

# WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE SELF-TARGETING OF FOOD AID?

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May 2020

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This paper is an updated version of the paper presented at the annual conference of the *Société Française d'Economie Rurale* (Bordeaux, France, 12-13 December 2019).

## Abstract:

Self-targeting (ST) is a method used to allocate social transfers to specific households. Its principle is very simple: transfers are proposed to all households in the community, but conditions are created to discourage households that are not in need from asking for them. Three modalities are used: low-quality food is distributed; queues are created intentionally when distributing food or cash; or a matching contribution in the form of work is required. Experts are usually enthusiastic about ST because it is proving to be much more cost-effective than classical targeting methods (T). However, some experts share the feeling that “there is something wrong with ST”. This article provides the first systematic analysis of the ethical issues raised by ST. It assesses ST under a wide spectrum of ethics approaches (consequentialist and non-consequentialist; objectivist and subjectivist), the counterfactuals being “no transfers” and “transfers targeted through T”. It appears that ST raises huge ethical issues. The potential implications for policies are far-reaching, since self-targeting is widely and increasingly used to channel emergency food aid and other social transfers.

JEL Codes: D63, I31, I38, O15

**Keywords:** Social transfers; Food aid; Targeting; Self-targeting; Ethics

## 1. Introduction

The first time I heard about self-targeting (the topic was the self-targeting of food aid), I was shocked. Since then, I have asked many people how they feel about it. And do you know what? It seems humanity can be divided into two groups: those who are shocked and those who “do not see what the problem is”. But I should first explain what self-targeting is.

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### Acknowledgments :

I am grateful to Lori Keleher for very helpful comments and suggestions. The conclusions drawn in this article, and its recommendations, are solely mine.

## 1.1. Self-targeting

Self-targeting is a method used to allocate social transfers to specific households. Social transfers typically consist of cash, food, vouchers or other goods (for instance agricultural inputs). They can be implemented on a permanent basis (with the aim of reducing poverty or chronic malnutrition), or as and when a crisis occurs. In all cases, the challenge is to channel transfers towards the households that need them, and only these households: otherwise, the cost of the transfer programme would be huge. Moreover, transfers can generate market distortions: cash transfers may distort the labour market, food transfers the food markets and fertiliser transfers the market for fertilisers. This is why it is usually considered necessary to restrict the group of recipients to households in need.

The problem is that targeting households in need is highly complicated. Several methods exist, such as geographical targeting (based on identifying affected areas), administrative targeting (based on specific household-related criteria, usually proxies related to income and poverty such as education, and housing conditions), or community-based targeting (relying on the people in charge of local communities). All of these methods are costly and, even when combined, they are also imperfect: some households in need are not covered (exclusion error), while some households that do not need the aid receive it (inclusion error), see Table 1.

Table 1. Targeting errors

		Households in need?	
		Yes	No
Recipients?	Yes	A: rightly included households	B: wrongly included households ( <i>inclusion error</i> )
	No	C: wrongly excluded households ( <i>exclusion error</i> )	D: rightly excluded households

Empirical studies show that, for many transfer programmes, the inclusion and exclusion error rates are high, meaning not only that there are significant “leakages” (a high percentage of non-poor or non-food-insecure households are included), but also (and this is much more problematic) that a high percentage of poor or food-insecure households are not covered (Banerjee 2016; Brown *et al.* 2018). Moreover, almost all empirical studies deal with permanent transfers, i.e. the type of transfers for which targeting is less complex because the people in charge of designing the transfer programme can implement large-scale household surveys and build a database of households with detailed information on their needs and incomes. The case of emergency transfers is much more challenging: when a food crisis or a famine occurs, there is very little time to organise the distributions, and resources (including logistical resources) are often limited. Although very little data is available on emergency transfers, it seems reasonable to assume that the effectiveness of targeting is even lower (or much lower) for these transfers. This has dramatic consequences as, in this case, targeting errors may result in serious deficiencies in calories or nutrients that may – directly or indirectly – result in death or harm the development of young children’s brains.

The practical issue here is reducing the inclusion and exclusion error rates. One way to proceed is by applying less restrictive criteria when selecting recipients. Doing so will reduce the exclusion error rate, but will increase the inclusion error rate. An alternative is to apply more sophisticated targeting methods (based, for instance, on detailed household

surveys). This could reduce both types of errors, but the cost of targeting will increase. If the budget is limited, the amount transferred will then have to be reduced accordingly (either the number of recipients and/or the amount per transfer). There is in fact a kind of trade-off between the inclusion error rate, the exclusion error rate and the cost: reducing one of these often implies increasing at least one of the two others. This is a real dilemma, which is further complicated by the fact that the difficulties of targeting are not only (and sometimes not primarily) technical: targeting is also liable to generate political economy issues, as decision-makers are likely to be under pressure to provide transfers to specific social groups.

This is where self-targeting (ST) comes in. ST has been proposed as a solution to overcome the poor efficiency of classical targeting methods (T). The principle is very simple: food aid is proposed to all households in the community, but conditions are created to discourage households that are not in need from asking for it. Three basic methods are used: low-quality food is distributed; queues are created intentionally when distributing food or cash; or a matching contribution in the form of work is required. Of course, the “low-quality food” distributed is always safe and nutritious: it is just that it does not conform to local habits and preferences. When participation in public work is requested as a matching contribution (as is the case in the “food-for-work” and “cash-for-work” programmes), wages should be low enough to discourage non-food-insecure households from participating. But, of course, households that are not able to provide the work (because they are old, ill or suffering from deficiencies) are exempted from this requirement.

The rationale of ST can be represented as follows. To obtain the transfer, people must accept an “inconvenience”: the matching contribution of work, the time spent queuing or the reluctance to eat food they do not like (depending on the ST modality used). The utility generated by receiving a transfer can be expressed by  $U = U(A) - C(I)$ ,  $U(A)$  being the utility related to the amount  $A$  received and  $C(I)$  being the cost of the inconvenience intentionally introduced through the self-targeting method used. Why should this cost result in households self-selecting themselves in an effective manner? Let us consider two households: a household  $i$  that needs food aid and a household  $j$  that does not. Their utility when receiving the transfer is given by:  $U_i = U_i(A) - C_i(I)$  and  $U_j = U_j(A) - C_j(I)$ . We may reasonably expect that  $U_i(A) > U_j(A)$ : the same amount of money or food will generate more utility when transferred to a poor or food-insecure household than when transferred to a household from, for example, the middle class. We may also reasonably expect that  $C_j(I) > C_i(I)$ : the (opportunity) cost of the time spent queuing or working for the transfer programme is likely to be higher for the less poor households because they usually have more economic opportunities. This means that we may reasonably expect that  $U_i > U_j$ . If  $I$  is correctly fine-tuned (the length of the queue, the level of quality of the food distributed, the wages paid for recipients’ work), for (almost) all households in need, the utility of receiving the transfer will be positive (they will accept the transfer), whereas for (almost) all households not in need, this utility will be negative (they will not ask for the transfer). What ST offers is the promise of effective targeting; one might even say the promise of efficient targeting, as the cost of ST seems to be relatively low compared to classical targeting methods.

