

## Abstract

Topics of societal concern such as mental health and poverty reduction increasingly require action programs which operate within broad psycho-social and social justice perspectives. Models of practice centered in individual needs, although important, are not powerful enough to bring about social change when they operate in isolation. In this article we present the findings resulting from the observation of programs engaged in collaborating with socio-economically disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. The programs selected for study were nationally or internationally recognized for the quality and innovation of their methodologies or for having been subjected to scientific attention; some met both criteria. Altogether, 15 programs were visited, in North and South America and Europe. Through a grounded theory methodology, the processes of data collection and analysis led to the development of a theoretical framework which identifies a continuum of programs aimed at supporting the development of individuals, families and communities and which has at its core the central process of *building reciprocity*. This article presents and describes the continuum of programs and how each type relates to the process of *building reciprocity* and establishes links with other relevant and significant concepts in the framework. Finally, implications for further research are explored.

*Key Words:* reciprocity, socio-economic disadvantage, community development, well-being.

In this article we present the findings of a research study on social programs recognized as good practice across several countries. The research led to the development of a theoretical framework which identifies a continuum of programs aimed at supporting the development of individuals, families and communities and which has at its core the central process of *building reciprocity*. *Building reciprocity* is presented in this article as a key process for developing individual, community and societal well-being. Building reciprocity involves a process of increasing trust and collaboration between people (e.g. community members and program participants, professionals or partners, in the context of this research). Being engaged in such reciprocal dynamics, all parts both influence and are influenced, changing together. A typology of four programs, ranging from safety-net to social transformation is presented, as well as the characteristics of each program, their intersections and the connections between those programs' actions and the process of building reciprocity.

This article suggests that no type of program should stand by its own and emphasizes the importance of the articulation and complementarity between programs. Our findings indicate that the relationship between professionals and participants need to evolve towards greater levels of reciprocity.

The article is organized in six sections: a) a literature review on reciprocity and program paradigms and approaches, b) a description of the research methods and procedures; c) a brief overview of the theoretical framework's main categories and interrelations, d) an analysis of the dynamics within the continuum of programs, e) the articulation between presented findings and prior literature and finally f) implications for future research.

**Previous research: The helping process and the concept of reciprocity**

For years, foreign aid for poverty alleviation has followed a typical order of events: aid arrives, problem is reduced; aid leaves, and problem returns (Li & Julian, 2012). Even though individual interventions may reduce specific individual psychological symptoms, the rate of those symptoms in the population keeps increasing (Albee & Fryer, 2003). A multiplicity of programs is being created worldwide, trying to bring solutions to the complexity of problems connected with mental health and poverty, but efforts usually involve fragmented and uncoordinated processes which turn into unsatisfactory outcomes (Albee & Fryer, 2003).

The recent reductions to basic income and social provisions, such as the access to basic health and education, have increased the vulnerability of the poorest people, creating greater inequalities (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). At the same time, most intervention approaches and social policies are formulated by politicians, government officials and academics, without including the contributions of those most affected by them (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Ribner and Knei-Paz (2002) asked participants to describe experiences of successful helping relationships, noting such instances were considered exceptional amongst a vast number of frustrating and disappointing interactions. It is key to challenge the tendency of conceiving poverty as a charity issue, which creates obstacles to structural change, feeds social inequality and fosters a victim blaming perspective (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Tankel & Groot, 2014). Most of the income-based measures of poverty sustain top-down approaches, and do not integrate the experiences and perspectives of people living in poverty (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). The authors suggest that the contribution of policy makers would be greater if they

developed social policies to tackle poverty and the mal distribution of income rather than focusing on changing individuals to improve their employability.

Social programs operate in the intersection between the state and the market assuming a critical role in society (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008; Quintão, 2011). Their boundaries are difficult to establish, since they change across time and history and combine characteristics from different sectors. They can also assume ephemeral or lasting shapes, formal or informal characteristics (Quintão, 2011).

State programs such as cash conditional transfers in Brazil, Mexico and India are showing positive results with respect to the reduction of income inequality (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, 2013). Well-formed welfare states have less poverty than less generous systems. Providing social security transfers and investing in public health are key to reduce poverty (Brady, 2005; Brady, 2009; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Studies have shown that the odds of being in poverty in Denmark (the most generous welfare state) are significantly smaller than in the United States (the least generous welfare state). Research suggests that welfare generosity increases the access to education and protects the households that otherwise would be lacking opportunities to cope with hardship (Brady, 2009). Nevertheless, providing assistance can only be an effective measure if broader structural constraints are overcome, guarantying the access of many in need to quality services such as health care and education (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, 2013).

Community and social actions integrate a wide diversity of programs that range from a focus on welfare and individual support to a civic engagement approach, to promote individual, relational and collective well-being (Maton, 2000; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Welfarism asks “how can I help these people?”. Collaboration

approaches ask, “how can we work together in the promotion of our collective cause?” (Aron, 2014). Even though providing access to resources is primary and essential, the provision of resources doesn’t promote full development (Neal & Neal, 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Traditional welfarist approaches still follow a deficit model, being centered on reducing patients’ symptoms and ameliorating life conditions. Such approaches are grounded on professional expertise and control (Nelson, Prilleltensky & MacGillivray, 2001). The deficit model identifies individual-level problems and sets the stage for individual transformation, leaving the environment unaltered (Payne, 1996). An increasing disappointment with deficit and expert-driven approaches opened space to the development of capacity building, as a primary transformational process (Maton, 2000). System-level interventions that are focused on the promotion of protective factors are promising alternatives to the deficit model (Nelson et al., 2001). Many authors have been recognizing the potential of civic engagement to attain individual and collective transformation (Evans, 2012; Nelson, Lord & Ochocka, 2001; Nelson et al., 2001; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Rojano, 2004; Trickett, Beehler et al., 2011; Zimmerman, 2000).

Programs that foster participation generate participants’ willingness to embrace collective well-being causes (Cornwell & Gaventa, 2001). Through participation, service users can start impacting social policies, exercising their rights of agency and citizenship (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Rojano, 2004). By developing leadership skills and recognizing their power to contribute to the community well-being, individuals strengthen their self-esteem and their sense of belonging (Nelson et al., 2001).

Further, Brodsky and Cattaneo (2013) introduce the idea of “status quake”, stressing the importance of addressing imbalances of power and striving for structural transformation. Such transformation can be promoted by citizens and community members, who increasingly recognize their ability to act on the structures of power that constrain their lives (Grabe, 2011). Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) suggest that transformative actions, aimed to unsettle the societal structures’ status quo receive less investment than initiatives that are created to ameliorate the life conditions of poor people. In order for the complex nature of problems to be fully addressed, different types of programs and the community need to work together (Minich, Howe, Langmeyer & Corcoran, 2006).

