

*Draft paper for WeD Conference. Bath, June 2007.*

## **How relevant is wellbeing to international development policy and practice?** James Copestake

### **Summary**

The paper examines the view that wellbeing provides discursive space for reviewing development policy and practice in fresh ways. Section 1 examines its potential to throw light on contemporary policy perspectives that contest the relative importance of economic growth, basic needs, human rights and the local. Section 2 argues that development agencies can learn more about the views of those they purport to serve by drawing more on psychometric approaches to studying wellbeing. Section 3 reviews how a wider conceptualisation of wellbeing adds to political economy analysis of national welfare regimes. It suggests that openness to social, symbolic and emotional as well as material drivers of change can be critical to identification of opportunities and obstacles to development. Section 4 explores the relevance of these insights to how development agencies operate in complex, diverse and contested policy arenas. It identifies a central management problem as being complexity, requiring that agencies set parameters and delegate. Drawing on a grid/group analysis of culture and coordination it argues for weaker parameters, including less rigid horizontal demarcation so as to permit more flexible, reflexive, local and holistic improvisation. Section 5 concludes that thinking about wellbeing is helpful in identifying why some policies and practices resonate among stakeholders whereas others fail to connect and indeed alienate them. While there may be context-specific grounds for favouring narrower as well as broader development discourse, such judgements can only be made with reference to a broad understanding of the nature of wellbeing. The argument is informed particularly by research into wellbeing in Peru.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introduction.**

In a world full of poverty, conflict and injustice some impatience with agonising over wellbeing is understandable. Of course wellbeing is relevant to development, so let's get on with tackling specific problems! But impatience can be a symptom of dogmatism and can contribute to misunderstanding that compounds these same global problems: Hypocrisy and failure is the price to be paid for insufficient reflection and self-criticism, as documented by the growing literature on development disconnects.<sup>2</sup> Sharp differences persist in the way stakeholders in international development policy and practice (hereafter referred to simply as development) think about poverty and wellbeing. This profoundly affects what they do, what works and what doesn't.

#### *Contemporary development discourse.*

This section first presents an overview of contemporary thinking about development. By contrasting four distinct contemporary discourses I explore how much disagreement is rooted in fundamentally different assumptions about what it means for a person to 'be well'. This is not necessarily to argue for a fifth wellbeing discourse, but to suggest that the concept provides discursive space for clarifying and perhaps even resolving some of the differences between narrower perspectives.

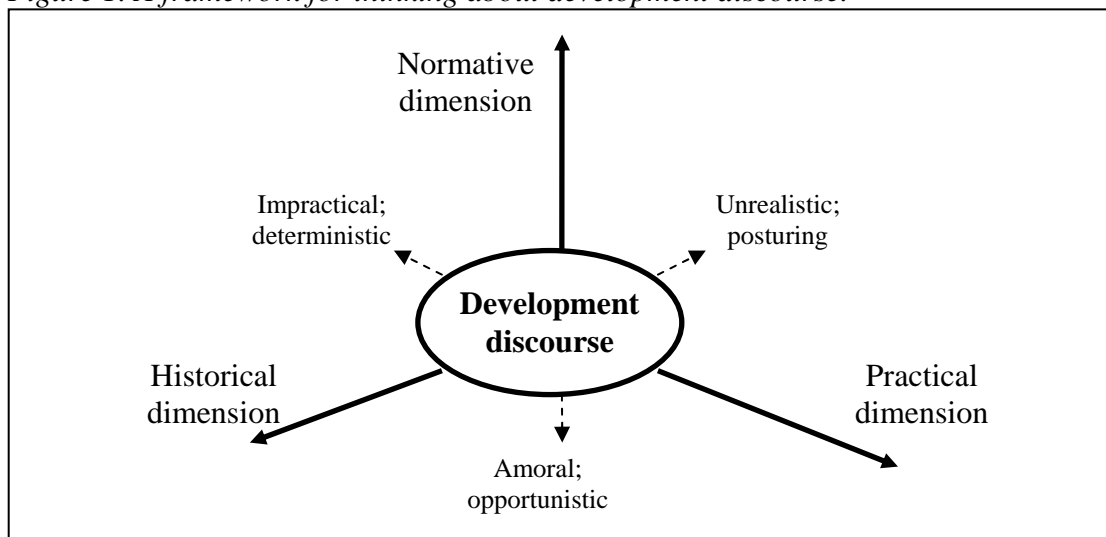
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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to many members of WeD (also Mateo Garcia Cabello and Virginia Williamson) for ideas shared, reworked, returned and rebuffed. I am grateful also to ESRC for their funding of WeD.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Ferguson (1990), Escobar (1995) and Rahmenia (1997). On development disconnects specifically in the Peruvian Andes see, for example, Apfell-Marglin et al. (2003), Bebbington (2007), Coxshall (2006), Garcia (2005), Poole (2004), and Vincent (2004).

Development discourse is defined here as language that seeks to establish a coherent story in three dimensions. First, there is the normative or ethical dimension, embodying a definition of wellbeing. This is the main focus of Section 2. Second there is a historical dimension, representing a view of development in the wider sense of an actual process determining availability of resources, opportunities and constraints in any period. This is the main subject of Section 3. Third, there is a practical dimension, concerned with how to manage development. This is explored further in Section 4. To the extent that a discourse achieves coherence between these three dimensions then it provides a cognitive framework for meaningful action.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 also suggests how different forms of discourse may fail as well as succeed in achieving such a synthesis: erring on the side of pragmatism at the expense of normative clarity, for example.

Figure 1. A framework for thinking about development discourse.<sup>4</sup>



It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the long-term evolution of development discourse.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I use the above framework to offer a snapshot of contemporary policy debate. As a first approximation, I suggest that four positions can be distinguished, as shown in the second to fourth columns of Table 1.