Now you know what self-targeting is. Are you shocked or enthusiastic?

## 1.2. Is there something wrong with self-targeting?

Economists are usually enthusiastic. They like cost-effective tools and self-targeting is a very low-cost method that has proven to be effective in selecting only households in need (see, for instance, Alatas *et al.* [2016]). Some years ago, I had the opportunity to question two of the leading international experts on food security and food aid. They said they do not see what the problem is. The first one gave the example of Ethiopia, where cash-for-work programmes were implemented with the result of improving food security both in the short term (thanks to the cash transferred to food-insecure households) and in the long term, because recipients' work contributed to improving roads and thus connections between surplus areas and deficit areas. The second expert gave the example of Mozambique, where imported yellow maize (considered as low-quality compared with the local white maize) led to the self-targeting of food-insecure households, while having no depressing effect on white maize prices and production. Both experts said that compared with the consequences of malnutrition, having to consume low-quality food is not really a problem. And they are right of course, from a certain point of view.

One month later, I had the opportunity to discuss the same question with recipients of food aid in France. They were complaining about the low quality of the food distributed and about the long queues to get their "basket". I told them that in the developing countries, the low quality of the food distributed and the long queues are not only related to cost and logistical issues (as is the case in France), but are purposely created in order to induce self-targeting. Do you know what? They were horrified.

I repeated the "experiment" with a number of people. Some were experts on food aid, food security, poverty or social transfer programmes. Others were not aware of these topics and I had to explain to them what social transfers, targeting methods and self-targeting are. In both groups, some people were shocked, while others did not see any problem with self-targeting methods.

The coexistence of these two (very different) reactions raises several puzzling questions. First, what explains the feeling that "there is something wrong with self-targeting"? Second, why do only some people share this feeling, whereas others do not see any problem with ST? Third, who is right and who is wrong? The general answer to the second question is obvious: people from the two groups apply different criteria. Answering the third question would therefore require using a kind of meta-criterion to assess the criteria used by both groups. But perhaps the most puzzling question is the first one, a question that can be expressed as follows: "What are the criteria used by people who feel that there is something wrong with self-targeting?". For people in the other group (those who "do not see what the problem is"), it is quite simple. These people are pragmatists: they are in favour of what works, and self-targeting works well (it effectively targets households in need, at a low cost). Therefore, applying self-targeting maximises the impact of transfer programmes on poverty or food insecurity. However, for the first group, things are more complicated. Although I belong to this group (I feel that "there is something wrong with ST"), I struggle to explain what is wrong. The analysis developed in this article is an attempt to answer this question and, in this way, to address the two other questions. My main focus will be on the self-targeting of emergency food aid (the issue I am most familiar with), but it seems to me that the conclusions apply to all types of social transfers (I will come back to this point in the conclusion). In section 2, I will try to identify what is wrong with ST by using different ethics approaches (consequentialist and non-consequentialist, objective and subjective). Given that identifying what is wrong with ST will prove difficult (whatever the approach used), in section

3, I will propose an extended analysis based on a hypothesis rooted in empirical works on transfers. I will discuss the implications of this hypothesis for the evaluation of ST under the ethics approaches reviewed in section 2. In the conclusion, I will provide answers to the three puzzling questions listed above and draw practical implications for the use of ST.

## 2. Assessing self-targeting under different ethics approaches

Let me first clarify that I do not question the cost-effectiveness of self-targeting. The empirical literature converges towards the idea that self-targeting is very cost-effective, not perfect, but much better than classical targeting. Although some divergent works emphasise the limitations of ST (see, for instance, Alderman and Lidert [1998]) or propose a more nuanced view of the relative performance of T and ST (Coady, Grosh and Hoddinott 2004), I will not enter into this debate. Even assuming that ST is very cost-effective, my feeling is that there is still a problem with it. In this article, to be extremely clear and straightforward, I will even assume that ST leads to perfect targeting (no inclusion or exclusion errors), and I will try to investigate what is wrong with it, in spite of its assumed perfection.

How can we go beyond cost-effectiveness? The point of departure is the observation that the cost-effectiveness of ST only refers to the viewpoint of the transfer programme, with its objective (reducing poverty, improving food security) and its limited means. To go beyond cost-effectiveness, we must therefore go beyond the viewpoint of the social transfers programme and consider the viewpoint of the households that are the potential recipients of transfers. Then, the question we must consider is the following: can their situation deteriorate because of the implementation of self-targeted transfers?

Answering this question requires criteria that can be used to compare the situation of the population considered with i) no transfers, ii) transfers targeted through classical methods (T) and iii) self-targeted transfers (ST). Many criteria have been proposed by the numerous theories of justice. The authors of these theories usually consider that the criteria they propose should not be applied to a specific institution, but to the full set of institutions in a given society. In any case, since we can consider social transfers as an optional institution (which may or may not exist), it seems that we can use the *ceteris paribus* clause to discuss whether household situations *with* transfers are better or worse than *without* transfers and, similarly to compare the situations resulting from transfers with T and those with ST. In other words, we can try to assess the *contribution* of transfers to the satisfaction of criteria of justice in the population considered, depending on whether they are targeted through T or ST. I will successively consider criteria based on endowments, welfare and freedoms.

### 2.1. Endowments

The simplest and most intuitive way to analyse whether ST is better or worse than T is to consider their impacts on household endowments. To do this, we need a criterion enabling us to rank different sets of endowments from best to worst. An intuitive criterion is based on equality. Under this criterion, ST can be considered as better than T if it contributes more to reducing inequalities within the population considered. I will examine this criterion in the second stage, but I must first consider criteria that are more in line with the objectives of transfers. Indeed, the explicit objectives of transfers are not related to reducing

inequalities, but to reducing poverty or food insecurity. They are therefore more closely related to a maximin rationale (improving the situation of the least fortunate people as much as possible). They are thus closer to the “difference principle” proposed by John Rawls in his Theory of Justice (1971). However, for Rawls, the difference principle cannot be considered separately from another principle: the “fair equality of opportunity”. Let us consider these two principles.

