

Public Service Employment as an Institutional Vehicle for Transforming Gender Inequalities: The Case of Argentina

Pavlina R. Tcherneva
Bard College
tchernev@bard.edu



Public Service Employment (PSE)

- How can we use PSE programs to begin addressing gender inequalities, esp. those that emerge from lack of economic opportunities, prolonged spells of unemployment, and precarious sources of income?
- What specific lessons can we learn from the Argentinean experience?
 - How has Argentina's *Jefes* program answered critics' concerns
 - How has it affected the lives of women



Macro merits/micro aspects of *universal* job guarantees

- Macroeconomic effects of PSE
 - Policy addressing the problem of the marginal worker
 - PSE/ELR is a policy of addressing labor market precariousness
 - A policy of lifting all boats
- Microeconomic aspects of PSE
 - Are jobs mother-ready
 - Do they reduce time use associated with unpaid work
 - Do they reduce unpaid work itself
 - Reduce gender biases in work (e.g. feminization of certain low skill jobs due to inadequate access to training and education)



Lessons from Argentina

- General Criticisms of PSE
 - Unmanageable, administrative nightmare
 - Big and inefficient government, corruption
 - Unskilled people with no culture of work
 - There isn't sufficient infrastructure and institutional support for such a large scale public service program
 - This is not work (unemployment by another name)
 - Artificial increase in the labor force by 'activating' women
- Some findings from Argentina's experience
 - PSE broadens the meaning of work
 - PSE has a very positive impact on women
 - Women want paid work
 - PSE empowers
- Argentina's current program reform from public employment to welfare: a step backwards for women



Program introduction

- Some distinctive features:
 - Unemployed head of households are given opportunity to work 4hrs/day for 150 pesos/mo
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants are women
 - 87% of activities are community projects
 - 60-80% maximum government financing for each project
 - Program <1% of GDP at its peak
 - decentralized administration
 - sharp reduction in indigence rates, program multiplier of 2.57
 - Training and education component



August 2005 cite visits

- The Policy makers
 - Ministry of Labor, City Government of Buenos Aires,
- Beneficiaries
 - immigrants with some formal labor market experience (Ciudad Oculta)
 - skilled workers who had lost jobs as a result of the economic crisis
 - young and educated women from “downwardly mobile” neighborhoods that had aspired to middle class status before the crisis
- Activities
 - Some of the projects sold output in markets
 - others distributed their output or services free of charge to their communities
- A large majority of the participants we interviewed were female, as were many of the supervisors, managers, political activists

Types of projects: butcher shop, sewing coop, bakery



Women at work at the Mataderos bakery



The sewing cooperative was another very small operation.



This butcher shop under construction was mostly funded by local individuals, who were also applying for some government funds in order to complete the project.

Agro-coop, Micro enterprise, Multi-project house



Half of this previously fallow plot was now dedicated to growing vegetables and other crops to feed the people from this agro-cooperative and their children.



This micro-enterprise also had various posters pointing to local resources for family planning, training and education.



The rest of the plot was used to prepare food using an outdoor oven and to care for the children in a mini-daycare center.



Literacy training, education, family planning, low cost/high quality products



This micro-enterprise also had various posters pointing to local resources for family planning, training and education.



The pastry shop, like many other public service projects, had a training and education facility. This is an example of the training schedules, the classes offered, and the names of the workers who were enrolled in these courses and their respective instructors.

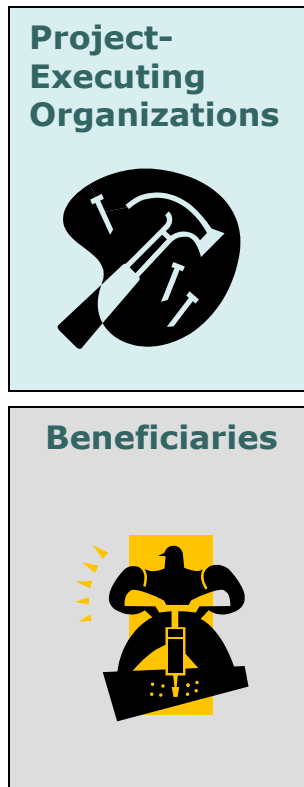


The toys produced in this shop were finely made, with intricate detail, beautifully-knitted ornamentation and a solid dose of creativity.