Growth first is utilitarian in its view of wellbeing, emphasising the goal of raising average incomes. Over the years this has been advocated by classical, neoclassical and some heterodox economists to the extent that they have all regarded economic growth as the key means not only to increasing average incomes, but also to creating more productive employment and thereby reducing absolute poverty rates (Easterly, 2002). Its neo-liberal version emphasises the role of markets in doing so, and became known as the Washington consensus, but the discourse is broader than

<sup>3</sup> In a more comprehensive analysis of the different “foundations of knowledge” underlying academic disciplines Bevan (2007) identifies nine components: focus, values, ontology, epistemology, theorising, research strategy, key conclusions, rhetoric and praxis.

<sup>4</sup> Lines show three sets of connections that render a discourse consistent and meaningful; arrows show three ways in which these can be weakened.

<sup>5</sup> Useful examples of books that attempt this are Hunt (1989), Raczynski (1998) and Pieterse (2001). My own views are summarised in Copestake (2005), where I suggest four discourses have competed for dominance over the development industry in the last fifty years: comprehensive planning, basic needs, neo-liberalism and policy management.

this and continues to evolve.<sup>6</sup> For example, it has recently rediscovered an interest in reducing inequality, particularly to the extent that this can be shown to be based on market failures and to restrict domestic demand in ways that adversely affect economic growth (World Bank, 2006). But many advocates of this approach are wary of public intervention aimed directly at reducing poverty on the grounds that these are prone to distort incentives away from innovation and economic growth, encouraging rent taking and seeking instead (Easterly, 2006).

*Table 1. Four contemporary development discourses.*

	Economic growth first	Basic needs first	Human rights first	Local first
Normative dimension	Individual material income, leisure and choices.	Poverty reduction; satisfaction of multiple basic needs.	Social justice; equity of esteem and opportunity.	Community solidarity: local self-determination.
Historical dimension	Capitalism first: growth, jobs and rising incomes are delivered mostly through private enterprise.	Managed capitalism: rational mostly public service response to deprivations arising from or ignored by capitalism.	Constrained capitalism: popular and philosophical reaffirmation of universal values and norms.	Beyond capitalism: endurance through resistance of local groups to the hegemonic tendencies of globalisation.
Practical dimension	Create better conditions for pursuit of private material self-interest (market led).	Build capacity to provide all with the means to meet a basic set of human needs (state led).	Establish basic rights in law and fight to ensure correlative duties are delivered (society led).	Build grassroots communities in harmony with local ecology. (community-led).

Needs first is based on a more multi-dimensional view of wellbeing and poverty. Its political home has been in the UN system, and includes the literature on basic needs, the capability approach and human development (Gasper, 2007:52-59). It has historically been particularly concerned with the role of the state, including official international development agencies, and with rational planning to supplement the market in ensuring entitlement to basic needs, including services with public good characteristics such as health, education, social protection and food security. In the last decade there has been a marked shift from a growth first vision of wellbeing (as primarily a function of asset ownership, income, consumption and leisure time) to a broader vision of multi-dimensional needs, such as those embodied in the Millennium Development Goals (Sumner, 2006)<sup>7</sup>. These have also supported by pressures to raise international aid flows and sovereign debt reduction (Sachs, 2005). This indicates the tendency of the needs first approach to work to an expertly informed specification of universal minimal requirements for human wellbeing.

Rights first emphasises the relational (social, political and cultural) dimensions of development, the struggle against injustice and the potential of human rights

<sup>6</sup> See Williamson (2003) for reflections on the original conceptualisation of the Washington Consensus, and Fine (2002) for a more critical view. Kuczynski and Williamson (2003) set out the agenda for second generation economic reform, and Rodrik (2006) also offers ten additional components of an “augmented” Washington consensus for “growth diagnostics”.

<sup>7</sup> Stedman Jones (2004) provides a reminder that the debate between these two positions goes back at least two hundred years further. Kanbur (2001) emphasises that needs discourse is rooted particularly in scepticism about markets, and unwillingness to weigh poverty for some against prosperity for others either within or between generations.

discourse to mobilize poor and marginalised citizens through social movements to become more active agents of their own development. Compared to needs first it emphasises the role of popular social movements rather than what Wood and Gough (2004:321) refer to as “far sighted elites”. Rights discourse has become particularly influential within international NGOs, and has been extended from the civil-political sphere to the socio-economic. Hickey and Bracking (2005:862) describe this as a bid to secure basic needs of “distant strangers” not as alms but by rights through duties of action on major social institutions underpinned by a theory of transnational justice. However, in NGO hands and compared to needs first discourse the rights first approach is less rationalist, materialist, aid-oriented, top-down and paternal: more focused instead on justice, grassroots action, power and citizenship education.

Advocates of the three discourses find themselves competing with each other not only in policy arenas but also to capture the popular imagination in increasingly global debate mediated by bureaucracies, academia, mass media, politics and popular culture. In so doing so they also create powerful tensions with local perspectives, an important product of which is the growth of a fourth ‘anti-development’ discourse. It would be contradictory to call anti-development discourse a discourse, but for all their differences its advocates have a common interest in defending local or parochial perspectives from universal and cosmopolitan influences. Local first discourse regards the other three discourses as a threat to individual autonomy and cultural diversity (Berman, 1997). The critique of growth first discourse, with its emphasis on market-led economic growth is most familiar (e.g. Mehmet, 1995). But the two other discourses described above also attract criticism. For example, Illich (1992:88) described basic needs as “possibly the most insidious legacy left behind by development”, while Esteva and Prakash (1997:283) argued that “...any conception of universal rights – to education, for example – is controversial and a colonial tool for domination”. Hickey and Bracking (2005:862) also note that the (Western) ethnocentric character of rights discourse “remains a problem, as does the issue of how the weakest members of society mobilize to actively claim their rights, suggesting a need to look beyond rights based approaches”. From this fourth perspective the other three (or indeed any synthesis of them) is suspect, since it risks overwhelming and distorting the local, vernacular and idiosyncratic narratives of individuals, communities and grassroots movements. Rahnema (1997:ix) observes how the very diversity of global development discourse is part of its attraction, so long as debate does not “question the ideology of development” and the assumption of “its relevance to people’s deeper aspirations”.