Rawls’ “fair equality of opportunity principle” holds that people in a similar situation (e.g. with the same skills) should have the same opportunities (e.g. job opportunities). Social transfers targeted through classical methods (T) are supposed to meet this criterion: all poor or food-insecure households are supposed to have access to transfers, contrary to non-poor and non-food-insecure households. However, given that in practice, targeting through classical methods (T) is always imperfect, some households in need do not have access to transfers (although they are in a similar situation to other households in need that do have access to transfers) and, symmetrically, some households that are not in need have access to transfers. Under this principle, ST is clearly better: because it offers transfers to all households, *a fortiori*, all households in a similar situation have the same opportunity to access transfers. The same conclusion can be drawn for Rawls’ “difference principle”. Targeting through classical methods (T) is theoretically in line with this principle: the distinction made between households that do not have access and households that do clearly advantages the less fortunate people because those who have access are poor or food-insecure households. However, in practice, because of the imperfection of targeting, some households in need do not receive transfers, while some households that are not in need do: the maximin rationale of the principle of difference (improving the endowments of the less advantaged as much as possible) is clearly not satisfied. The situation is better with ST, as the rate of targeting errors is lower with ST than with T. With the (unrealistic) assumption made in this article that ST leads to perfect targeting, we can even say that ST fully satisfies the difference principle (the difference made between recipients and non-recipients clearly advantages the less fortunate people).

Although equality is not one of the explicit objectives of social transfers, we can consider the potential contribution of transfers to reducing inequalities. By increasing the endowments of poor households and only poor households, social transfers are supposed to reduce the gap between poor and non-poor households and to thereby contribute to reducing inequalities (although they do not affect inequalities within the group of poor households or within the group of non-poor households). Theoretically, this result holds whatever the targeting method used (T or ST). But again, the imperfection of targeting changes the picture. As ST is assumed to generate better targeting than T, it is likely to contribute more to reducing inequalities. In short, whatever the endowment-based criteria used to compare household situations, ST seems to be better than T.

Things are more complicated, however, because until now we have assumed that shifting from T to ST will only affect the allocation of resources (food or cash), not their level. But the inconvenience purposely introduced in order to generate self-targeting induces a cost for recipients: the time spent queueing or working for the transfer programme could have been used for income-generating activities; the same can be said for the time spent reselling the low-quality food received when the recipient household is not willing to consume it. Therefore, because of the inconvenience purposely introduced into it, ST may have a lower impact than T on the purchasing power of recipient households. Even if ST leads

to better targeting, T may therefore have a greater effect on food insecurity or poverty. This is precisely the finding of a study on a workfare programme operating in the Indian state of Bihar (Murgai, Ravallion and van de Walle 2016). This is a striking result because this programme operates in a context that seems to be conducive to workfare: Bihar is one of the poorest states in India, with a high rural unemployment rate (16 % for men and 32 % for women, twice the national average). However, two effects that are in favour of ST are not included in this study. First, as the targeting costs are usually lower with ST than with T, the money saved on targeting may be used by the transfer programme to increase the amount transferred (either the number of recipients or the amount per recipient), which gives an advantage to ST. Second, when ST is based on requiring a matching contribution of work, the public work carried out produces public infrastructures (roads, irrigation channels, etc.) that benefit everyone living in the area. In short, although from a theoretical viewpoint there is no certainty that ST is always better than T, this is likely to be the case most of the time. If we want to understand what is wrong with ST, we have to move to other sets of criteria. Let us try criteria based on welfare.

## 2.2. Welfare

Criteria based on welfare take into account more information than criteria based on endowments. What matters is not only the objective consequences of transfers (the food or cash received), but the way they affect the welfare of recipients and potentially of non-recipients.

The first step is to clarify the counterfactual: the reference situation can be either no transfers (ST versus nothing), or transfers targeted by classical targeting methods (ST versus T). Although our main interest is in the second comparison, let us first consider the case of 'ST versus nothing'. It seems that offering self-targeted transfers i) does not change the situation of the households that reject transfers, and ii) can only improve the situation of the households that accept them. Indeed, as ST enables households to choose whether or not they want to be a recipient, it enables them to put in balance all of these costs and benefits: if properly informed, households will accept to receive transfers only if the benefits are higher than the costs for them. Therefore, it seems that when self-targeted, transfers are always beneficial for recipients (and neutral for the other households). It thus seems that the situation with ST is always better than the situation without transfers (ST > nothing). In other words, implementing ST transfers always generate a better situation than no transfers, according to the Pareto criterion: it improves the situation of at least one person without worsening the situation of even a single person<sup>2</sup>.

The second comparison (ST versus T) is more complex: shifting from T to ST generates both winners and losers. This can be easily understood by referring to the four categories of households described in Table 1 and assuming that ST generates perfect targeting. In the first

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Setting aside the question of the financing of the transfer programme (assuming that it is financed from outside, not by taxes paid by members of the population considered, as is actually almost always the case). Note also that the way transfers are funded is not affected by the way targeting is carried out (T or ST): there is therefore no reason to think that the funding of transfers can affect the compared performance of T and NT.

step, I will also assume that the total amount transferred is the same with T and ST. Under these assumptions, the winners and losers are as follows:

- Households in category A were already receiving transfers with T and still receive them with ST. However, with ST they incur the cost of the inconvenience intentionally introduced (providing a matching contribution of work, queuing, or eating food products they dislike). They are therefore losers when the targeting method shifts from T to ST.
- Households in category B are clearly losers: they were receiving transfers with T and they no longer receive them with ST.
- Households in category C are in the opposite situation: they were not receiving transfers with T and they do receive them with ST. Since they choose to accept transfers whereas they were free to reject them, we know that the transfers are welfare-improving for them.
- Households in category D do not receive transfers (either with T or with ST). For them, there is no difference between T and ST.

What can be said about the aggregated effect of shifting from T to ST? Since there are winners and losers, we cannot apply the Pareto criterion (as we did for the comparison 'ST versus nothing'). In any case, assuming that individual utilities can be compared and aggregated, we can identify two factors working in opposite directions. First, the total amount transferred (assumed to be unchanged) is allocated differently: the transfers towards households in category B are diverted towards households in category C. For the reasons explained in section 1.1, we can reasonably assume that the utility generated by the same amount received is higher when the recipients are households in need than when they are not. This factor therefore works in favour of ST being superior to T (in terms of aggregated welfare generated). The second factor concerns the cost of the inconvenience purposely introduced into ST to incentivise the households to self-select themselves. It reduces the utility for all recipients (households in categories A and C). Therefore, strictly speaking, the effect of shifting from T to ST on aggregated welfare is undetermined, although advocates of ST will argue that the gain in utility induced by better targeting poor or food-insecure households is much higher than the cost of the inconvenience purposely introduced by self-targeting methods.