These toys were made of recycled material.

Decentralized Administration



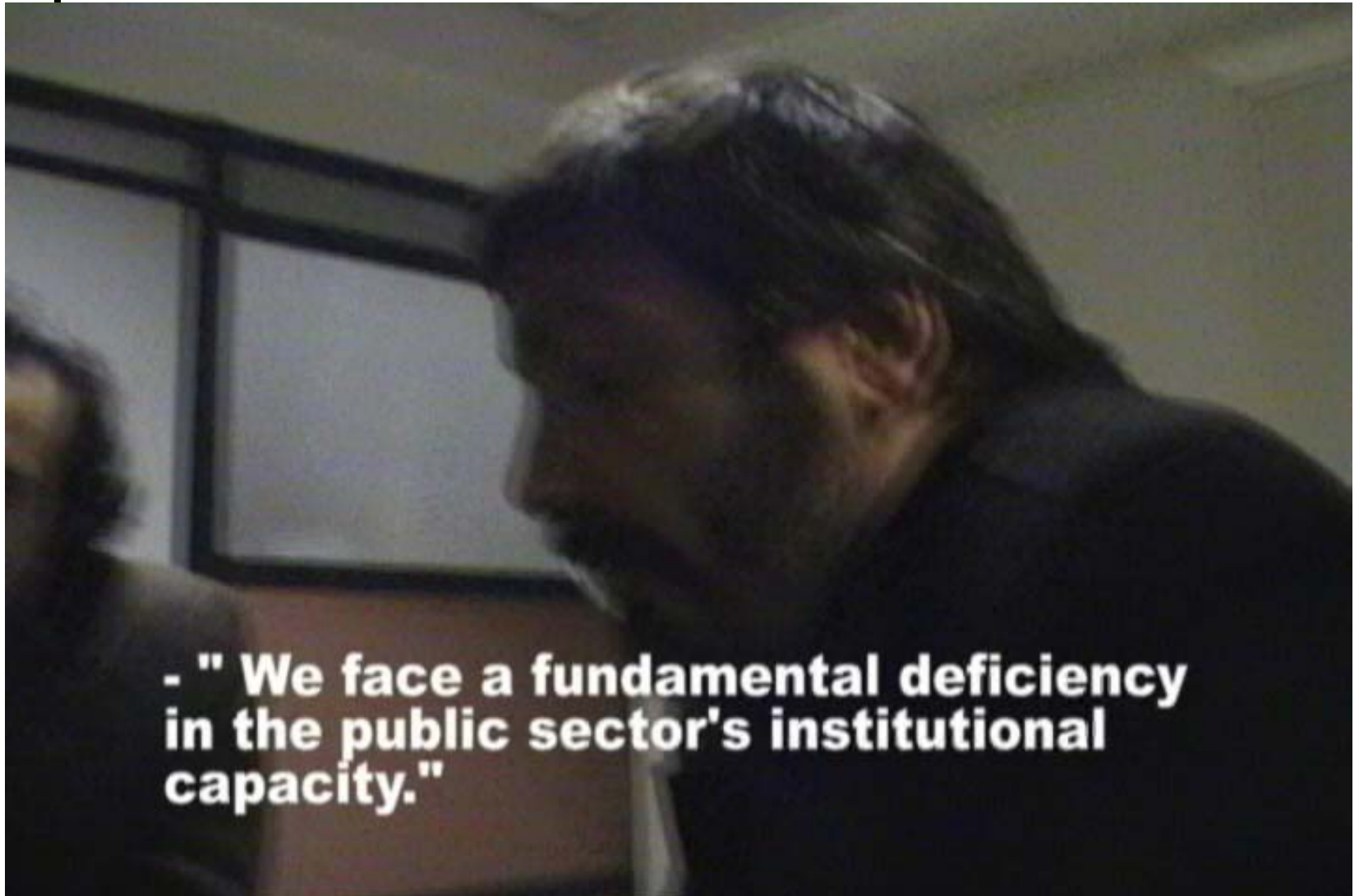
- Institutions:
 - National: Ministry of Labor, GECAL
 - Local: Municipalities, Municipal Consultative Councils (MCC)
- Project Executing Organizations:
 - NGOs, Governmental organizations, Non-profits
- Beneficiaries
 - Heads of Household