A key point of the anti-development position is that development is more than just discourse, but part of a powerful and professional bureaucratic nexus with its own interests capable of imposing its views of the world not only through language but also through its far-reaching actions. Development discourse is dangerous because it is aligned with a global apparatus that justifies its existence by using language (of problems, poverty, need, underdevelopment) that are to some degree self-perpetuating, particularly when the labels are internalised by the people thereby stigmatized (Escobar, 1995). At this point the local first discourse acquires a strongly deterministic streak in its scepticism of the power for reform or redemption of global institutions. An even more critical assumption is that having neutralized or removed the development industry an alternative post-development dynamic of grassroots action will somehow emerge that can both deliver human wellbeing in greater measure and is expunged of the tendency to create precisely the kind of development bureaucracy that was first wished away. Pieterse (2001:111) welcomes the “shift

toward cultural sensibilities” but fears the “ethno-chauvinism” and “reverse orientalism” that would result from reification of indigenous and local culture. Too pure and dogmatic a critique of development, he points out, risks replacing it with its shadow, and risks becoming an abdication from the messier and more complex task of political engagement with the details of development both as discourse and as practice, or what Calderon and Szmukler (2004:282) describe as “deliberative politics”.<sup>8</sup>

Local first discourse is useful in deconstructing development’s Western ethnocentrism, its global bureaucratic hegemonic tendencies, and its habit of using idealistic rhetoric as a cover for self-interested intervention. But the philosophical foundation required for reconstructing development is broader. Renewed reflection on the nature of human wellbeing is part of this, as is greater attention to culture.<sup>9</sup> In particular, it provides opportunities to reassert development as a holistic endeavour, challenging the way it tends to be carved up into specialist sub-fields and disciplines each with a bias towards some particular aspect of wellbeing that it can be dangerous to view in isolation.<sup>10</sup> But to realise the potential of this reflexive turn in development it is important that it is systematically informed by empirical understanding of people’s experience of wellbeing and poverty in ways that are not sanitised by the same bureaucratic, professional and disciplinary machinery that is in constant need of reform. Pieterse (2001:163) observes that the tendency towards “authoritarian high modernism” stemming from the Western Enlightenment accounts for much of the past failure of development effort, but that hope resides in its capacity for transformation through “reactions to and negotiations of the crises of progress”.

### *Wellbeing discourse*

This discussion illustrates how human wellbeing can be viewed in many different ways: how defining it too narrowly undermines its potential as a discursive space. On the other hand, it is useful to map out in a broader way some of the territory that alternative definitions can encompass. To this end wellbeing can be defined as a state of being with others in society where (a) people’s basic needs are met (b) they can act effectively and meaningfully in pursuit of their goals, and (c) they feel satisfied with their life.<sup>11</sup> Each of the three components requires further clarification. The first raises

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<sup>8</sup> They define this as “based on a pluralistic notion of justice that seeks the recognition of equality in difference. This, in turn, can promote socially shared economic development, starting with the idea that development must include many distinct groups, and a re-examination of the notions of the common good and public responsibility”.

<sup>9</sup> Rao and Walton (2004) is an indication of the extent to which culture is making incursions into development thinking. In contrast, Radcliffe and Laurie (2006) set out the dangers that what they refer to as a “new paradigm of culture and development” is neglectful of historical and geographical variation and contestation.

<sup>10</sup> This echoes arguments set out by Pieterse (2001) in his chapter on “critical holism and the Tao of development.” It is surprising, however, how little this chapter refers explicitly to wellbeing. This is perhaps an indication of just how recently it has entered into the lexicon of development theory.

<sup>11</sup> Gough (personal communication) points out that these three dimensions can be identified in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia* as the highest goal in life and this is normally translated into English as ‘happiness’ (Ethics I vii). However, recognising that pleasures can be fleeting, he goes on to define the happy man as “one who is *active* in accordance with complete *virtue*, and who is adequately furnished with *external goods*, and that not for some specified period but throughout a complete life” (I x). This introduces three further ideas. First, the idea of activity (*energeia*) – of exercising one’s powers and realising one’s capabilities through time (though, given the accidents of fortune, this can take the form of enduring hardships). Second, it introduces the idea of virtue (*arete*) since “virtuous acts have the greatest permanence” (I x). Aristotle grounds virtue in good

the issue or what constitutes a basic need or, putting it negatively something whose absence, when viewed in isolation, invariably constitutes harm.<sup>12</sup> While arriving at a definitive full and final list may be impossible, securing wide agreement on at least some components (food, water etc.) is reasonably straight-forward (Gough and McGregor, 2007:11-16). Turning to the second part, goals can be viewed as potentially achievable expressions of a person's values, and embraces the idea of living a fulfilled, meaningful life (Haidt, 2006). It allows for differences according to context and anticipates the likelihood of political conflict over wellbeing. A liberal emphasis on freedom, emphasis on civil and political rights, and resistance to universal projects can all be accommodated here. Third, satisfaction introduces both positive and negative subjective feelings. Hedonic psychology (e.g. Kahnemann *et al.*, 1999) tells us that these are not opposites, and are also affected by aspirations and adaptive preferences.

This threefold definition of wellbeing leaves scope for further elaboration of each component, and also for exploring trade-offs between them. It can be further clarified by comparing it with the more widely used twofold distinction between: subjective wellbeing (how people think and feel); and objective wellbeing (what they can be observed to have and do).<sup>13</sup> OWB is particularly associated with indicators of access to observable resources that contribute to meeting needs and to avoiding harm. However, success in achieving goals can also be objectively measured, as indeed can outward signs of happiness, like smiling a lot. SWB is particularly associated with people's reported feelings, but this concept extends beyond positive and negative emotions to include personal assessment of goal achievement, as well as subjective perception of the adequacy of available resources. This illustrates the more general point that subjective and objective aspects of wellbeing are in practice often very hard to disentangle, particularly when it comes to interpersonal relationships. The post-positivist rise of constructivism in social as well as the natural sciences reflects growing understanding that all assessment of objective states (wellbeing included) is also ultimately socially and culturally embedded, or inter-subjective (Pieterse, 2001:142).