Two other factors support the idea that ST is likely to be better than T. The first concerns the compared cost of T and ST. Until now, I have assumed that the total amount transferred is the same with T and ST, but as ST is usually less costly, it seems more reasonable to assume that the money saved on the cost of targeting is used by the social transfer programme to increase the amount transferred (the amount per transfer, the frequency of transfers and/or the number of recipients). This is an additional reason for thinking that ST is likely to be better than T. Moreover, when ST is based on requiring a matching contribution of work, this work produces public infrastructures (e.g. roads, irrigation infrastructures) that benefit the local population. The second factor is more subtle. It concerns the psychological costs generated by T and (supposedly) removed by ST. The utilitarian framework is usually linked to a selfishness assumption: agents' utility is assumed to be independent from the situation of other agents. Yet sociologists and psychologists have shown that this is often not the case: for instance, people may be jealous or, on the contrary, altruistic. The utilitarian framework can take into account this phenomenon: the only thing to do is to assume that the utility function of agent  $i$  depends on  $j$ 's income or utility. In the case of classical targeting methods

(T), two effects must be considered: recipients may feel stigmatised and non-recipients may feel excluded. An interesting consequence is that non-recipients may be adversely affected by a transfer programme (their utility decreases if they feel excluded) but, more surprisingly, this can also be the case for recipients (if the disutility generated by stigmatisation is higher than the utility generated by the amount received). The final consequence is that a transfer programme implemented through T is not necessarily better than no transfers at all. Given that with ST, households themselves choose whether or not to be a recipient, it seems that the psychological costs related to the feelings of exclusion or stigmatisation disappear, or are at least significantly reduced.

The situation can therefore be summarised as follows:

Table 2. Comparing the welfare generated by transfers when targeted with T and ST

	(1) Utility with T	(2) Utility with ST	$\Delta$ Utility : (2) - (1)
Recipients	$U(A) - U(S)$	$U^*(A^*) - C(I)$	$U^*(A^*) - U(A) + U(S) - C(I)$
Non-recipients	$-U(E)$		$U(E)$
Total	$U(A) - U(S) - U(E)$	$U^*(A^*) - C(I)$	$U^*(A^*) - U(A) + U(S) + U(E) - C(I)$

The welfare gains generated by shifting from T to ST are therefore the following:

- $U^*(A^*) - U(A) > 0$  because i)  $A^* > A$ : the money saved thanks to the lower cost of ST is used to increase the amount transferred; and ii)  $U^*(X) > U(X)$ : the same amount transferred to a household in need generates more utility (and with ST – contrary to T –, all recipient households are assumed to be households in need).
- $U(S)$ : the stigmatisation cost is supposed to be nil (or at least lower) when the household itself chose to accept the transfer.
- $U(E)$ : the exclusion cost is nil when the household itself chose to reject the transfer.

The only element that works against ST is the cost  $C(I)$  of the inconvenience purposely introduced to incentivise households to self-select themselves. It is enough to say that the effect on aggregated welfare is theoretically undetermined. But at the same time, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the time,  $C(I)$  is inferior to the three elements listed above (and therefore that ST is usually better than T).

To sum up, although there is no certainty that ST is always better than T from the viewpoint of aggregated welfare, many elements suggest that this is the case most of the time. In addition, the utilitarian approach does not give us good reasons to be shocked by ST, as it seems that ST does not generate dramatic consequences for household welfare. Therefore, the two approaches we have explored do not help us to identify what is wrong with self-targeting: neither the consequences on household endowments nor the consequences on household welfare seem to be horrific. What these two approaches have in common is that they are purely consequentialist: they are only based on the objective (endowments) or subjective (welfare) consequences of T and ST. To go further, it may be worth exploring approaches that are not purely consequentialist: approaches based on freedoms.

**2.3. Freedoms**

Different philosophical streams emphasise the importance of freedom to choose. Not (as in the utilitarian approach) because more freedom to choose often results in better decisions (following the classical argument that individuals usually know better than anyone else what is good or convenient for them). But because they assume that *freedom to choose has a value in itself*, independently of its consequences on individuals or groups. This non-consequentialist approach based on freedom has deep roots in the history of thought. For instance, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the debate on the abolition of slavery developed within two different frameworks: the utilitarian framework and a non-consequentialist framework based on human rights.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the non-consequentialist approach based on freedom was mainly developed by libertarian thought. People like Robert Nozick emphasised the role of the law and prohibitions in reducing individual freedoms (Nozick 1974). They recommended minimising the scope of prohibited behaviours, putting a strong emphasis on the absolute respect of property rights. For instance, the property right a person has to his own body should not be constrained by a law prohibiting the sale of organs. The main argument made by libertarians against social transfers concerns the way they are financed: if they are funded by taxes, these taxes may be viewed as unjustified constraints restricting individual property rights and freedom. I will not consider this argument here, as I assume that the financing is external to the population considered (see footnote 1). The issue I would like to consider now can be viewed rather as the mirror image of the issue raised by taxes. Should we consider that receiving a transfer without having applied for it and without being willing to receive it is an unjustified restriction of individual freedom? I am not referring here to unpleasant feelings associated with receiving an unwanted transfer (such as the feeling of being stigmatised): these feelings are related to welfare (see section 2.2), not to freedom. I am referring to the following question: “Can receiving an undesired transfer be considered as a restriction of freedom in exactly the same way as an unwelcome tax can be considered as a restriction of freedom?”. To the best of my knowledge, the libertarians have never studied this kind of question and I do not know whether the answer for them could be “yes”. But for my purpose, this does not matter: either receiving an undesired transfer *is not* a problem and, in this case, ST is equivalent to T (it does not generate any problem for individual freedom); or receiving an undesired transfer *is* a problem and, in this case, ST is better than T (ST does not generate any problem for individual freedom, but T does). Note that, in this case, it is not the compared consequences of T and ST that matter (as was the case with criteria based on endowments or welfare), but the fact that, with ST, receiving a transfer is the result of a choice, whereas with T, it is the result of someone else’s decision. In all cases, ST is at least as good as T: the libertarian approach is not very helpful to understand what is wrong with ST.

Other theories propose lists of freedoms that should be guaranteed. Rawls, for instance, proposed a list of “basic liberties” such as political liberty (i.e. to vote and to run for office), [freedom of speech](#) and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, freedom of property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Rawls 1971). It seems that none of these liberties can be affected by social transfers (whatever the method used for targeting).

Perhaps the problem with these theories is that they are only concerned with formal liberties. The approach based on capabilities developed by Amartya Sen implies much more than the libertarian view: beyond formal liberties, it stresses the importance of allowing people to *really* have a choice (Sen 1985), which may require specific interventions to

increase the capabilities of people in difficulty. For instance, to be free to choose, some people will need more endowments (the case of poor people), others will need more infrastructures (the case of people living in remote areas far from any hospital), and yet others will need more education. The point is that in Sen's view, what matters is not only the fact that people with more capabilities are likely to have different "functionings" (and therefore a better life, according to their own criteria of what is a good life), but also that the freedom to choose has a value in itself, independently of its consequences. This is why Sen's approach (called "broad consequentialism") is a mixed approach to freedom: like the libertarians, he gives an intrinsic value to freedom; like purely consequentialist approaches (based on endowments or welfare), he takes into account the consequences of freedom on people's lives. It can therefore be considered as a relatively comprehensive approach. Perhaps it will give us some keys to understand what is wrong with self-targeting.