Some Criticisms:

No culture of work



Some criticisms: Inadequate Institutional Base





Criticisms

- Administrative nightmare
- Big inefficient government
- Unskilled people with no culture of work
- There isn't sufficient infrastructure and institutional support to do the public sector jobs
- This is not work
- Artificial increase in the labor force by 'activating' women



Some Answers from Argentina

- *Jefes* was up and running in less than 4 months
- Less than 1% of GDP and falling.
Decentralized administration
- Women wanted to work
- Many worked long hours (beyond the 4 hours), some had specific skills, many were getting literacy training and education.
- Some available infrastructure from the Eva Peron Foundation, other newly built structures, in other cases people opened their homes

Eva Peron Foundation



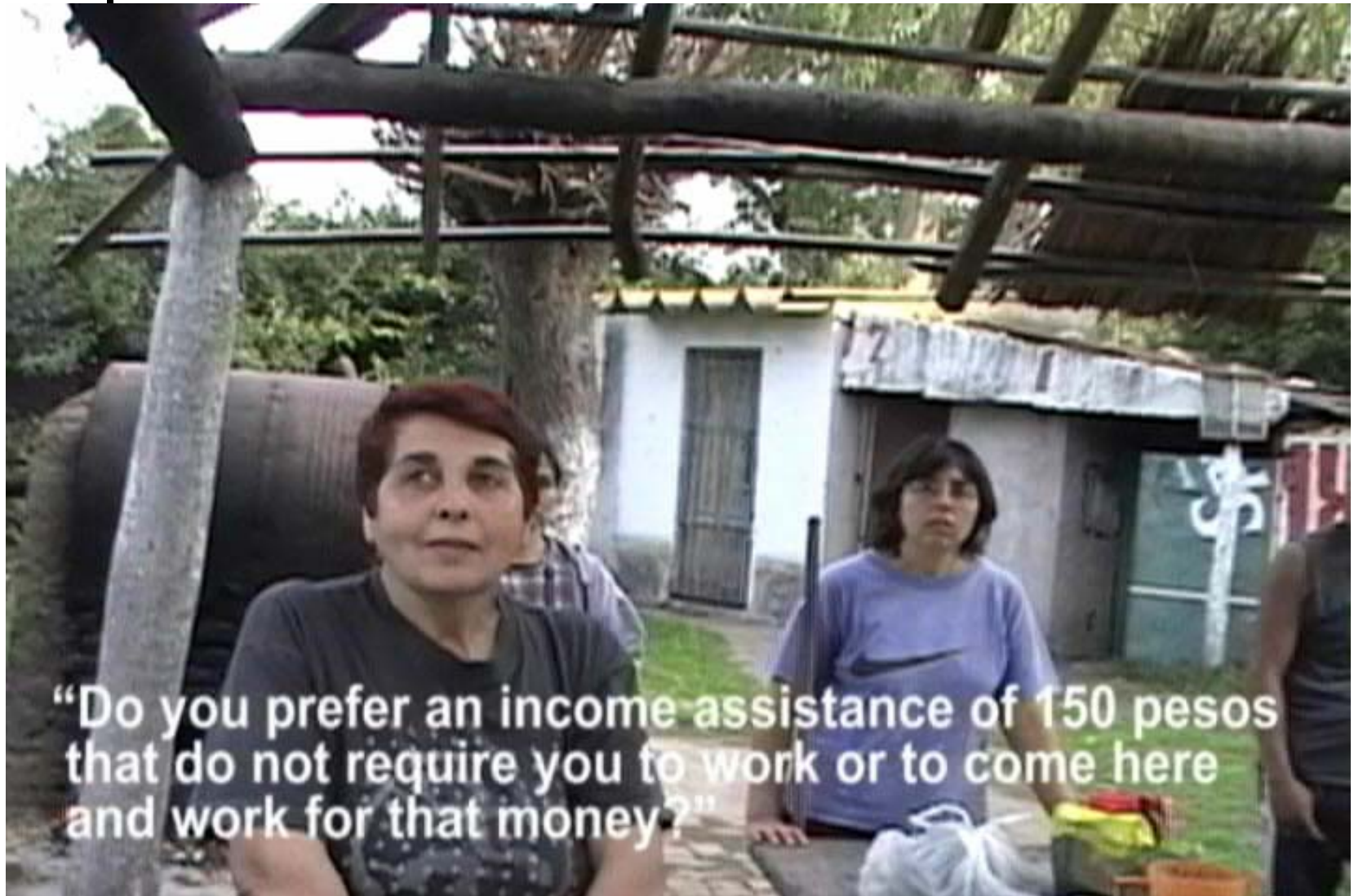
- ● ● | Women (& men) wanted jobs



Why people wanted jobs