The concept of reciprocity refers to the interdependence between participants of a social system and to the ways in which they engage in give and take exchanges (Kelly, Ryan & Altman, 1999). The relevance of this concept for the development of individuals, families, communities and programs has not been fully recognized and explored (Jung, 1990; Li & Julian, 2012). As Madsen (2007) suggests, engaging in collaborative partnerships between participants and professionals can become a surprising transformative process for all. Reciprocity is a key, since it opens space for individuals who are often powerless in our society to express their opinions and to value their own voice (D’Arlarch, Sánchez & Feuer, 2009). Research has shown that individuals involved reciprocally in giving and receiving reported better levels of satisfaction than those who were mainly receivers or providers of support (Jung, 1990; Maton, 2000). To reciprocate involves a deep, intimate relationship, in which there is a commitment to being helpful to each other (Kelly et al., 1999).

Traditional language concerning the helping process inadvertently encourages dependence on professionals and unequal relationships, cultivating the idea of unidirectional support (Zimmerman, 2000). The concept of prescription represents the imposition of a choice over an individual (Freire, 1970). In this context, the users of services are seen as having little capacity and interest to contribute to policy deliberations. This process is left and restricted to the professionals and politicians to assure that the users' needs are well served (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001). Such vertical paradigms need to be replaced by collaboration and reciprocity (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Building trusting relationships between partners, sharing power, knowledge and resources are fundamental steps to counteract oppressive practices (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). In this context, the helping process is increasingly being framed as a collaborative relationship that is gradually less hierarchical and more horizontal and democratic (Anderson, 1997).

It is pivotal, then, to identify the processes that will enhance sustainable change at multiple levels of society (Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang, 2007). Lessons from successes and good practices need to be documented and communicated widely, so that guidelines for improvement may be found and continually developed (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007; Prilleltensky, 2005; United Nations Development Program, 2011). A research study undertaken by Trickett, Espino and Hawe (2011) showed that very few peer-reviewed articles reporting community interventions were focused on system change, organizational capacity-building and leadership development. The authors concluded that more complex and context sensitive theorizing is needed in this field.

## **Method**

This research was guided by three main purposes: 1) to identify social and educational programs recognized as good practices in the collaboration with socio-economic disadvantaged individuals and communities, at national and international levels; 2) to understand which are the main factors contributing for the programs' success; and 3) to develop a framework which articulates the research findings, to serve as a useful tool for groups and organizations involved in community development and poverty reduction.

As criteria for inclusion in the sample, programs needed to: 1) work with socio-economically disadvantage individuals or communities and 2) be recognized for quality and innovation. To select the programs, we used three main sources: articles which identified programs recognized as good practices; Ashoka<sup>1</sup> platform which congregates successful innovative programs; and finally, recommendations from other researchers and practitioners.

Since we intended to generate theory that was rooted in grounded perceptions and experience, grounded theory (GT) methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 2014, 2016) was chosen as the method that could best meet this purpose (see Minas, Anglin & Ribeiro, 2017). We followed the classic grounded theory method (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser, 2016; Holton, 2007) and applied the various systematic and rigorous steps of substantive coding, constant comparison, memoing and diagraming, selective coding and sorting (Glaser, 1998) that led to the emergence of

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<sup>1</sup>Ashoka is a non-governmental organization that recognizes initiatives which are improving the lives of millions of people. Created in 1981, it operates in 90 countries. Ashoka follows rigorous criteria to select the best changemaking initiatives: 1) Originality; 2) Creativity; 3) Leadership's quality; 4) Social Impact and 5) Ethics. Website: <https://www.ashoka.org/>.

*building reciprocity* as the core category and to the Dynamics of Reciprocity Theoretical Framework.

We started with open coding, doing line-by-line coding, as well as focused coding (Charmaz, 2004). In this stage it was possible to get in direct connection with the data and constantly compare incidents and patterns, resulting in the emergence of constructs (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2003). After completing this process in each data source, we created a diagram that helped us sketch and analyze the main emerging constructs. The process of doing substantive coding and generating diagrams fostered the creation of memos, which helped take the analysis to the theoretical level (Charmaz, 2004, 2006). While we were screening the data, we kept asking “what category does this incident indicate?”, “what is the main concern of the participants and how are they trying to solve it?” (Glaser, 1998). Going through this systematic process of substantive coding, constantly comparing and writing memos, some processes gained increased relevance and centrality (e.g., sense of agency; willingness to contribute). At this point, we moved into selective coding, which served to gain focus, both for further data collection and analysis. Thus, we returned to the field having in mind the themes that were emerging as central in the analysis. It was at this point that the notion of *reciprocity* emerged as a core concept, which seemed to encompass the program dynamics and to be imbued in the discourses of research participants. At this stage, we checked the concept of building reciprocity against the criteria for a core category (Glaser 1978, 95-96), and it proved to integrate the other key constructs into a meaningful whole. To take this process to completion, we moved forward into the sorting stage. The purpose of sorting is to weave the theory together, interconnecting the theoretical codes and the core category (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1998). To do that, we

printed the memos (over 500 in total) and sorted them into separate memos. Then we organized the memos by categories. This exercise was generative of more memos and theoretical codes, helping the researchers recognize the connections between the categories under study. We reached the end of this stage with a diagram that encompassed the core category and the key concepts of the research and their interrelations. This diagram was further developed and refined into the Dynamics of Reciprocity Theoretical Framework, which will be presented in the next section.

Data collection was based in participant observation, semi-structured interviews with participants and professionals and focus groups with professionals. The semi-structured interviews were flexible, although they were guided by some predefined questions, allowing the researcher to adopt a conversational style that allowed the conversation to flow and to invite the participants to introduce preferred topics (O’Leary, 2004). The participant observation method allowed the researchers to become part of the community they were observing. This way, the researchers observed the participants’ natural context, through the participants’ perspectives (O’Leary, 2004). Focus groups involve interviewing a group and gathering multiple perspectives, allowing for interaction amongst participants and the ability of the researcher to gain a sense of the commonality or diversity of perspectives and opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Decisions about what data collection methods would be used in each setting were taken together with each program’s staff. The programs’ staff also indicated the participants who would participate in both the interviews and the focus groups and they were those considered most knowledgeable about the operation of the program. Fifteen social, community and educational programs across 9 countries were selected as case studies. Table 1 summarizes the programs’ characteristics according to the groups they

involve, their purpose/vision, nature and scope (the information was retrieved from the programs' sites and document analysis and is presented according to their own terms).