The rationale of social transfers is consistent with Sen's capabilities approach. For instance, transferring cash to poor households is likely to strengthen their capabilities. The same can be said for food transfers: recipients' capabilities are increased if they are better fed and in better health. Moreover, receiving food enables them to save money (the money that would otherwise have been spent on food). This money can be used for many purposes and increases their freedom of choice. Do we have any reason to think that ST is better or worse than T? Yes indeed. We have two good reasons to think that ST is likely to be better. First, as ST is more effective than T in targeting poor households, ST is likely to have a stronger effect on the capabilities of people with low capabilities. Second, ST offers more freedom of choice than T, as the households themselves choose whether or not to ask for the transfer<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it seems that both the consequentialist and the non-consequentialist components of Sen's criteria converge towards the idea that ST is likely to be better than T. It seems that approaches based on freedom do not really help us to understand what is wrong with self-targeting.

## 2.4. Synthesis

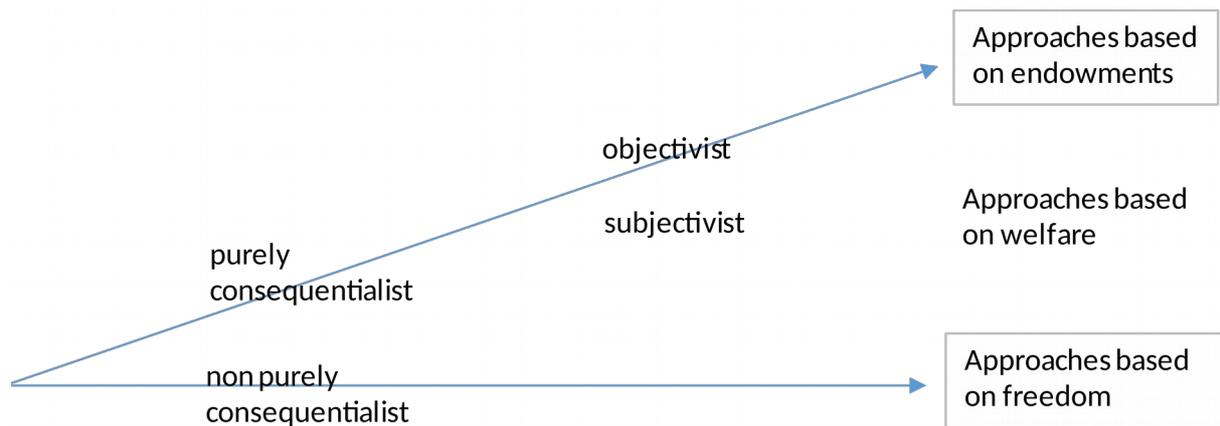
None of the approaches reviewed seems capable of explaining the feeling that there is "something wrong" with self-targeting. This is surprising in a way because these approaches are fairly representative of the different possible approaches that can be used to formulate a normative judgment: consequentialist versus non-consequentialist, objectivist versus subjectivist (see Figure 1).

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Incidentally, note that if freedom of choice has a value in itself *for the agents themselves*, it seems possible to integrate this value into the utilitarian framework. This gives an additional advantage to ST (compared to T), since having an additional option appears to increase welfare: even the welfare of the agents who decide to reject the option is increased.

Figure 1. Typology of the approaches reviewed



Whatever the approach used, ST appears to be at least as good as T, and often better. This is because:

- (a) ST is generally less costly than T: with the same budget, the amount transferred can be higher with ST
- (b) ST is generally more effective than T (fewer errors of targeting): the amount transferred is channelled towards poorer or more food-insecure households
- (c) ST enables households to choose whether or not they will be recipients of transfers (contrary to T).

These different factors play a different role depending on the approach considered: the superiority of ST over T stems from (a) and (b) for approaches based on endowments, from factor (c) for the Libertarian approach to freedom, and from (a), (b) and (c) for approaches based on welfare and Sen’s approach to freedom based on capabilities.

The only factor that may work against ST is the “inconvenience” intentionally introduced in order to induce self-targeting: having to provide a matching contribution in the form of work, having to queue, or having to eat low-quality food. However, the cost of this inconvenience is usually assumed to be relatively low compared to the consequences of food-insecure households not receiving the transfers they need. The cost of having to queue or to work to receive the food or the cash you need to feed your family seems to be fairly low, especially for poor households that have very few alternative opportunities. Moreover, when a household receives low-quality food and does not want to consume it, it often has the possibility to resell it (even if this implies incurring a transaction cost, it still leaves some profit). Whatever the modality used, the fact that, with ST, recipient households choose to ask for transfers seems to prove that, for them, the benefit of receiving the transfer is higher than the cost incurred to obtain it.

Perhaps you are now beginning to ask yourself if there is *really* something wrong with self-targeting. Perhaps it is time to ask to yourself to which part of humanity you belong. Are you one of those who “do not see what the problem is”, or one of those who are shocked? If (like me) you belong to the second category, then you need to ask yourself “why”.

As a matter of fact, the analysis presented in section 2 does not enable us to identify anything wrong with ST. It seems therefore that the answer to question 3 may be that those

who do not see any problem with ST are right. However, the analysis does not provide any answers to questions 1 and 2. What drives the feeling that there is something wrong with self-targeting? What explains that some people share this feeling whereas others do not? It seems that, to be acceptable, an analysis should provide a convincing answer to the three questions.

The following section presents an extended analysis capable of answering the three questions.

### **3. An extended analysis**

In the previous section, I tried (unsuccessfully) to identify what is wrong with ST. As I used different criteria stemming from the main ethics approaches, this suggests that the limitation of my analysis does not come from the criteria used, but rather from the empirical facts to which these criteria were applied.

In section 2, the empirical facts taken into account to assess T and ST (and to compare them) were i) the flows of food or cash they allocate, ii) the freedom to choose whether or not to be a recipient, and iii) the inconvenience intentionally introduced to generate household self-targeting. Three observations are derived from section 2. First, ST is usually better than T to allocate the flows of food or cash (fewer targeting errors, lower targeting cost). Second, ST provides households with more freedom to choose, as they decide whether or not they want to receive transfers. Third, the first two observations imply that the only element that can explain why ST may be worse than T is the third one: the problem with ST is probably linked to the inconvenience intentionally introduced to generate household self-targeting. Fourth, analysing this inconvenience as a cost does not enable us to understand what is wrong with self-targeting: for starving households, the opportunity cost of the time wasted to queue or work is low compared to the benefit resulting from the transfer.

Therefore, to understand what is wrong with ST, *we need to expand the set of empirical facts we take into account, by including in the analysis new implications of the inconvenience intentionally introduced to generate household self-targeting*. As we will now see, empirical works suggest that these new implications may be related to messages sent by targeting procedures.