Why people wanted jobs



Why people wanted jobs



Why people wanted jobs

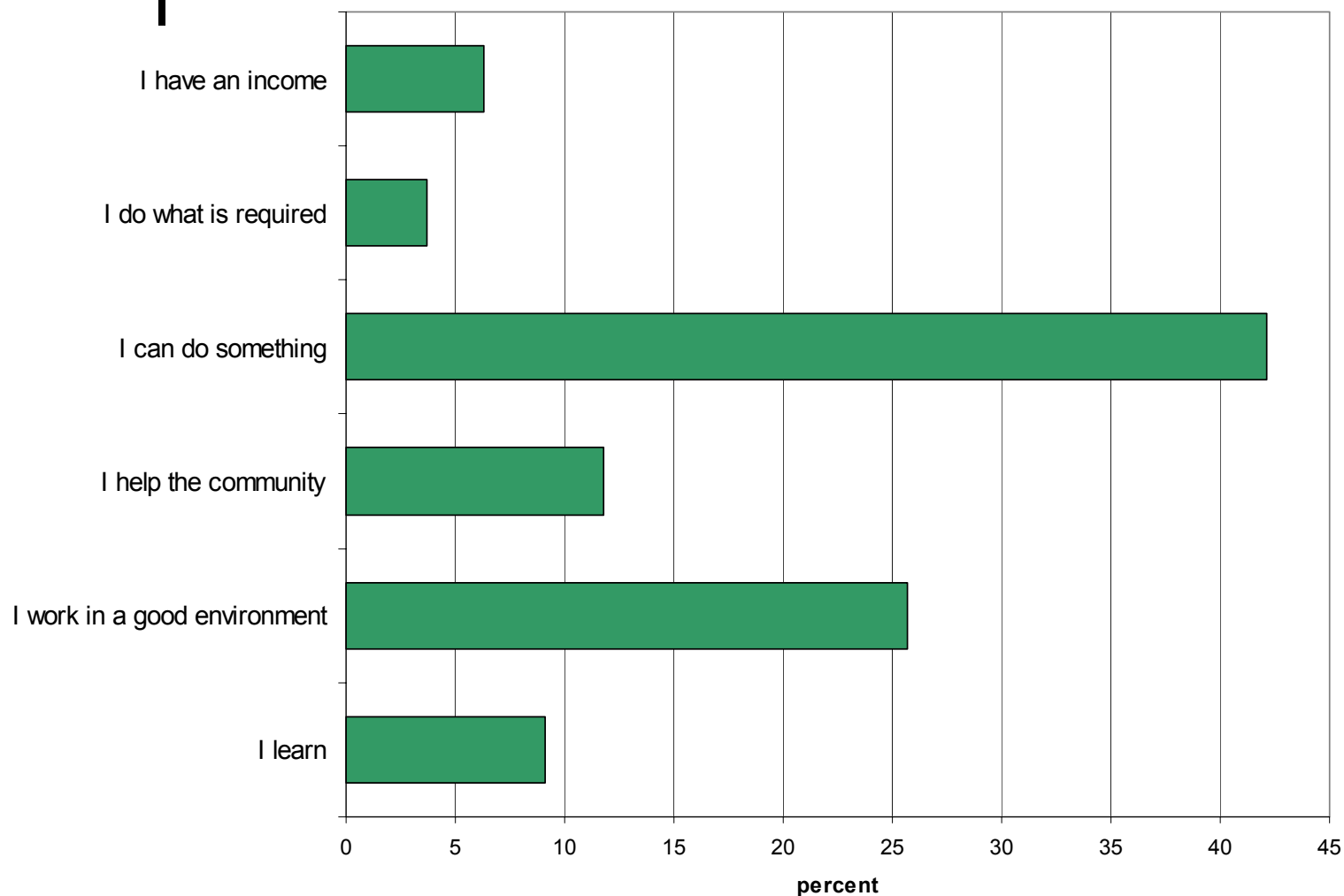




Why people wanted jobs

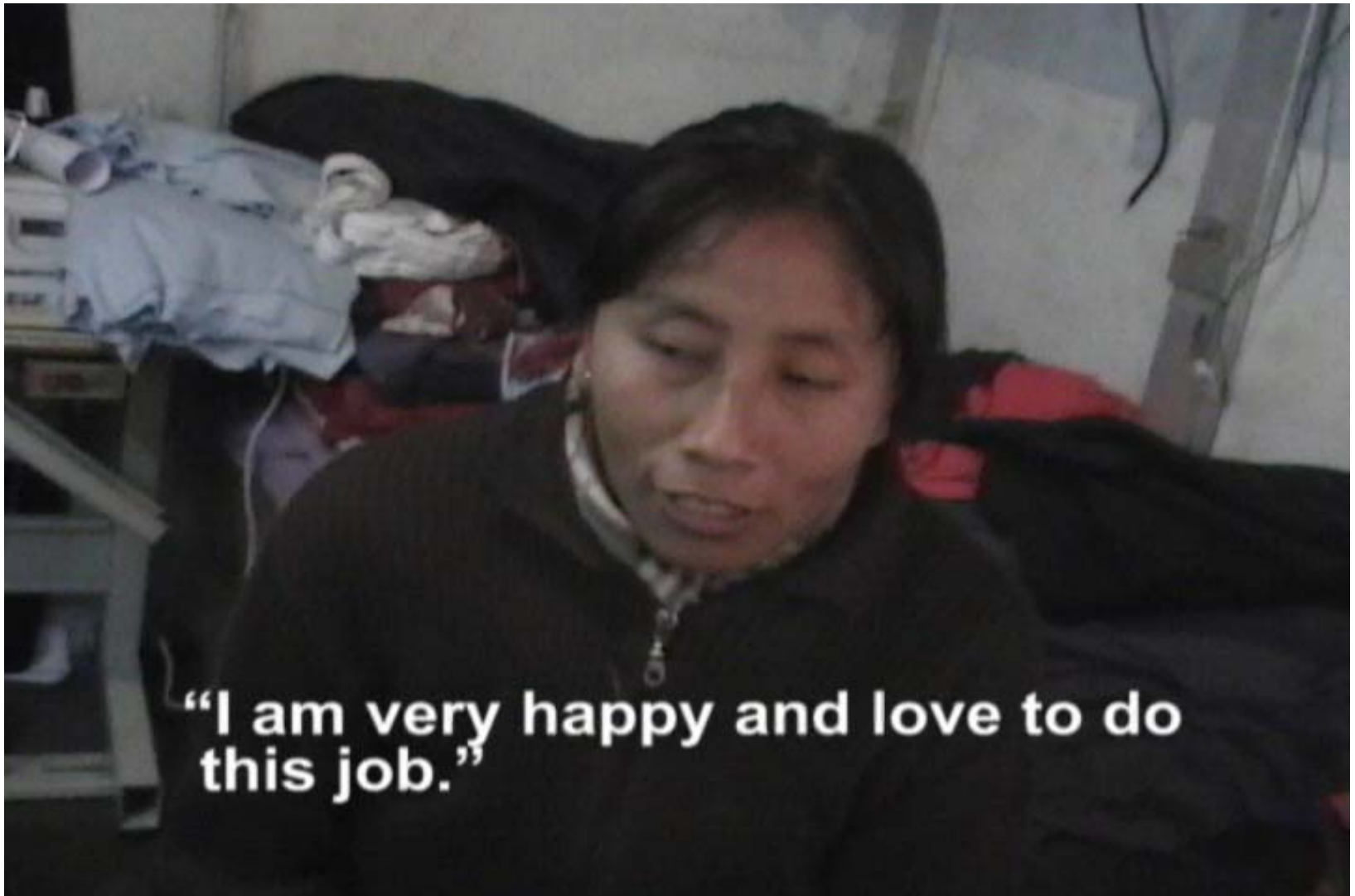
- Reasons for preference to work:
 - they felt (or would feel) useless sitting at home
 - they felt like they were helping the community when they were working
 - there is dignity in working
 - they were meeting their neighbors and
 - they were learning new skills