Beyond multiple informal conversations, 19 participants (12 women, 7 men, Mage = 27,7 years, age range: 12–47 years) and 16 professionals (7 women, 9 men, Mage = 41,5 years, age range: 28–63 years) participated in 35 semi-structured interviews and 56 professionals (45 women, 11 men, Mage = 35,1 years, age range: 22–59 years) participated in 9 Focus Groups (See Table 2).

All interviews and focus groups, as well as some informal conversations, were recorded. To do that, ethical principles and procedures were clarified, safeguarding participants' confidentiality, and participants offered their informed consent. The semi-structured interviews and the Focus Groups were driven by open questions such as: If this program could talk, what would it say about itself? How would you characterize the relationships that you build in the program? Name five positive things about this program [Interviews with professionals]. What are your main concerns? What do you consider to be the greatest advantages of participating in this program? How would you describe the professionals and the relationship you have with them? [Interviews with participants]. What persuaded you to join the program? Think back from when you started working in this program, what have been the main lessons learned? [Focus Group with professionals]. These methods were chosen to provide a flexible and informal environment, that allowed the expression of participants' perspectives, regarding the characteristics of the programs, which were the focus of the research.

After leaving the program site, follow-up e-mails were sent to the programs thanking them for their collaboration and giving them feedback about next steps in the research process. As a result of this generative process of data collection and analysis,

findings were incorporated into the Dynamics of Reciprocity Theoretical Framework, which outlines the reciprocal processes involved in the development of individuals, families and communities engaged with social programs.

### **Dynamics of Reciprocity Theoretical Framework**

Having discovered reciprocity as the central construct, the authors identify three trajectories of reciprocity: vertical, diagonal and horizontal (see Figure 1) in the relationship between the participants and professionals of the programs (Minas, Ribeiro & Anglin, 2018). Each trajectory involves a different type of relationship, which is moderated by the properties of reciprocity. There are six properties of reciprocity, namely informality, openness, power balance, identification, influence flow and congruence. The vertical trajectory represents top-down relationships (See Figure 1). Individuals in the top of the line (e.g. professionals) retain resources, information and power, for which they tend to be recognized as experts. Individuals in the bottom of the line (e.g. socio-economic disadvantaged “users”) are seen as lacking resources to attain positive development and needing external help.

In vertical trajectories individuals from upper positions and individuals from bottom positions engage in predominantly unidirectional and asymmetric relationships, where the former has the power to give guidance and support and the latter are expected to passively receive help and follow directions.

In diagonal trajectories (See Figure 1), the power differences are acknowledged, and efforts are consciously made to diminish such gaps. This way, in order to reach collaboration and interconnection, individuals with greater power depower themselves by being available to learn from individuals who have less power and encouraging participation. Individuals who used to have less power actively define their own goals

and share opinions in respect to their surrounding environment, progressively finding opportunities for giving and contributing.

Horizontal trajectories are characterized by two-way, balanced relationships, where individuals from diverse backgrounds interchange resources and affection (See Figure 1). In this trajectory all individuals engage in exchanging, both giving and receiving. High levels of reciprocity are evident in this trajectory, involving a great exchange of resources and the generation of novel solutions and paradigms, thanks to the multiple contributions. As reciprocity evolves to its higher levels, the properties of reciprocity become more expressive and evident.

This framework also presents four different foci that individuals and communities can assume (See Figure 2), according to their socio-economical-political context:

1. Focus on immediate needs and micro/individual spheres: Individuals who assumed a one down position in the vertical trajectory of reciprocity usually experience having lack of resources to address challenges, due to socio-economic constraints, leading them to focus on immediate needs. Experiencing such limitations, they center on protecting their core family needs and their own individuality. Individuals then get anchored in the immediate time. They tend to prioritize short-term gains, overlooking what could eventually bring benefits to the future. In this way, they experience being disenfranchised from the mainstream society, perceiving broader social spaces as being far away from them and believing they have little or no impact over it.

2. Focus on future goals and micro/individual spheres: Individuals who assume the one-up position in the vertical trajectory of reciprocity are usually in a more advantaged social and economic situation, having access to resources that allow them to cope with challenges. They also tend to be especially concerned about achieving individual benefits. However, having access to economic and social resources helps these individuals to meet their needs, thus being able to make long-term plans and look for new goals to achieve.
3. Focus on immediate needs and macro/collective spheres: Individuals who are struggling with poverty and who have strong community bonds are more oriented to relational and collective issues. Nevertheless, the lack of access to resources that is experienced by the community, brings to the fore immediate needs that are not being met.
4. Focus on future goals and macro/collective spheres: Individuals who engage in horizontal interactions are more oriented to relational and collective issues. From this quadrant's outlook, individuals recognize multiple potentialities in social networks and have positive expectations about interchanges. By privileging interconnections, the accessibility to resources is maximized, allowing them to pursue long term goals. Furthermore, they are predominantly focused on collective purposes.

Six basic social processes – struggling to survive, strengthening confidence, developing a sense of agency, developing a sense of belonging, wanting to contribute and give-back, and finding a sense of worthiness and meaning in living – are developed as the dynamics of reciprocity progress. A continuum of four types of programs – safety net, promotion, co-construction and social transformation – is intercrossed with the

trajectories of reciprocity, stressing diverse focus, purposes and relational characteristics, evolving from low to high degrees of reciprocal dynamics and scope (See Figure 3). The characteristics of each type of program will be further developed in the next section of the article.

### **The continuum of programs**

Every program observed in this research was working with individuals and communities, in order to promote their development and well-being, nevertheless they assumed different criteria to assess whether collaboration was successful or not. On that basis, diverse approaches, methods and strategies were put in place leading to different outcomes. Those variations have been integrated in the framework as a ‘continuum of programs’ typology. The analysis of the programs revealed similarities and contrasts between the programs that contributed to define the four types of programs.

The 15 programs had different characteristics. There were programs that integrated projects with various modes of intervention and other programs that were only focused in one mode. As Table 1 shows, there were four safety-net programs, six promotion programs, four co-construction programs and three social transformation programs. Each group had in common similar key characteristics, which led to the definition of the four typologies. The characteristics of the four types of programs that emerged in this research will now be presented.

#### **Safety-net programs**

The safety net type is positioned at the left edge of the continuum (See Figure 3). Safety-net programs are configured to support people who are struggling to survive

by providing them resources to meet their basic needs and to enhance their stability. These programs can also be understood as lifelines, serving to take individuals out of risky situations (See Table 3). Such individuals tend to struggle with problems associated with poverty, lack of health and unemployment. Due to the hazards they face, they are especially focused on individual and family immediate needs.

