have shown in this book, talking about inclusion, rights, or a *share* is not enough. Development is full of “fuzzwords,” terms like *empowerment* and *participation*, which make people feel good but easily are invoked by projects that have little substance (Cornwall and Eade 2010). Development experts sold Juntos as a mechanism for rights and inclusion and were still able to claim success even after the intervention had been evacuated of its more substantive aims (Cookson 2016). Using feel-good language can dull the imperative to do the more difficult and uncomfortable work of tackling deeply rooted legal, political, economic, and social arrangements through which some people become rich and others stay poor.

For a distributive politics to be meaningful to women, it would first have to advance a narrative about care as essential work and work of value—and then it would have to put substance behind those words. While a cash stipend helps buffer the financial costs of caring at the household level, good care requires a mix of support from individuals and institutions, and it requires emotional labor, skills, and infrastructure. As women’s accounts in this book have illustrated, caring requires more than cash. A caring society is also one that provides accessible, affordable, and high-quality health care and education. A caring society supports and adequately compensates people who care professionally: teachers, nurses, doctors, care aides, nannies, and domestic workers, among others. Cash transfers, even if distributed more justly, would still be just the beginning.

CHECKING THE BLIND SPOTS

Finally, as we consider the transition from imposing conditions to cultivating conditions for caring and living well, I offer reflections on how we may know whether we are making progress. In this book, I demonstrate how a narrow focus on a handful of quantitative metrics created a blind spot that hid the gendered costs of imposing conditions on aid in rural places. Such blind spots abound in global development. Rates of monetary poverty continue to fall, in part owing to governments’ implementation of cash transfer programs, and many development experts now celebrate places like Peru for having become middle-income countries. Yet most of the world still lives on less than ten dollars a day, and income inequality continues to grow (OECD 2015). The drivers of this dilemma are impossible to comprehend if we attend to the wrong metrics.

In order to overcome persistent inequality, the world has lined up behind a new set of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These goals have a unifying aim: leave no one behind. The goals come with more indicators than any previous global development agenda, and countries are actively encouraged by development banks and private funders to measure their progress. Many of these metrics have their merits, yet if we don't want this agenda to leave anyone behind, we still need to check our blind spots. One current, major gap in our understanding of inequality is produced by a lack of census data that can tell us about women's lives. For this reason, philanthropic leaders like Melinda Gates and the Clinton Foundation have partnered with international organizations like UN Women to collect "gender data" on a previously unheard-of scale.

This push for gender data shows real promise and, if successful, will lead to policies and programs that effectively address the drivers of gender inequality. Yet many women's rights activists and development practitioners take the recent buzz with a hearty dose of reservation. This is because "gender data" is often equated with sex-disaggregated statistics, and calls for gender data collection tend to exclude the kinds of qualitative evidence that women's rights organizations routinely use to guide their work. As a result, many view the "measurement imperative" as an externally imposed, impractical, and burdensome distraction from the political work to be done—and funded. They wonder whether the aim of the "gender data revolution" is merely to "count women." Their concerns are not unfounded. After all, one of the most striking lessons from the implementation of CCTs is that numbers tell a partial story. For the gender data movement to transform the unjust conditions of our world, it must go beyond technical indicators and ask uncomfortable questions about identity, power, wealth, and justice. Gender data must include women's accounts of their own lives.

If we are to leave no one behind, we need to do slow research to complement the fast gains of quantitative evaluations. Slow research is no silver bullet, but when done well it can reveal depth and nuances in the conditions of people's everyday lives. To be sure, in this approach to data collection the answers do not come quickly. Yet the tendency of slow research to instill a level of humility in those who seek to improve this world is also its biggest promise. By looking slowly, by patiently learning which questions to ask, and by taking the time to listen with care, we can begin to see those things that otherwise remain in the shadows. The messy features of social life, the pernicious economic and political arrangements that harm so many—these unjust conditions are available for investigation. And it is not just the more wicked aspects of our world that we can come to understand. Through slow research, we may identify the openings, levers, and possibilities for crafting a more just and caring society.