In breaking with the tradition of regarding wellbeing as either clearly objective or subjective this paper places considerable emphasis on the explicit or latent process of goal formation, whether this takes the form of individual preferences, locally accepted norms or universal theories (Gough and McGregor, 2004). The feelings and motives elicited by goals are determined in part by their relationship to actual or perceived availability of resources to achieve them in a particular context. They in turn trigger actions whose outcomes affect future goals and resource availability (see Figure 2). At the personal level, the framework can be used to explore subjective wellbeing defined as long-term satisfaction with personal goal achievement. Individual goals reflect personality and self-image, which in turn reflect personal

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actions within the context that a man finds himself. Third, happiness requires external goods, "for it is difficult if not impossible to do fine deeds without any resources" (I viii). See also Gasper (2007:60).

<sup>12</sup> For example, building on the work of Doyal and Gough (1991) and of Ryan and Deci (2001) we can identify needs for health/competence, autonomy and relatedness. These in turn requires a set of intermediate need satisfiers, such as food, childhood security. The reference to "in isolation" rules out situations where harm, even death, is voluntarily accepted in the name of some higher goal.

<sup>13</sup> While OWB is by definition revealed through physical states and actions (including ownership of assets, allocation of time, the consumption of goods and the use of services) which are in theory observable by others, its measurement in practice often relies on subjective statements of respondents (e.g. how much money and leisure they *say* they have). Hence it cannot be assumed that data on OWB is necessarily more reliable than that for SWB.

relationships, values, social identity and culture (Yamamoto, 2006). We also hypothesise that life satisfaction is influenced by individual perception of the gap between personal goals and the resources needed to achieve them.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 2. A framework for thinking about individual wellbeing as process

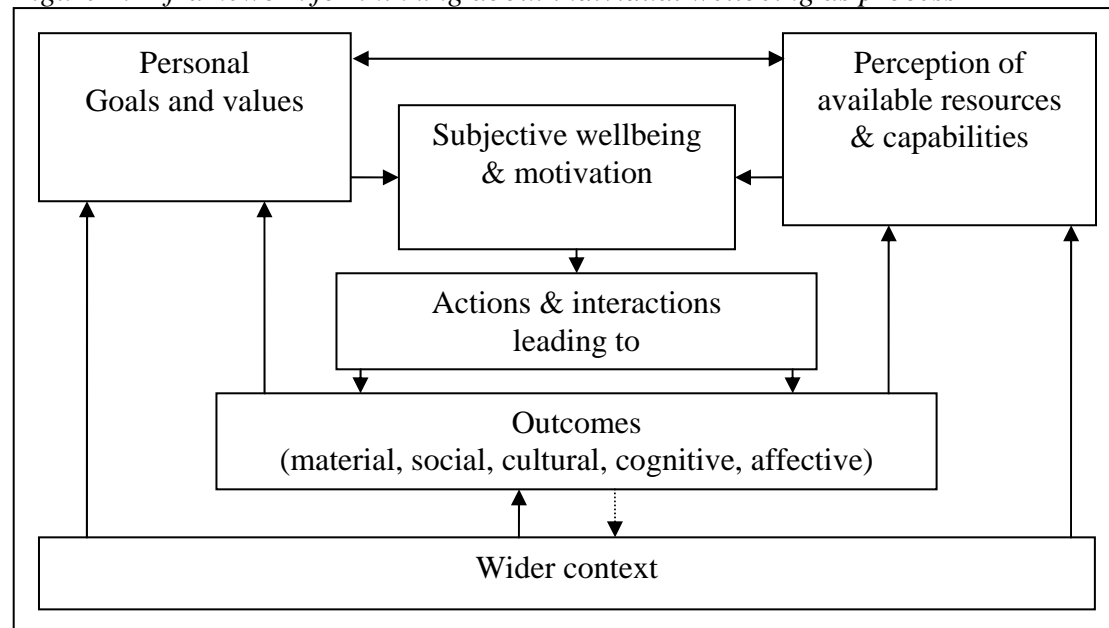


Figure 2 can also be related back to Figure 1: goals reflect a normative dimension (how things should be); resources and capabilities are linked to historical context (how things are) and the combination of the two prompts action (to make things more like they should be). Every individual has their own set of stories relating these different components, and we are interested in how far development discourse strikes a chord or *resonates* with them. Where there is a mismatch then alienation, resistance and conflict results: international development fails to connect with individual perceptions of wellbeing. This begs the question: how can top-down discourses of development that drive policy learn from and adapt to the diverse and myriad personal visions and narratives of individual wellbeing? This is the subject of the next section.

## 2. Subjective wellbeing and needs assessment

This section examines mechanisms for identification of priorities for development intervention in specific contexts, this being one link between the practical and normative dimensions of development discourse. More specifically it explores scope for using psychometric methods to identify such priorities. Not discussed, but latent in what is said are four general propositions. First, development can usefully be grounded in more complex understandings of individual human wellbeing. Second, the scientific basis for such understanding can usefully draw more from psychology as a discipline. Third, this will entail mainstreaming new tools of research, appraisal and

<sup>14</sup> This echoes the emphasis in economics on rational constrained optimisation. However, recognition of the importance of individual and cultural constraints on such rationality is growing. For example, low wellbeing influences peoples' actions and interactions via their influence on self-esteem, confidence and the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2006). Similarly, preferences are bounded by cultural understandings, and "preference constraints" are themselves endogenous to development processes.

evaluation. Fourth, psychological ideas and methods will need to be better understood and appropriated by development specialists who are not psychologists.

### *Institutional context*

If development is regarded as an ‘industry’ then finding out what its ‘clients’ think and feel can be regarded as routine market research and a counterpoint to the top-down visions of wellbeing arising from agencies’ own preferred discourse, including those reviewed in the last section. Do we feel food secure? How satisfied are we with our formal education? Can we agree on a list of basic needs? How important is our own personal autonomy in different arenas of our life?<sup>15</sup> The questions are many and behind them all are different views of wellbeing. The choices of development agencies unavoidably reflect a particular view about the relative importance of different aspects of the wellbeing of those they are seeking to assist. How far can they (and should they) take these people’s own priorities, values and visions of wellbeing into account?