Programs, as well, concentrate their energies on responding to immediate needs, confining the focus of analysis and action to an individual and micro level, typically not addressing issues related to their surrounding environment. In this sense, programs that operate strictly at this level, although having a fundamental role in tackling critical situations, usually don't approach the broader conditions and complex causes that led individuals and families to the programs. As a Middle-Class Express's professional, at Raleigh, United States, stated, "Most services are responding to immediate needs, but they are leaving the roots of the questions aside".

Safety-net programs' activities are essentially centered on attending to and analyzing who is eligible for receiving support, assessing and monitoring needs and risks and distributing subsidies and other types of resources. They mostly provide financial, instrumental, emotional and psychological support. These programs are usually governed by bureaucratic and standardized guidelines and the length of support is usually limited to avoid generating dependency. Coercion was another characteristic found in most safety-net programs. Families are pressed to collaborate in order for them not to lose specific supports or rights.

Programs that are positively recognized by professionals and participants try to balance this somewhat rigid structure by being informal, flexible and being sensitive to

particular situations. Nonetheless, services offered by safety net programs are generally negatively connoted by the mainstream society.

Individuals who attend these programs are seen as vulnerable and needy, and they generally feel ashamed to ask for safety-net support. As a Middle-Class Express professional affirms: “when you [a client] get to child welfare I don’t get to meet you on really happy terms. (...) I am going to come and the disaster has already hit”. This relates to the roles professionals and clients play in this kind of program, which are highly differentiated. Professionals tend to be seen as specialists who have the power and resources to help and participants are mostly seen as receivers who have little say in pre-structured protocols, being expected to adapt and follow its rules. Even when programs ask for some type of involvement from the participants, it often has a mandatory nature. Like the participants, professionals are expected to execute protocols and to undertake prescribed work.

These programs consider their action to be successful when basic needs are met and crises are controlled, at a short-term and micro level. As a professional from NÓS said, “Our mission is exactly to eliminate the risk to which children are being exposed within their family, promoting a behavioral and functional change inside the family so that it is possible to avoid institutionalization of the children”. However, if this type of support ends without fostering confidence at individual and relational levels and, for instance, before an informal network of trust has been established, it is likely that individuals will keep returning for emergency help. If professionals and programs assume a rigid “giver” approach and take participants as passive receivers, not considering their purposes and skills, participants tend to introject such perspectives, losing track of their hopes and dreams. In this context, they don’t find opportunities to

keep developing and gradually reach higher levels of reciprocity in interactions, being pushed to keep struggling to survive. As a community leader from Laudes Infantis expressed:

Unfortunately, in this country [Colombia] people receive lots of help but with very little resources that scarcely help them to survive. And people got used to receive, receive, receive and give nothing, contribute with nothing. They think they cannot do anything for their lives, for the community, for nobody.

Safety-net programs need to facilitate participants' transition and access to programs with a promotion nature. This way, a transition from struggling to survive to strengthening confidence can be fostered.

### **Promotion programs**

Programs that have a promotion nature are aimed to support participants in identifying and developing strengths and skills<sup>2</sup> (See Table 3). The focus is put on resources and on the future, using goals and dreams as motivation and strategy. As a participant from KIPP emphasizes: "They [professionals] give me good words, they give me opportunities... they want me to succeed in life, because they see I am talented in certain areas". Activities and services are essentially focused on creating opportunities for capacity-building – such as training, workshops, formal and informal education, networking opportunities and the like.

Professionals assume the role of mentors, being responsible to support and motivate participants' efforts developing skills and pursuing goals. As a Middle-Class

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<sup>2</sup> Although participants can benefit from promotion, co-construction and social transformation programs without having their basic needs met, they can take more advantage of the programs in case their stability and fundamental needs are safeguarded.

Express's professional explains: "I had to learn not to be their parent. (...) They [Participants] don't see themselves as clients. They see themselves as participants, partnering with us, even though they are the ones receiving benefits". This excerpt illustrates how professionals make a conscious effort, trying to avoid vertical relationships. Nevertheless, they keep predominantly anchored to a top-down approach, where professionals unidirectionally provide opportunities and participants receive resources for their benefit. Participants are the initiators of their own process and path. They are recognized as agents, having the experience and knowledge to develop their preferred lives. As a participant from Fundación Rais reflects: "Fundación Rais gives you that, the freedom to express your opinion, to say this seems a good idea, this seems a bad idea". Limited influence of participants is evident at this point.

Promotion programs intend to foster individuals' autonomy, aiming to release them from relying on social welfare and outside support. With such a purpose, they expect participants to reach a point where they leave the program because they become self-sufficient. This is connected with the length of the programs, which is expected to be, like safety-net programs, circumscribed in time. As a Pressley Ridge staff member says: "Our goal is to be temporary in people's lives. To be able to impact on a specific moment, to capacitate, to support and then allow people to become autonomous, even though we will always be an open door". Thus, promotion programs consider success is achieved when participants adopt proactive attitudes and begin to take action towards pursuing and gradually achieving goals they set for their lives.

These programs are responsible for fostering their participants' and staff's sense of agency, creating conditions for the development of a sense of belonging. According to the framework's continuum, promotion programs should be promoting participants'

transition to co-construction programs, where development can move forward, towards a greater focus on community purposes and collective spheres.

### **Co-construction programs**

Co-construction programs aim to create environments that promote the mutual development of participants and professionals, in that way enhancing leadership and participation for all (See Table 3). This type of program is open for participants to exercise more fully their leadership and participation skills, by teaching other participants a skill they master or by being key contributors in the programs' activities and dynamics.

Each member involved can be simultaneously leading and learning, and activities are defined in articulation between professionals and participants. For instance, in Circo Volador and in Laudes Infantis, participants are encouraged to offer workshops to other members of the community and they can also participate as "students" in other colleagues' workshops. In the case of Community Therapy, the methodology engages participants in asking questions to other participants and sharing lessons learned from experience. In that way, all participants are in some way community therapists, giving and receiving. According to Circo Volador's founder, "it is not that I change the people. I don't believe in changemakers. I believe that change must be a reciprocal change. I suggest a change and you change me. Then, more than a change, it becomes an interchange".

The onus in these programs is put on the group dynamics instead of in the individual. Co-construction programs are characterized by flexibility, informality, diversity and freedom to express and take initiative. Everybody's perspectives are

considered important and, whenever possible, they are converted into practice. Like a community leader from Circo Volador affirms: “Circo Volador is a place where participants can be... where they can express themselves without fear. (...) It is a free space, an open space for all”.

Both participants and professionals express a sense of pride to be engaged in this kind of program. As a community leader from Laudes Infantis states: “Laudes Infantis gave me the opportunity of being a leader. I haven’t been a community leader before, I used to work at a bank, to meet my financial needs but I didn’t do much for the community”.