#### **3.1. Evidence that targeting sends messages**

Empirical works show that transfers not only provide flows of resources (food, cash): they also provide messages. These (implicit) messages are conveyed through all the characteristics of transfers: their nature (food, cash, vouchers), amount, frequency and targeting (who is a recipient and who is not). We have evidence that transfers always convey messages, even when not accompanied by awareness actions (for instance on nutrition). A key example is related to the so-called “citizenship effect” of transfers (Banerjee 2016). It has been observed that households increase their food consumption more when their income increases because of a (cash or food) transfer than when it increases for other reasons. This fact shows that transfers convey an (implicit) message related to the importance that should be given to food consumption by the family. It is even more than that: impact assessment

studies show that food transfers usually lead to a greater increase in calorie consumption than cash transfers and that, conversely, cash transfers usually lead to a greater increase in food expenditure (for a review, see Gentillini [2005]). This can be interpreted as follows: when a household receives a food transfer (mainly comprised of grain in developing countries), it also receives an implicit message to “consume more calories”. And when it receives a cash transfer, the message is to “spend more money on food consumption”.

Other empirical works focus on the messages sent by the targeting procedures used. At this point, one element should be taken into account: the people who design and implement social transfer programmes are usually far-removed (socially speaking) from the households that are the potential recipients of transfers. They usually come from other countries or other parts of the same country and they are members of different social classes. This social distance often means different ways of thinking and results in surrealistic situations where interventions are perceived as absurd or unfair. To analyse this phenomenon, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan developed the “anthropology of development”. It is based on the very attractive idea of studying development projects and emergency aid from the viewpoint of the “beneficiaries”, and therefore potentially viewing them as strange and exotic entities, exactly as Franz Boas, Claude Lévy-Strauss or Philippe Descola studied “primitive peoples”. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan is usually highly critical: he emphasises the gap between the visions of the designers and “beneficiaries” of development projects (or food aid interventions), and the resulting unexpected effects of these projects or interventions. In particular, he developed a critical analysis of the cash transfers implemented in numerous villages in Niger during the 2005 food crisis. These transfers were targeted through classical methods (T). According to Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, the targeting rules used by the NGOs and other organisations that implemented the transfers were “incomprehensible” to local populations. They often “contradict local norms, keep their distance with municipal authorities, raise suspicions and exacerbate conflicts” (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2014: 107). People reacted by “treating the ‘humanitarian rent’ as a form of the usual ‘development rent’ [provided by the numerous development projects that intervene in Niger], and with the same criteria: everyone should try to ‘get his share’. [...] The targeting criteria used by donors (such as acute child malnutrition) were therefore most of the time perceived as unfair, just as imposed conditionalities that should be circumnavigated” (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2007: 21).

A striking example is provided by the way households reacted to the food transfers implemented by the World Food Programme and the *Cellule de crise alimentaire* (Niger public body in charge of managing food crises). As social targeting was too complicated to implement in this situation of emergency, the choice was made to rely only on geographical targeting and to distribute food to all households in the villages selected. The amount distributed was supposed to be based on the size of the family: the family record book therefore had to be presented in order to receive transfers. However, the need to present the family record book generated several problems. In Niger, some taxes depend on the size of the family, meaning that in many families, numerous members are not declared (resulting in families receiving food for six people when there were actually 20, for example). Moreover, the need for the family record book gave rise to the idea that food transfers were a corollary of having paid taxes (and therefore a right for all taxpayers). Consequently, many people living in villages not covered did not understand why they did not receive transfers in spite of having paid their taxes (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2007). In some localities such as Tirmini, an

additional condition was added to the need for the family record book: the presence of women was supposed to guarantee that the food would be used for family consumption. Many men were thus in trouble because they did not have a wife (they were single, widowed or divorced), because their wife was not available (ill or travelling), or simply because they were not aware of this condition and living far from the delivery place of food transfers. Some women from Tirmini therefore offered them the possibility of a marriage of convenience, with the agreement of their husband (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2007).

Another striking example is provided by the episode of the “lucky babies” that also occurred during the 2005 crisis. Due to the high level of child malnutrition (malnutrition rates triggered the mobilisation of the international community by *Médecins Sans Frontières* or MSF), many nutritional recovery centres were set up. Following MSF, almost all of the NGOs that provided this kind of aid provided food transfers to the families of undernourished children. Having children considered as undernourished therefore became an entry ticket to obtain grain and other food products (beans, oil, sugar). Since the amount of the food transfer was relatively high (with MSF, 50 kg of millet, 25 kg of beans and 10 l of oil when the child left the nutritional recovery centre), it was attractive for rural households. Women who came back to their village with food from the nutritional recovery centre were congratulated and having a child classified as undernourished was perceived as good fortune and the children in question were called the “lucky babies”. The selection criterion (a strap to measure the mid-arm circumference) was completely incomprehensible to the local populations, all the more so given that, for them, being thin is not perceived as a disease. As a result, the women who travelled a long way to reach a nutritional recovery centre and came back with nothing did not understand why they “make selections when everybody is hungry”. Of course, many strategies were devised, including going to the recovery centre with a child from another family or provoking diarrhoea in children to make them lose weight (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2007).

In order to avoid destabilising effects on social structures and institutions, the transfers received are often reallocated, which sometimes results in nullifying the targeting: the cash received is bulked and distributed equally to all households in the village, either directly or in the form of food purchased with the cash collected. On some occasions, some of the money is used to pay village taxes (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2014). These examples of de-targeting highlight the huge hidden social costs that can be generated by targeting.

This analysis only deals with T (not ST): all of these examples of the potential destructuring effects of transfers on social relations and institutions concern transfers implemented through classical targeting methods (T). Nevertheless, it seems possible to build on Olivier de Sardan’s analysis to investigate the (potential) adverse impacts of ST. This is what I will do now.

### **3.2. A hypothesis on the messages sent by self-targeting**

These empirical elements lead me to formulate the following hypothesis to explain what is wrong with ST:

*“When ST is implemented, messages are conveyed by the inconvenience purposely introduced in order to generate self-targeting (having to queue, having to provide a matching*

contribution of work, having to eat low-quality food). Three types of (implicit) messages are sent:

- (1) to all the households to which transfers are proposed: messages telling them how they are perceived by those who provide them with transfers (the government of their country, or the international community when the transfers are provided by international NGOs or UN organisations): as people suited to doing a poorly paid job, to spending time queueing or to eating low-quality food.
- (2) to all the heads of households: messages telling them that, since they are responsible for the food security of their family, if they face difficulties they should accept the transfer (enduring its associated inconvenience), thereby putting a lot of pressure on their shoulders, including making them feel guilty about the idea of rejecting the transfer.
- (3) to the households that accept transfers: messages not only made of words but lived “bodily”, as they have to constrain their body to some kind of self-discipline: eat the low-quality food<sup>4</sup>, queue for a long time or work.

These three effects are strongly interrelated: (2) carries a behavioural norm that leads many heads of households who are struggling to feed their family to accept transfers; they then have to constrain their body to some form of self-discipline (3)<sup>5</sup>, which in a way results in “validating” the way they are perceived by those who provide the transfers (1).