No development agency can have a work plan that is entirely client responsive or demand driven: all are constrained by their own competence and cultural inheritance. The latter is latent in the values of staff and in informal practices that may or may not be echoed by formal mission, vision and policy statements. A specialised microfinance institution, for example, embodies a view about how wellbeing depends in part on access to financial services.<sup>16</sup> It cannot and will not suddenly turn itself into a medical relief agency, nor should it. But while there is strong institutional path dependence in respect of embodied visions of wellbeing this need not amount to total lock-in, nor diminish the value of finding out how this connects or fails to connect with those of actual and potential clients. Taken as a whole, the development industry can and should be much more responsive to the differentiated, diverse and changing priorities of those it aims to assist.

In the market arena, delegation of power to any business is in part legitimised by the freedom of the consumer not to buy, and the belief that if enough customers reject its products then the power of a business over resources is lost. Of course, businesses also carry out market research to find out directly how consumers think and feel about their products, and they also seek to influence this through advertising. Likewise, while the ultimate check on a government may be that it can be thrown out of office for failure to deliver on what was expected of it, governments also invest heavily in monitoring and manipulating how others think and feel about their performance. Development can similarly be viewed as another arena in which institutionalised and individual wants, needs and visions of wellbeing compete and coalesce with each other. However, this arena or “quasi-market” is made additionally complicated to the extent that those who pay for and vote for the services provided are not the main intended beneficiaries of those services (Martens *et al.*, 2002). This “broken feedback loop” accentuates the challenge of how to develop collective normative positions.

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<sup>15</sup> To give a more specific example, when asked about a visit from representatives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to their community in Peru, it was not unusual to hear people complaining that while they had been given the chance to testify it was middle class people from outside who had earned a salary by writing down what they said.

<sup>16</sup> My interest in researching wellbeing was partially prompted by being taken to task by a woman who I was interviewing as part of an evaluation of a microfinance programme. Turning the tables on me she demanded how I would react if given the opportunity to improve my business through a loan, but only by risking the loss of my house by surrendering the deed as collateral, or by jeopardising my friendships by securing the loan against a group guarantee?



This is not to argue that complete alignment of stakeholder goals, still less values, is a necessary precondition for any effective development intervention. Indeed such alignment often takes place most effectively only through practical collaboration. However, because evolutionary feedback loops through which alignment with ‘client’ interests can take place are weaker, the possibility of persistent disconnects is greater. And this risk is accentuated by the extent to which debate is dominated by the supply-side of the industry. The discourse of donor harmonization is an example. While it may be hard to disagree with the goals embodied in the March 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, for example, the question remains open whether time and effort spent by donors trying to align goals and harmonize practices at the apex level adds to or detracts from effort to do so with their primary stakeholders at a more local level. But even if case for giving more weight to bottom-up views is accepted in principle, the question remains how best to elicit them.

#### *Alternative methodological approaches*

One objection to ‘just asking’ people what they think development should prioritize is that they may themselves have unclear or biased views, which may even amount to what Engels first called “false consciousness”.<sup>17</sup> Examples from Peru include the high priority attached to cementing over the village plaza, and to hiring the best musicians for the festivals. Systematically finding out what people think and feel does not imply abandoning the quest for consistent universal visions of wellbeing as well, but should aid and complement it. For example, if people are prone to cognitive shifts as they get older or richer then it is useful to understand why. One way of doing so is to add subjective wellbeing questions to existing surveys of needs and resources, thereby permitting subjective and more orthodox indicators (such as stated income) to be statistically compared (e.g. Herrera et al., 2007).<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, subjective questions about wellbeing can be elicited within a predetermined framework that divides wellbeing up into different domains. Rojas (2007), for example, divides life satisfaction into health, economic, job, family, friendship, personal and community domains and analyses people’s subjective views about each.<sup>19</sup> Regional ‘barometer’ studies are even more eclectic in their selection of opinion questions, leaving open the possibility of failing to ask about things that are nevertheless important to respondents themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The main approach development agencies have used to overcome potential bias has been participatory appraisal.<sup>21</sup> Starting as a movement to give more weight to

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<sup>17</sup> “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker. Consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces.” Engels (1893).

<sup>18</sup> Moller (2007:247) reports that the twenty-five year old Quality of Life Trends Project in South Africa, started out this way, but found the correlation between subjective and so-called objective indicators to be so strong that they dropped the latter completely.

<sup>19</sup> Under WeD, this approach was pursued through inclusion of domain satisfaction questions in a survey of resources and needs (McGregor, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> This is an example of the standard epistemological dilemma that prior codification or quantification of responses facilitates subsequent data manipulation and aggregation, but only by top-down imposition of categories and hence the introduction of bias, including reduced openness to the unexpected (Moris and Copestake, 1993). Even *post-hoc* classification of qualitative data opens up scope for analysts to weaken, distort and lose the voices of individual respondents.

<sup>21</sup> For a recent review of participatory methods see Mayoux and Johnson (2007). From a pure anthropological perspective all such methods retain bias because of the link in the mind of the researcher to some form of development practice. In other words they can be viewed as hybrid

indigenous knowledge in specific fields (particularly agriculture, natural resource management and health) such methods have been adopted more broadly: as part of the process of elaborating national poverty reduction strategy papers, for example DFID and World Bank (2003). They were also used as part of the massive “voices of the poor” programme of the World Bank (Camfield, 2006:5-10). A particular strength of participatory appraisal at the micro level is that group consultation can lead directly to collective action and bottom-up processes of empowerment: or a process of participatory learning and action. Group based consultation methods, when done well, can also act as a direct spur to collective action in securing public goods. Indeed the very process of collective discussion and decision can be regarded as a common good (Deneulin & Townsend, 2006). On the other hand, there is a risk that participatory appraisal processes downplay individual priorities, marginalise minority interests and bias policy towards a lowest common denominator of felt needs. The work reported below is concerned with identifying complementary methods that are less biased towards collective ends and avoid mediation through semi-public consultation.