Community leaders have the role of promoting leadership and establishing partnerships with participants, and the same is true for the governing board towards community leaders. Participants, in turn, engage and commit to the program, developing capacities and leadership competences that they will later share with others, feeding a multiplicative cycle. Then, as leaders, they will be the ones encouraging new participants to manifest their opinions and to take action.

They [participants] find a sense of belonging, knowing the time they are spending serves not only to learn but also to learn how to teach. Here we have prepared many teachers, many, many teachers. Maybe we have more teachers than students! [Circo Volador’s founder]

Co-construction programs foster the development of a sense of belonging, strengthening members' sense of being part of a collective and their desire to contribute. As a community leader from Laudes Infantis underlies: “I come to Laudes Infantis because I love to be here, because here I am seen, here I am welcome and I am

important”. Co-construction programs are marked by the transition from a diagonal into a horizontal trajectory (see Figure 3).

The most emergent and distinctive interactional dynamic in this type of program is encouraging participation. As a Circo Volador’s professional mentions: “That’s CV’s advantage – to be opened to participation, to be nurtured by participants’ abilities and potentialities”. Programs of this type consider success as the capacity to bring together and engage people to work collectively for community development.

Unlike safety-net and promotion programs which need to set time limits for participation to avoid fostering dependence, co-construction initiatives expect to endure as long as they are enhancing the development of individual and community well-being. Since the relational bonds that are created in this type of program are reciprocal and foster participants’ full development, there is risk of generating dependency or a “receiver stance”.

### **Social Transformation Programs**

Social transformation programs engage participants and professionals in major causes that seek to impact social structures (See Table 3). Programs of this type often include societal systems improvement and civic engagement as goals, aspiring as well to transform social assumptions that constrain connection and collective well-being. Such broad goals imply the adoption of a macro and integrative lens. As a professional at the Observatório de Favelas says: “The program was created with the goal of developing actions that could change the perception people have about *favelas* (slums). We aim to impact society”.

Due to their broader lens, these programs are greatly integrative; they assume a collective perspective that leaves room for individual singularities, aspiring to generate impact at a macro level (targeting broader systems) and at the micro level (directly and closely collaborating with communities and individuals). A ForandringsFabrikken's professional illustrates this point by saying "we want to change the systems, but what we see is that we are changing a lot of kids' lives as well". These programs put in place activities that involve establishing partnerships, organizing and mobilizing groups around topics of concern, developing actions and campaigns, researching and disseminating results to impact social policies. They can be characterized as being audacious, irreverent, critical and innovative, since they try to add novelty to what already exists.

Their culture is marked by activism, a sense of mission and commitment. In ForandringsFabrikken (Factory of Change) youth who are users of diverse child and youth care systems become key consultants for decision-makers, expressing what is working and what is not working in the systems and providing advice based on their experience. This way, youth and decision-makers are gradually working together to improve social policies and laws that guide the Norwegian social systems. As a ForandringsFabrikken illustrates: "Here we use our lives to motivate, to inspire systems to do things differently. (...) It is kind of building from the bottom-up". Social transformation and co-construction programs alike intensely foster in their members a sense of pride and *amor à camisola* (literally meaning "love for wearing the shirt", which expresses identification and passion for the program's cause). As another ForandringsFabrikken's participant expresses "I feel very proud! (...) I've been at the

health department today, I am given the opportunity to speak to some people in a room, where my opinion may actually hit the right person and trigger the right reaction”.

Professionals and participants work together to achieve common goals, advocating for a cause. Both are invited to dedicate their resources and skills to the cause, fully participating, both inside and outside the program. An Observatório de Favelas’s professional states: “A job around a life project is not individual, it is collective. (...) The participants see themselves as multiplier agents. Through their practices they are impacting others’ lives”.

Success for social transformation programs is achieved when civic mobilization is enabled, generating some positive impact in society. Further, social transformation programs allow their members to strengthen their desire to contribute and give-back, and to develop a sense of worthiness and meaning in living. For social transformation programs, closure is not a concern, since their purpose is to keep constantly changing and prompting changes to foster societal transformation, aiming to build a just society. The social transformation programs visited in the context of our research were developing their action plans with a bottom-up strategy, operating from a community-based approach.

Finally, these findings were checked against the practice, to infer their validity. For that, the findings were presented in various conferences related to poverty reduction worldwide and the participants feedback was confirmatory. Also, we kept visiting programs in various countries (in Thailand, Mozambique and São Tomé), sharing this framework and learning their methodologies, and this continuity work continues to validate the findings.

## **Discussion**

The research findings of this study suggest that a diversity of programs and strategies, combining both welfare and civic engagement approaches are needed to guarantee social support and poverty reduction. Our research findings suggest that an encompassing continuum of programs that operates in articulation to promote the full development of individuals, communities and societies, can offer an integrated strategy for poverty reduction and to develop collective well-being. Based in *building reciprocity*, program design can offer a transformative and stair-cased pathway that begins with meeting basic needs and moves progressively towards building agency, meaningful participation in society and wider community well-being. This framework offers guidance for community members, community-leaders and professionals, to embrace collaboration, to identify the best type of program according to the specific individual or community developmental challenge, encompassing both individual and structural factors that affect people's lives.

Prior literature has been suggesting a distinction between amelioration, connected to safety-net and promotion programs, and transformation, connected to co-construction and social transformation programs (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013; Cattaneo, Calton & Brodsky, 2014; Evans, 2012; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Maton, 2000; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Our findings are also aligned with the work of Evans (2012), who has been proposing a continuum of social services, to surpass the dualistic essence of ameliorative versus transformative models, identifying gradients between the two models. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) as well as Neal and Neal (2011) note that despite the access to resources being essential and primary, such provision does not promote full development by itself. We believe that our framework adds novelty to this field, thanks to the conceptual articulation which emerged using the grounded theory

method. We suggest that a safety-net will have greater positive effects when integrated with progressively reciprocal and broader collaborative programs, that together serve as development platforms.

To develop training which puts emphasis on building reciprocal processes within safety-net programs could perhaps be effective to compensate for the bureaucratized and formal nature of these programs. Such possibilities are attuned to the concerns shared by Ibarra (2012) who affirms bureaucrats are trained primarily in technical discourse and have internalized the disbelief in the possibility of changing the existing reality, which limits their ability to bring about social change.

According to our framework, once basic needs are met, individuals will benefit from promotion programs that foster opportunities for the development of capacities and resources. Diverse authors have been stressing the value of promotion programs to prompt individual competence and sense of control as well as enhance social support (Maton, 2000; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Nelson et al., 2001; Trickett, Beehler et al., 2011). In contrast with Tseng et al.'s (2002) conception of promotion efforts as having by themselves the potential to create system-level transformation, our findings point to an integrative paradigm that involves the cooperation between programs of different types.