All of these effects involve some form of symbolic violence: violence linked to the negative image of themselves sent to the members of the population considered (which may affect their self-esteem); violence linked to the pressure and guilt put on heads of household; or violence lived bodily by the households that accept transfers.”

Can the different ethics approaches include the messages implicitly conveyed by ST (and the violence carried by these messages)? This is what we will consider now.

### 3.3. Evaluating self-targeting while taking into account the messages it sends

To what extent does taking account of messages modify the conclusions on ST provided by the different ethics approaches (the results presented in section 2)? Let us take these approaches one after another.

*Approaches based on endowments.* As these approaches only focus on flows of cash or food (which are not affected by messages), they cannot capture the effects of these messages (the symbolic violence they carry). This can be illustrated by considering the (extreme) case in which maize was distributed to populations that usually use it only to feed

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The low-quality food received can sometimes be resold on the market. In this case, the recipient household is protected from the violence of the third type of message. However, the violence is transferred to the person who buys this food and eats it.

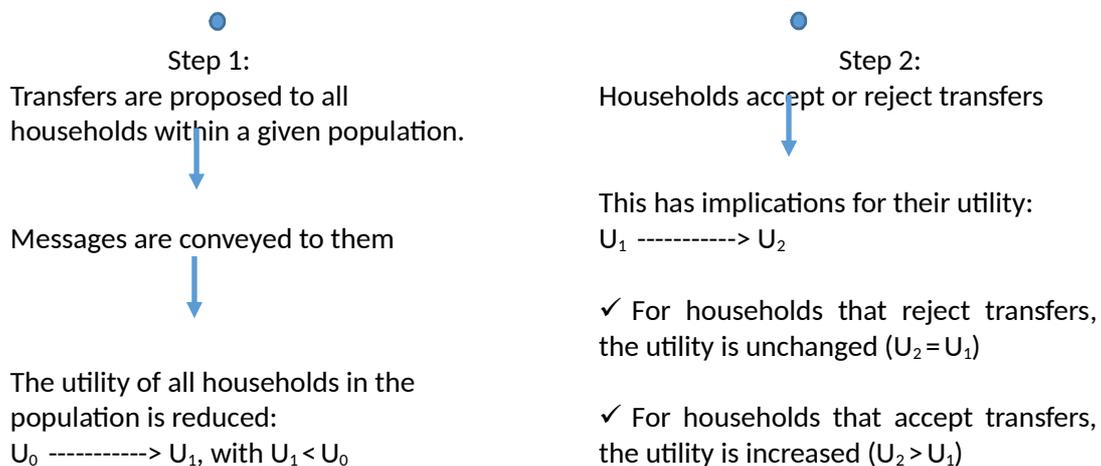
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Governing individuals by disseminating behavioural norms which, if internalised, will lead them to discipline their own bodies is often associated with neoliberalism (see Foucault [2004] and, for an example related to food, Kimura [2013]).

cattle. No doubt the households not in need did not ask for transfers: self-targeting here was probably extremely effective in excluding those that should be excluded. Perhaps it went too far in that direction and resulted in also excluding some food-insecure households (as some of them may have preferred hunger to eating food considered as animal feed). Let us assume that this was not the case. Then ST proved to be extremely effective (no errors of targeting). As the distributed maize was safe and nutritious, it played its role in supporting the nutrition of recipient household members, both more effectively and at a lower cost than T. Thus, approaches based on endowments do not see any problem with ST, but this is because they ignore an important element of the reality (the symbolic violence conveyed by the messages induced by ST).

*Approaches based on welfare.* By contrast, these approaches can easily include messages and their effects: messages conveying some form of symbolic violence are assumed to provoke a reduction in welfare, which must be balanced with the increase in welfare generated by the transfers received. Does it significantly change the conclusion of these approaches regarding ST? The answer is yes. In fact, including messages in the analysis challenges one of the strongest results of these approaches: the idea that ST can only improve household welfare. Indeed, when messages are not taken into account, the analysis of welfare is restricted to Step 2 of the ST process (see Figure 2). Thus, it seems that self-targeted transfers i) do not change the welfare of the households that reject transfers ( $U_2 = U_1$ ), and ii) increase the welfare of the households that accept transfers (otherwise, they will not accept them) ( $U_2 > U_1$ ). Therefore, as explained in section 2.2., it seems that ST is always welfare-improving (it even satisfies the Pareto criterion).

Figure 2. Welfare effects of self-targeted transfers: a two-steps process



Taking messages into account changes everything: a step is added before the households' choice to accept or reject transfers, the step during which transfers are proposed. Indeed, during this step (now Step 1), messages are sent and result in a reduction in the welfare of the households to which transfers are proposed. Therefore, *when they make their decision to ask for the transfer or not (in Step 2), the welfare of all households within the population considered is already affected.* This has two strong implications: first, the welfare of the households that reject transfers is reduced ( $U_2 > U_0$ ); second, the welfare of

the households that accept transfers can be either increased or reduced ( $U_2$  can be higher or lower than  $U_0$ ). This means not only that self-targeted transfers adversely affect non-recipients (those who choose to reject transfers), but also that there is no guarantee that these transfers increase the welfare of recipients: although it is better for them to accept transfers than to reject them ( $U_2 > U_1$ ), they may have been better off if no transfer had been proposed to them (because in this case they would have been protected from the symbolic violence conveyed by self-targeting in Step 1, which resulted in a reduction in their welfare from  $U_0$  to  $U_1$ ).

Consequently, when taking into account the effects of both Step 1 and Step 2, there is no guarantee that ST is welfare-improving. On the other hand, there is no certainty that ST is *not* welfare-improving in some situations. Equally, there is no certainty that ST cannot be better than T (from the viewpoint of welfare). True, ST likely generates a (much) higher level of symbolic violence than the symbolic violence provoked when T's targeting rules are not understood by the population concerned. But since, on the other hand, ST generates better targeting (and therefore improves food security more), ST may be better in some situations. This result holds because approaches based on welfare assume that all (positive and negative) effects of ST are commensurable: they can be compared and compensate for each other. This is why, under theories based on welfare, it may be appropriate in some situations to accept a certain dose of symbolic violence in order to improve targeting and therefore food security (thereby reducing another type of violence).

However, it seems that we have good reasons to question the commensurability assumption. This is because the symbolic violence conveyed by ST is directly related to the representation other people have of you and project on you and, in this way, also to the image you have of yourself. What may be damaged is your self-esteem. If you are hurt by some form of symbolic violence, you are not the same before and after being exposed to this violence. It therefore seems difficult to argue that having access to more food can compensate for the harm you suffer. This is why we have good reasons to reject the commensurability assumption. The implications are strong: nothing then justifies adding a certain dose of symbolic violence in order to improve food security (or vice-versa). Does this mean that nothing can justify shifting from T to ST or from ST to T? Does it mean that rejecting the commensurability assumption leads to conservative positions? No, because an order of priority should be established between the two dimensions: if the symbolic violence carried by ST affects people's self-esteem, then it violates human dignity and it should be forbidden, whatever the consequences for food security. This implies going beyond purely consequentialist approaches. This is precisely what approaches based on freedoms do.