The emphasis on eliciting the views of individuals leads back to the problem of how to aggregate the results in a way that make them more user-friendly. Confronted with the selective, subjective and political nature of this task the only solution is to build consensus around consistent and comparable procedures. A first criterion for building consensus is transparency so that methods are widely understood and can be subject to peer review of other professionals in the field. A second is systematically to consult users themselves in more or less democratic ways over what methods to use.

A leading example in the field of cross-cultural assessment of subjective wellbeing is the work of the Quality of Life group affiliated to the World Health Organisation.<sup>22</sup> The main measures it has developed (the WHOQOL-100 and the 26 item WHOQOL-BREF) both rely on responses to closed questions organised into domains and facets of quality of life that are negotiated across countries and between languages using systematically negotiated protocols (Skevington et al., 2004; Schmidt and Bullinger, 2007).<sup>23</sup> The initial plan of WeD was to follow this approach, paying particular attention to how a measure could be extended to give more weight to autonomy as well as to health in recognition of its importance as a basic human need. While the protocols allow for negotiating changes to existing lists of facets and domains, there were fears that the rules for doing so (particularly reliance on focus groups) could bias results too much towards the values and priorities of more educated participants.<sup>24</sup> Alternative approaches considered included self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2001), the satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al, 1985), use of the global happiness question (Veenhoven, 2001) and the individualised patient generated index (Ruta 1994, 1998). This prompted fears of

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methods, assimilating some of the more open-ended methods of ethnography but in ways that feed more rapidly and explicitly into development action.

<sup>22</sup> The term “quality of life” as used by this group can be taken as synonymous with subjective wellbeing. They define it as “an individual’s perception of their position in life, in the context of culture and values in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHOQOL Group, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> The domains for the former are physical, psychological, social, environmental, economic and spiritual, while the latter covers only the first four.

<sup>24</sup> As a result it was also feared that the health psychology orientation of the instrument (emphasising standard physical and mental functioning of the human organism) might continue to dominate relative to a social psychological perspective that places more emphasis on the cultural and context specificity of subjective wellbeing outcomes.

relying too heavily on any one over-arching definition and measure of subjective wellbeing, such as happiness or long-term life satisfaction. Worries also persisted about the dangers of arbitrariness and cultural bias arising from adopting a predetermined typology of subjective wellbeing domains. For example, the importance of positive and negative emotions and of hedonic balance, and its influence via utilitarianism on economic thinking was recognised. But a eudemonic emphasis on individual human fulfilment (or life satisfaction stripped of short-term emotional affect) connected more closely with sociological perspectives on development. There was support for Ryan and Deci's emphasis on identifying factors behind long-term life satisfaction through an empirical process, but some wariness that their emphasis on competence, autonomy and relatedness might reflect findings of research largely with educated people in high income countries. Although problematic as the basis for cross-cultural comparison, an attraction of the PGI was its simplicity and its openness to respondents' own values and priorities, in a way that also echoed methods used by Clark (2002) in South Africa. This led to consensus among WeD researchers that a gap theory (as discussed in the last section) tallied in a promising way with the idea of development as a planned or cognitive process.<sup>25</sup> A gap theory also promised to address directly the problem of cognitive shift, adaptive preferences and false consciousness: how to deal with people who reported being happy but in relation to low expectations; or who were unhappy but relative to very high expectations.

#### *The WeDQoL instrument*

The WeDQoL is more fully described elsewhere (Camfield and King, 2005). Here, the instrument used in Peru is first very briefly presented, along with some initial findings. I then discuss issues arising from its potential as a development tool. I suggest that the case for using it hinges on two interrelated arguments. The first is that it picks up on issues that are important to people, but that are poorly correlated with more orthodox indicators. The second is that it is particularly valuable in contexts where there is a high degree of political sensitivity to the imposition by development agencies of their own values and priorities.

The WeDQoL can be described as an individualised set of measures of subjective wellbeing based on responses to a series of closed questions. These are organised into six sections or scales, each designed to produce one or more quantitative indicators of different aspects of SWB. In addition the schedule includes a set of socio-demographic questions that permit disaggregated analysis of scores by age, gender, formal education, marital status, and place of residence, and so on. For the sake of brevity, I focus here on just two of the scales developed as part of the WeD research - those covering goal necessity and goal satisfaction.<sup>26</sup> In Peru, these both comprised questions about the 34 items shown in Table 2. Item necessity or importance was rated by respondents on a three point scale (very necessary = 2, necessary = 1 or not necessary = 0) while goal satisfaction was rated against a four

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<sup>25</sup> Within psychology, gap theories emphasised comparing goals and aspirations with personal evaluation of how far they were realised (Calman, 1984; Michalos, 1985). Universal needs theories also feature a gap between achievement of a minimum acceptable threshold and availability of resources or need-satisfiers.

<sup>26</sup> The other WeD-specific scales covered resources and values, and in Peru, additional modules were also added to cover personality and social identity. These extra scales permit more detailed analysis (see Yamamoto, 2006), but they are not discussed here in order to focus instead on the gap theory at the core of the WeD perspective on subjective wellbeing.

point response scale (satisfied = 3, so-so = 2, bad = 1, don't have = 0). Table 2 also presents mean scores for each item obtained from 550 people in seven rural and urban sites (Copestake, 2007b). Items are listed in rank order of stated necessity, starting with health. In general respondents were more satisfied with items that they also regarded as necessary, as one would expect. However, the difference in ranking reveals some items that were regarded as necessary despite satisfaction with achievement of them being low: education of children, working for a salary and being a professional (see also Woodcock, 2007:17).