In respect to the concept of autonomy, which is presented as a major goal for safety-net and promotion programs, in order to avoid the generation of dependence, it seems to imply that individual well-being grows as the need for support decreases. This research leads us to critique the idea of autonomy as the ultimate purpose for programs and suggests the diverse types of programs, together, need to strive instead for the development of collective agency and reciprocal interconnection, through which

individual, relational and collective well-being can be achieved and combined.

Mendonza (2012) also asserts the importance for institutions and social policy to stop fostering the autonomous individuality, promoting instead solidarity and the co-responsible exercise of power.

In reviewing co-construction programs, the concept of participation emerged as key, connected with a focus on collective dimensions, horizontal dynamics, the development of a sense of belonging and willingness to contribute and give-back. This articulation complements prior findings which indicated that programs encouraging participation, horizontal structures and shared leadership promote a willingness of members to share know-how and to change (Cornwell & Gaventa, 2001; Evans, 2012; Nelson et al., 2001; Trickett, Beehler et al., 2011; Zimmerman, 2000). Participatory action research seems to fit the definition of a co-construction initiative, since it emphasizes collective interrelatedness and intends to generate opportunities to contribute for those who have little influence in society (Fine, 2006; Maton, 2000).

Social transformation programs are the programs that foster the highest levels of reciprocity. Members involved in social transformation programs are especially driven to develop their sense of worthiness and meaning in living, as they collaborate together to build preferred and just societal cultures. These programs predominantly assume a collective and long-term focus, but at the same time, they are the type that most integrates individual/collective, micro/macro, short/long-term dimensions in its nature. This typology is congruent with much prior literature on social change initiatives which, similarly, envision a just society, target the causes of social problems that lie at the social structure level, rely on multiple-level actions and combine bottom-up and top-

down strategies, aiming to affect social, political and economic sectors (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Kelly et al., 2000; Maton, 2000; Minich et al., 2006).

The infinity symbol in our framework expresses reality's nonlinearity and complexity, that social transformation programs are challenged to embrace. It also suggests the need for continuous development and change, searching for new paradigms capable of fitting new social challenges. Similarly, Peirson, Boydell, Ferguson & Ferris' (2011) ecologic process model depicts systems change as a complex, nonlinear and multifaceted process. The social change literature more broadly has also been stressing the importance of contesting preconceived interpretations about social phenomena and suggesting alternative perspectives (Lehrner & Allen, 2008). Throughout this research we noticed that social transformation programs seem to be the least implemented and explored. These programs seem to be of extreme importance for individuals, communities and society to keep addressing its citizens' individual and collective hopes.

Since co-construction and social transformation programs engage all members as active contributors and are positively socially connoted, both participants and professionals revealed a sense of pride to be part to those programs. The possibility to contribute generates a sense of pride to belong, since participants and professionals see their actions having an impact in the program or even more broadly, at societal levels. Adding to this, assuming a "giver" position is associated to a positive social status. Contrarily, various participants reported feeling ashamed and reticent to get enrolled in safety-net programs, which were associated with negative social labels, and where they felt diminished by being considered passive recipients. These results confirm and add to some prior literature contributions. Tyler (1999) suggests organizations play a

fundamental role in defining people's identities, showing individuals are driven to contribute and develop a sense of pride when their membership is recognized. Sousa and Rodrigues (2009) observe that families usually prefer to refer to informal support and avoid formal support, aiming to engage in relationships marked by higher levels of reciprocity and less power differentials.

By building reciprocity, individuals feel mutually valued and encouraged to contribute, whilst programs benefit from more diversified contributions. Evans (2012) also stresses the importance for clients to progress from being viewed as recipients to co-agents. The *building reciprocity* framework progressively evolves to broader and more integrative systems of analysis, suggesting reciprocity needs to be built across interactional levels (including between professional staff, between boards and staff, and between staff and participants) and within the various types of programs.

Building reciprocity also appeared to be connected to a conception of programs' length. Programs which are centered on individuals' immediate needs, providing emergency resources, tend to be imbalanced and formally conducted, as reflected in the bottom-left quadrant (see Figure 3). Programs with such characteristics should be short-term or limited in scope, avoiding fostering dependence. Programs focused on collective and long-term dimensions, targeting the development of interconnection, as framed in the upper-right quadrant, encourage the development of natural and informal connections. That way, there is no need for time boundaries. These reflections confirm Rojano's (2004) perspective that systems that foster civic engagement are natural ecosystems and they are not meant to be dissolved. In accordance, Mendonza (2001) argues that enduring initiatives should consider individuals equally capable of contributing and dialoguing, potentiating a symmetric communication, joining efforts

towards a more cohesive, equitable and democratic society. Many authors have supported the importance of continuous and long-term approaches (Grabe, 2012; Minich et al., 2006; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; United Nations Development Program, 2011). Our framework suggests an assessment of the appropriate timing for the programs taking into consideration the type of program and its degree of reciprocity.

### **Conclusion**

The continuum of programs presented in this article stresses the importance of recognizing an integrated transformative framework, that tackles both individual and structural issues. It is argued that building reciprocity is a central process for the success of programs, being presented as an alternative to top-down unidirectional models of support. Each type of program can contribute to the development of individuals and communities, provided that there is a match between the developmental challenge that participants are facing and the program's type, as well as if the dynamics of reciprocity are imbued in the programs' processes. In all types of programs, the relationship between professionals and participants should go through a progressive shift, towards a greater degree of reciprocity. We also argue that social programs should pursue the development of societal reciprocal interconnection, instead of fostering, as ultimate goal, individuals' autonomy.

Future in-depth investigations are needed to understand if, specifically, the commonalities and differences encountered across programs are influenced by the nature of the programs themselves and by the cultural contexts where the programs are located. It would be pertinent to explore the distribution of programs by type in each country and to connect that analysis with a macro study of populations' needs and goals, to understand if there is correspondence between reported needs and existent service

delivery. It would also be relevant to further explore and present guidelines on how to successfully implement each type of program and to characterize its main fragilities.

Also, we suggest that further research compares programs that only assume one typology from programs that integrate projects with diverse typologies.

Finally, the centrality and significance of the process of *building reciprocity* uncovered in this study indicates the importance of examining the factors that can foster this process at individual and collective, as well as informal and formal systemic levels. We hope that our framework will offer a perspective on and a way of better understanding programs across the continuum, which aims to support the full development of individuals, families and communities.