Why satisfied with program



SOURCE: Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, Argentina

Why satisfied with program



Why satisfied with program





Why they wanted *public sector* jobs

- Proximity to jobs and childcare
 - Long commute from jobs was among the major disadvantages to their private sector jobs before they were laid off.
- Kids attended daycare, enrolled in school, or accompanied mothers to the workplace for after-school activities.
- Participants have access to various social services—often in a room attached to the workplace.
 - tutoring and literacy programs for children and adults
 - reproductive health services
 - information about intervention services for drug abuse and violence within the family



PSE Empowers

- Acquire skill and experience
- Dignity in work
- Direct representation in government
- Decentralized model that enhances participatory democracy
 - *The Take* by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis (*Brukman factory*)

The Meaning of Work: Two Views

- Profit generating vs. socially useful activities
 - People distinguished between factory work and community work, with many claiming that there are social services that are not considered 'productive' in the sense of profit-generating activities that, nonetheless, needed to be done—things like caring for the young, old and the ill, cleaning and fixing up the neighborhoods, running soup kitchens, and so on.



This man reflected on the poor conditions of his private sector factory job. By contrast, he was pleased with the flexible hours offered by Jefes and the proximity to his children. He preferred to work long hours in the Jefes job, since all proceeds from the sale of anything extra he produced were shared among the members of the sewing cooperative.



The Meaning of Work

- *Jefes* has helped to foster public discussion about the meaning of work, broadening conceptions of “useful” activities that ought to be “paid work”: providing aid to aged persons, child care, environmental clean-up.
- Women’s work as a public good

Welfare or Work?

- *The point is not to require women to work as is done in modern workfare programs with punitive means-tested measures, but to give women the opportunity to be employed in decent jobs if they want to work.*



All women we interviewed reported that they are happy to be working, to be involved in the community and to have jobs close to their children



A note on the present reform

- *Familias*
 - Child allowance
- *Seguro de Capacitacion y Empleo*
 - Unemployment insurance with training component
- All women report that they wanted to work
 - *Jefes*: a policy with the people in mind

Bottom-up approach I



Bottom-up approach II