*Approaches based on freedoms.* Contrary to the other approaches reviewed, these approaches are not purely consequentialist. They assume that a basic set of freedoms should be respected, whatever the implications of respecting them. For the Libertarians, basic freedoms are the only set of criteria. Other approaches (like Rawls' approach or approaches based on capabilities) take into account consequences, but only when the basic freedoms are respected. Therefore, approaches based on freedom assume incommensurability: they consider that the symbolic violence generated by ST cannot be compared to, or compensated for, by an increase in food security enabled by the better targeting produced by ST. Some purely consequentialist approaches also assume this incommensurability. The specificity of approaches based on freedoms is that they give clear priority to respect for a set of basic liberties (as is the case in the lexicographic order proposed by J. Rawls). They may therefore

lead to the conclusion that the symbolic violence conveyed by self-targeting is not acceptable because it violates one of the fundamental rights of human beings. For instance, we can perhaps consider that this symbolic violence should be forbidden because it undermines the social basis for self-respect described in capability #7.2 of Martha Nussbaum's list of 10 core capabilities (Nussbaum 2011): "Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species".

#### 4. Conclusion

The research presented in this article aims to answer three questions:

- What drives the feeling (shared by many people) that there is something wrong with self-targeting?
- Why do some people have this feeling (and are therefore shocked by self-targeting) while others do not?
- Who is wrong and who is right, in other words is there *really* something wrong with self-targeting?

To answer the first question, I compared self-targeting (ST) with classical targeting methods (T) using the criteria proposed by different ethics approaches and related to endowments, welfare and freedoms. None of the criteria reviewed helped us to understand what may be wrong with self-targeting: as ST is generally less costly than T and more effective in targeting poor or food-insecure households, it is generally better under consequentialist criteria; as ST enables households to choose whether or not they will be recipients of transfers (contrary to T), it is generally better under non-consequentialist criteria related to the freedom to choose.

In the second part of the article, I proposed a new hypothesis that enables us to answer all three questions. I made the hypothesis that when ST is implemented, messages are conveyed. This hypothesis is supported by empirical results from anthropologists showing (for the case of cash transfers implemented in Niger during the 2005 food crisis) that messages were sent by the (classical) targeting procedures used (T). More precisely, I made the hypothesis that when ST is implemented, messages are conveyed by the inconvenience purposely introduced to generate self-targeting (having to queue, having to provide a matching contribution of work, having to eat low-quality food) and that the "dark side" of self-targeting is related to these messages. More specifically my hypothesis is that these messages involve different types of symbolic violence: violence linked to the negative image of themselves sent to all potential recipients (being people suited to doing a poorly paid job, to queueing for a long time or to eating low-quality food); violence linked to the pressure and guilt put on heads of household (they have to accept transfers and the related inconvenience, otherwise they are not good heads of family); and finally, for the households that accept transfers, violence lived bodily (being constrained to a kind of self-discipline: eating low-quality food, doing unpleasant and poorly paid work, queueing for a long time). The symbolic violence carried by these messages is what drives the feeling that there is something wrong with self-targeting. My hypothesis therefore provides a simple answer to the first question.

This hypothesis also provides an answer to the second question. If some people are shocked by self-targeting whereas others do not see any problem with it, this is because only the first group takes into account the messages conveyed by the inconvenience purposely introduced in self-targeting and the violence generated by these messages. By contrast, the second group does not see any problem with ST because it only considers the material flows provided by transfers or required in order to obtain them, and these flows do not raise any ethical problems: when you are suffering from malnutrition, it is obviously better to eat low-quality safe food than nothing at all, and it is worth queuing or working, even for a low wage.

My hypothesis also gives a natural answer to the third question: people who find that there is something wrong with ST obviously use a more comprehensive framework than those who do not see what the problem is because they take into account elements of the reality ignored by people in the second group: messages and the symbolic violence they carry. It therefore seems that we can consider that they are right to say that there is something wrong with ST.

What are the practical implications of these results? Should we continue to use ST? Should we abandon it? Approaches based on welfare lead to the conclusion that ST may theoretically be better than T in some situations, in spite of the symbolic violence it generates. This is because it enables better targeting and, on some occasions, the welfare effects of this better targeting may be stronger than the adverse effects of the higher symbolic violence produced by ST (T also produces symbolic violence – as shown by the anthropology of development –, but it is likely to be much lower). Under these approaches, all of the advantages and drawbacks of ST (compared to T) can be compared and compensate for each other, meaning that it may be justified in some situations to introduce a certain dose of symbolic violence in order to improve food security or to reduce poverty (and, in this way, to reduce other forms of – economic – violence). Perhaps a reasonable recommendation drawn from approaches based on welfare is to abandon the ST modalities that generate the highest levels of symbolic violence. It seems that many people are more shocked by distributing low-quality food or organising long queues than by asking for a matching contribution in the form of work, and this suggests that food-for-work or cash-for-work programmes may generate less symbolic violence and could therefore be acceptable ST modalities (although the degree of symbolic violence for the three ST modalities probably depends strongly on the population considered). However, this recommendation rests on approaches based on welfare, which assume that the symbolic violence generated by ST can be compared to and counterbalanced by less hunger and food insecurity. And we have good reasons to think that this commensurability assumption does not hold.

Consequently, we must turn to other ethics approaches (based on freedoms) that lead to a more radical conclusion: ST should be abandoned because, by undermining the social basis for self-respect, it violates a fundamental right. This means trying to manage crises using tools other than targeted transfers. For instance, it has been shown that food crises are often provoked by grain price spikes that reduce poor households' purchasing power (HLPE 2011). Therefore, mitigating these price increases can be an efficient way to reduce the need to provide emergency transfers (Galtier, 2013; Timmer 1989). And when transfers prove to be necessary, it is still possible to target them through classical methods (T), trying to involve the local population as much as possible in the definition and implementation of the criteria and procedures.

The analysis presented in this article was developed considering the specific case of emergency food aid (the food or cash transfers that are implemented when a food crisis occurs). But it seems that the conclusions reached are valid for the other types of social transfers (structural transfers to combat poverty or chronic malnutrition): none of the arguments used seems to be specific to emergency food aid. Perhaps we could go even further, as it appears that the analysis developed here for the self-targeting of transfers could be (should be?) applied to other tools used to increase food security, reduce poverty or enhance development. These tools are usually assessed using only criteria related to their cost-effectiveness, but there are growing concerns about the ethical issues related to development practices (Drydyk and Keleher 2019; Ziai 2007). The approach based on analysing how development tools (or the way in which they are implemented or governed) may generate “collateral damage”, in the form of symbolic violence that affects the “beneficiaries”, may be a way to address some of these ethical issues.

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