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Table 1 – Brief description of the visited programs

	<b>Groups involved</b>	<b>Purpose/Vision</b>	<b>Other information</b>	<b>Type</b>
Projeto Família (PF)	Children and youth at risk and their families	To preserve the family and prevent the institutionalization of children through intensive, immediate and individualized support for these most vulnerable families.	Non-profit organization's program Foundation year: 1996 157 participants/year Portugal	Safety-net
NOS	Children and youth at risk and their families	To promote the early identification of risk situations of abuse and neglect, to involve the child and the family in the risk assessment and to develop the necessary actions to meet those needs, promoting the access of users to full citizenship.	Non-profit civil organization's program Foundation year: 1995 Portugal	Safety-net
Fundación Raís (FR)	Homeless people	To bring about the integration of the socially excluded, accompanying them throughout a process designed to enable them to recover their independence and become active citizen again and mobilizing citizens, public and private institutions and social agents.	Non-profit organization Foundation year: 1998 6137 participants/year 8 centers, national wide Spain	Safety-net Promotion
Pressley Ridge (PR)	Vulnerable children, youth and families	To provide services for the adjustment and development of children and teenagers with behavior problems, in order for them to stay with their families and communities.	International NGO Foundation year: 2010 1278 participants/year Portugal	Promotion
Mais Skills (MS)	Socio-economically disadvantaged youth	To prevent school dropout and to develop strategies that promote educational and professional qualification of low-achieving youth and adults, enabling the transition to working life.	Non-profit organization's program Foundation year: 2010 150 participants/year Portugal	Promotion
Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)	Socio-economically disadvantaged youth students	To create a national network of public schools that are successful in helping students from educationally underserved communities develop the knowledge, skills, character and habits needed to succeed in college and the competitive world beyond.	Charter school/Foundation Foundation year: 1994 162 KIPP Schools USA	Promotion
Middle Class Express (MCE)	Low-income Wake County residents	To help individuals and families to fulfill their life goals as they gain new skills and knowledge that moves them closer to the fulfillment of their life plan.	State program Foundation year: 2008 100 participants/year USA	Promotion
Better Beginnings Better Futures (BBBF)	Low-income communities	To reduce the incidence of serious long-term emotional and behavioral problems in children; to promote social, emotional, behavioral, physical and educational development in children; and to strengthen the ability of communities to respond effectively to the social and economic needs of children and their families.	Non-profit organization Foundation year: 1991 8 communities Canada	Promotion
Circo Volador (CV)	Socio-economically disadvantaged youth	Strengthening youth identities and self-esteem, valuing their abilities and potentialities, stimulating youth participation and generating a sense of community identity (directed to the poor) and building and disseminating common languages (directed to mainstream sectors).	Non-profit Organization Foundation year: 1995 More than 320000 youth Mexico	Co-construction
Laudes Infantis (LI)	Low-income communities	To train individuals who can lead processes and programs within their communities and promote active participation in the different activities offered by the organization.	Non-profit organization Foundation year: 1999 3500 families/15000 participants Colombia	Co-construction
Terapia Comunitária (TC)	Impoverished and vulnerable communities	To unite the academic and popular knowledge in a complementary perspective, to build a network of solidarity and expand the possibilities for resolution of the everyday problems.	Program recognized by the State Foundation year: 1992 12000 community therapists Brazil	Co-construction
Borderland Foundation (BF)	Communities from the border	To build bridges between the people of different religions, ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures.	Non-Governmental Organization Foundation year: 1990 Poland	Co-construction
Instituto Wilson Groh (IVG)	Civil society organizations	To propose public policies, in the management of resources and assistance to public sector institutions which advocate and support vulnerable populations.	Non-profit organization Foundation year: 1980 Scope: 7 organizations /5719 participants/year	Safety-net Promotion Co-construction Social Transformation
Observatório de Favelas (OF)	All citizens	To undertake research, consultancy and public actions to produce knowledge and elaborate political proposals focused on slums and urban issues.	Non-profit organization Foundation year: 2001 More than 75000/year Brazil	Social Transformation
Forandrings Fabrikken (FF)	Youth	Development based on the responses from those involved in social systems, will contribute to better quality services.	Nature: Non-profit organization Foundation year: 1999 Norway	Social Transformation

Table 2 - Interview format and participant observation per program

Program	Interview format				Observation
	Semi-structured (participant)	Semi-structured (professional)	Focus Group (professionals)	Informal conversation	
<b>PR</b>	2	1	1 (7 participants)	More than 5	Participant observation
<b>MS</b>	2	1	1 (4 participants)	None	Site observation
<b>PF</b>	2	1	1 (5 participants)	None	None
<b>NOS</b>	2	1	1 (6 participants)	None	None
<b>KIPP</b>	1	1	None	More than 5	Site observation
<b>MCE</b>	1	1	1 (5 participants)	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>BBBF</b>	1	1	1 (5 participants)	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>CV</b>	2	2	1 (6 participants)	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>LI</b>	None	1	None	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>IVG</b>	1	2	1 (12 participants)	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>TC</b>	2	1	1 (6 participants)	More than 5	Participant observation
<b>OF</b>	None	None	None	Less than 5	Site observation
<b>FR</b>	1	1	None	More than 10	Participant observation
<b>BF</b>	1	1	None	More than 5	Site observation
<b>FC</b>	1	1	None	More than 10	Participant observation