*Table 2. Necessity and satisfaction with components of wellbeing in Peru.*

Item	Necessity			Satisfaction			RD
	obs	mean	rank	obs	mean	rank	
Health	548	1.88	1	545	2.53	3	-2
Daily food	548	1.85	2	548	2.53	2	0
Education for children	549	1.77	3	550	1.91	22	-19
Room or house	548	1.68	4	547	2.33	10	-6
Electricity, water, sanitation	547	1.63	5	546	2.32	11	-6
Work for a salary	550	1.59	6	548	1.28	28	-22
Good family relations	549	1.57	7	550	2.65	1	6
Getting ahead	549	1.56	8	548	2.35	8	0
Tranquility: without violence or delinquency	546	1.54	9	544	2.21	16	-7
To be good with God and/or the church	549	1.53	10	549	2.28	13	-3
To be of good character	548	1.52	11	538	2.50	4	7
To be a professional	550	1.51	12	543	0.18	34	-22
Education for yourself	550	1.51	13	544	2.26	14	-1
Healthy and nice environment	550	1.47	14	543	1.90	23	-9
Public transport	546	1.44	15	548	2.21	17	-2
Improvement in the community	546	1.41	16	538	1.86	24	-8
Household goods (e.g. pots & furniture)	550	1.38	17	548	2.34	9	8
Getting on well with neighbours	550	1.37	18	550	2.46	5	13
Recreational space, like sports complex	546	1.37	19	549	1.97	20	-1
To teach others what you know	548	1.36	20	549	2.42	7	13
Neighbours participate in an organised way	547	1.28	21	547	2.13	19	2
Clothes	546	1.26	22	543	2.30	12	10
Friendship	549	1.18	23	547	2.45	6	17
Consumer goods like television or liquidizer	548	1.17	24	546	2.19	18	6
Children	550	1.09	25	547	2.23	15	10
Marriage	547	1.06	26	548	1.83	25	1
Telephone or other form of communication	548	1.06	27	548	0.90	31	-4
Partner	549	1.03	28	549	1.97	21	7
Shop, buying and selling (cattle, crops)	549	0.97	29	547	1.18	29	0
Member of communal/community assocn.	528	0.95	30	544	1.61	27	3
Own transportation	548	0.92	31	546	1.10	30	1
To be in a position of authority	549	0.70	32	548	0.82	32	0
Go to fiestas	550	0.42	33	546	1.76	26	7
Participate in organising fiestas	546	0.29	34	545	0.71	33	1

Note: RD refers to the necessity ranking less the satisfaction ranking.

Data of this kind can be used for assessing needs of the whole population from which the sample of respondents is drawn, and also for analysis of differences in necessity

and satisfaction with achievement of different goals by gender, age, sub-location and so on. It is also possible to investigate how achievement of these goals correlates with other indicators, such as the incidence of household poverty. But first it is necessary to address two critical methodological issues: identification of items for inclusion in these scales and how to consolidate the data into a more manageable number of indicators.

A central purpose of the WeDQoL is to provide a set of quantitative measures of the subjective wellbeing of a group of people as they themselves perceive it, minimising bias arising from the prior views of outside agencies or researchers, as well as dominant voices within selected groups. This issue is particularly relevant to contexts in which there is a high degree of cross-cultural sensitivity, including political resistance to the imposition of outsiders' values and ideas on local development processes. As such it fits particularly well with what was referred to in the previous section as 'local first' discourse. In Peru, this was an important consideration, given longstanding struggles and debates over the extent to which Andean and Western culture are mutually intelligible (Altamirano *et al.*, 2004).

The methodology used for development of the WeDQoL permits some flexibility over the extent to which item identification is conducted using data entirely generated from within the selected population, or based on adaptation of lists compiled elsewhere. We start with the *emic* process, since this is the method that was pursued in Peru. This was based on semi-structured interviews with a small but representative sample of the selected population. Open-ended questions were utilised to build up a large archive of concepts that respondents associated with wellbeing. Responses were then subjected to textual analysis in order to construct a checklist of items for inclusion in the main WeDQoL instrument. In Peru, a total of 419 such interviews were conducted. These were structured around Spanish and Quechua versions of the seven questions listed in Table 3.<sup>27</sup> A critically important issue here is the quality of the relationship between respondents and field-workers, especially avoidance of any expectations about possible intervention outcomes of the research. Interviews in Peru were conducted by a team of six carefully selected anthropology graduates from the regional university, and started only after they had been living in the research sites for some months. The same team also transcribed responses onto computer and assisted in production of a content analysis report for each site.

*Table 3. Checklist for exploratory semi-structured interviews in Peru.*

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Let's suppose that I would like to move to live here. What things do I need to be happy? What things are necessary to be happy? (goals).</li> <li>2. How do I get those things? <i>Ask for each goal mentioned by the respondent.</i> (resources).</li> <li>3. How do you [people in this community] feel in relation to...? (emotions).</li> <li>4. Who are the people you most admire [who are the best persons] in this community? What are the things that you admire in this person [these persons]? <i>Ask in relation to each person mentioned.</i> (values).</li> <li>5. Where do you find support when needed? (social networks).</li> <li>6. What were the happiest moments of your life? (happiest life episodes).</li> <li>7. What were the unhappiest moments of your life? (unhappiest life episodes).<sup>28</sup></li> </ol>
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<sup>27</sup> Subject only to minor variation arising from translation the interviews in other countries also included four of the questions shown in Table 3. The responses to them are analysed in depth in Camfield (2006).

<sup>28</sup> Note one criticism of this instrument is the emphasis on positive aspects of life or "what you need to be happy". Perhaps a different scale would have resulted from asking more about the main causes of ill-being or insecurity, or what is needed to avoid harm.

It was from these reports that a first list of items to be included in the goal necessity and satisfaction scales was compiled.<sup>29</sup> In general the scales were designed to include the most frequently cited items, subject to a careful process of matching and merging of concepts that were being used interchangeably. It was at this stage also that response scales were identified and pre-tested. A larger range of responses would have revealed more variation, but priority was given to an instrument that was as simple as possible to understand and to use in the field.<sup>30</sup> As with all surveys, obtaining good quality data depended not only on careful testing and refining of the questionnaire but also the thoroughness with which enumerators were selected, trained, and supervised. In the case of Peru, interviews were conducted by the same team responsible for the qualitative phase.