Figure 1 – Three trajectories of reciprocity

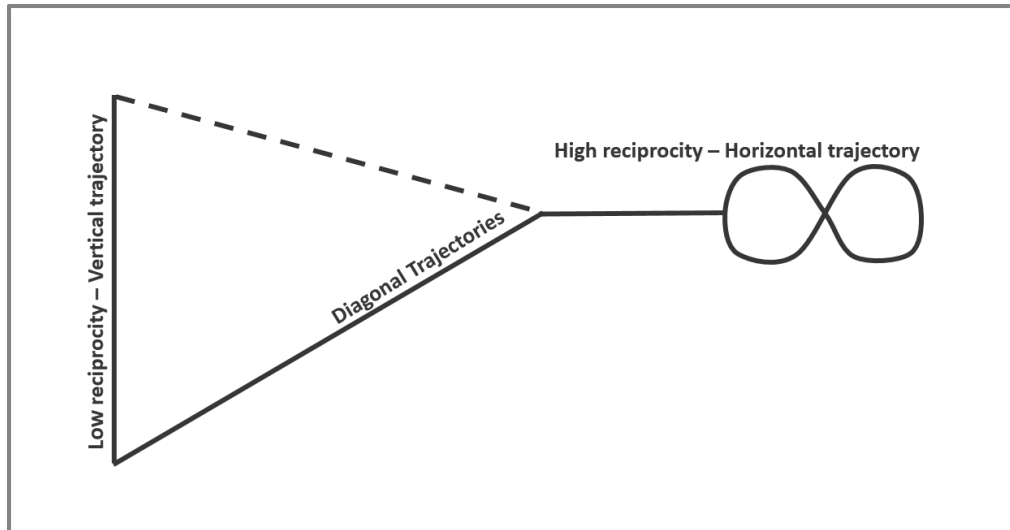


Figure 2 – Quadrants of reciprocity

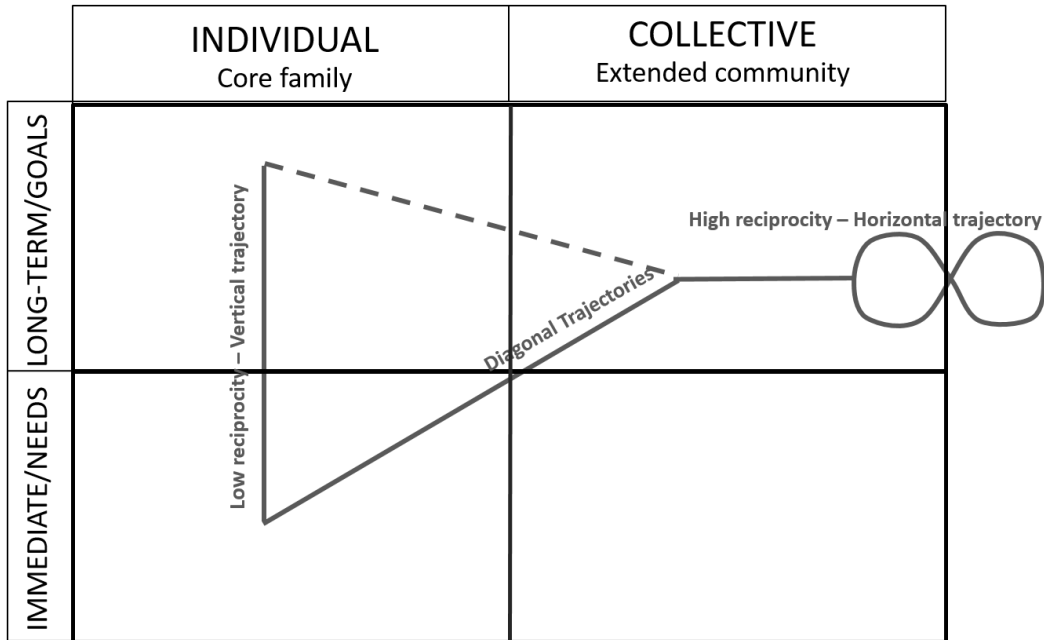


Figure 3 – Types of programs

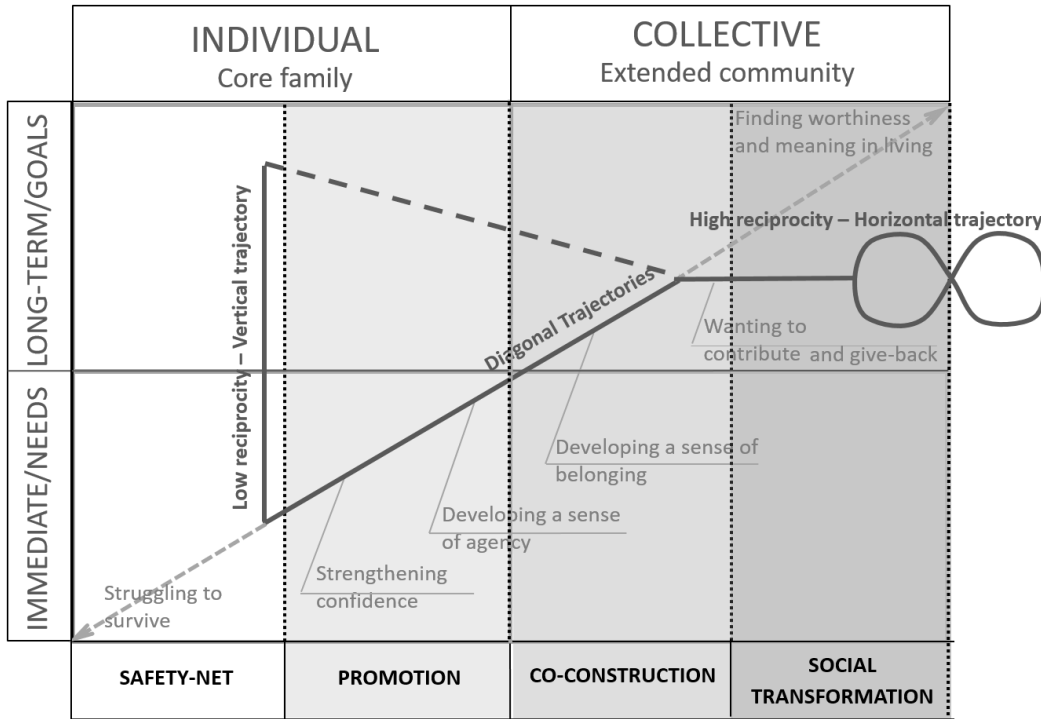


Table 3 – The continuum of programs typology

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Safety-net</b>	<b>Promotion</b>	<b>Co-construction</b>	<b>Social Transformation</b>
<b>Goals</b>	Remove the risk Addressing basic needs Autonomy	Capacity-building Autonomy	Participation Leadership Interdependence	Impact social policies and social structures Synergies between social systems
<b>Services</b>	Food and economic subsidies, protection, emergency support	Formal and informal education, coaching	Leadership development, Informal education	Campaigns, partnerships between systems, action-research
<b>Reciprocity degree</b>	Very low	Low	High	High
<b>Informality</b>	Very formal	Formal	Informal	Informal
<b>Openness</b>	Low	Some	High	High
<b>Power balance</b>	Low	Low	High	High
<b>Finding Identification</b>	Low	Low	High	High
<b>Influence flow</b>	Unidirectional	Predominantly unidirectional	Bidirectional	Bidirectional
<b>Characteristics</b>	Bureaucratic, coercive, standardized	Strengths-based	Flexible, community-based, participatory	Innovative, macro, complex
<b>Professionals' and participants' role</b>	Professional: support and resources provider Participant: user	Professional: mentor Participant: Agent	Both professionals and participants learn and teach Participants usually become part of the staff	Professionals and participants are partners Participants usually become part of the staff
<b>Predominant Focus</b>	Micro/individual/core family Immediate Needs	Micro/Individual/core family Medium term Goals	Group/Community Medium term Goals	Macro/Societal Long-term Goals
<b>Duration</b>	Short-term	Limited	Unlimited	Unlimited