The previous paragraph describes the preferred method for being able to construct *emic* or native scales. A short-cut (and closer to the approach adopted by the WHOQOL group) is to start with an established list of items and use semi-structured interviewing or focus groups to decide which to include and which to drop in each context, as well as to review the case for adding items. Adaptation of the WeDQoL instrument for the other three WeD case-study countries followed this approach, starting with the Peru scales and systematically comparing them with qualitative data collected at the same time (Camfield *et al.*, 2005). The closer the countries are in cultural terms the more likely this is to be acceptable and the easier it is to ensure sufficient equivalence in understanding both items and response scales.

A related point is that there is flexibility in the extent to which universality in design of a WeDQoL instrument is attempted.<sup>31</sup> At one extreme it can be used to construct a single survey instrument with standard questions for a whole country and even more ambitiously for cross-country comparison. At the other end of the spectrum it can be used to construct survey instruments that are adapted to a particular village, ethnic group or gender/age cohort. There is a trade-off here: the more universal the greater the scope for cross-cultural measurement and comparison; the more local the more the indicators produced by the instrument will reflect local cultural detail. The right balance will depend upon the purpose for which the data is needed, political and bureaucratic requirements to treat people in a standard way, and the risk of disconnects arising from doing so in too cavalier a fashion. In the case of the Peru survey already reported this covered people living in seven relatively poor localities across three departments in the central part of the country (Copestake, 2007b). High geographical mobility within the area provided *prima facie* grounds for believing that respondents' world views overlapped sufficiently to justify a common instrument that they would understand in similar ways, despite their socio-demographic heterogeneity.

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<sup>29</sup> The qualitative phase reports were themselves very interesting documents, but the data is amenable to little systematic comparative analysis. For example, given the open-ended nature of the questions it is likely that some respondents forgot to mention some important items that were nevertheless mentioned by others.

<sup>30</sup> In the case of goal achievement an extra response (don't have) was available in response to the question "how satisfied are you with [...]?" (A lot, so-so, not at all). For more details on this work in Peru see Yamamoto (2006). Camfield (2006) summarises adaptation and testing of the WeDQoL in all four countries, while Camfield and King (2006) provide describe the final instrument.

<sup>31</sup> The *extent* of flexibility hinges in part the possibilities for constructing questions and response scales about wellbeing that people in different contexts will understand in sufficiently similar ways. This is an empirical question, since consistency of responses can be evaluated statistically through use of appropriate psychometric techniques.

In addition to identification of the full list of items a second important issue concerns how to consolidate them into a smaller number of indicators of the overall wellbeing of individuals or groups. One way of doing this is to calculate the simple mean aggregate goal necessity and achievement score for all items (Woodcock, 2007).<sup>32</sup> Another is to calculate mean scores across predetermined domains, as discussed previously. In Peru a more ambitious approach was pursued that aimed to derive categories *post-hoc* from the data itself, in order to reflect as far as possible respondents' own latent views of what was locally important to wellbeing. At the centre of this approach is the use of factor analysis to identify principal components underpinning goal necessity responses. Many different possible factor solutions were scrutinised both statistically and for consistency with ethnographic data (Yamamoto, 2006). This entailed iteration between statistical modelling and model interpretation involving the entire field team, during which factors names or labels were also agreed.<sup>33</sup> In the final model goal necessity was consolidated into three factors, also referred to as latent needs. These were: place to live better, raise a family and improvement from a secure base. Table 4 presents this part of the model. The conceptual significance of this is not to be underestimated: what they represent is nothing less than a localised or *emic* theory of human needs arrived at through a combination of rigorous quantitative and qualitative empirical research with a minimum of contamination from external world-views. The same three factor solution was then imposed on the goal satisfaction data to derive indicators of individual satisfaction in relation to each of the same three meta-goals.

*Table 4. Latent needs in central Peru based on WeDQoL-Peru data.*

Latent need	Place to live better	Raise a family	Improvement from a secure base
Items (and loadings)	Clean and nice neighbourhood (0.79) Tranquility, without violence or delinquency (0.64) Moving forward (0.48)	Partner or spouse (0.79) Children (0.77)	Work for a salary (0.55) House and household goods (0.53) Children's education (0.50) Daily food and health (0.50) Be a professional (0.38)
Alfa	0.67	0.75	0.60

Notes. Model based on confirmatory factor analysis, with three factors. Figures in brackets are factor loadings. Some items were combined earlier in the analysis. Other statistical parameters of the model are as follows: CMIN=40.765; DF=32; P=0.138; CFI=0.990; RMSEA=0.023; RMR=0.008; AGFI=0.972; PGFI=0.572; NFI=0.956.

Having derived a set of *emic* subjective wellbeing concepts, the next question is what extra analytical and policy relevant insight they offer. This question can be answered

<sup>32</sup> Woodcock (2007) also works out individualized weighted average satisfaction scores by multiplying importance score by satisfaction score. The limitation of this is that the same score may reflect an item that is important but poorly achieved, or unimportant but highly achieved. An additional general complication here is how to deal with items that were deemed by the respondent as not necessary, not applicable or elicited no response. The easiest solution is simply to exclude these observations, though a consequence of this is that each individual mean score then refers to a slightly different set of items.

<sup>33</sup> Alternative results were tested within a full structural model comprised goal necessity, satisfaction scales, resource, personality and value scales and sub-scales. The resources scale comprised additional items, identified in exploratory work as not being goals in themselves but as necessary to achieving other goals. Rather than being subjected to separate factor analysis the goal satisfaction data was consolidated using the same factor model as the goal necessity data. In other words goal satisfaction scores were weighted in proportion to their perceived necessity or importance (Yamamoto, 2006).

both through statistical analysis of how the measures correlate with more orthodox indicators, and by drawing upon them to interpret qualitative data on development processes. Copestake *et al.* (2007c) illustrate the first approach by comparing WeDQoL data with absolute poverty status.<sup>34</sup> Table 5 shows that two of the goal satisfaction measures were associated with *higher* poverty. First, the sub-group from households living in extreme poverty reported a higher level of place to live satisfaction. This can partially be explained by greater place to live satisfaction in rural areas, where poverty incidence is also higher.<sup>35</sup> Second, people in extreme poverty also reported higher raise a family satisfaction. This suggests a possible trade-off between achieving higher income and being satisfied with progress in establishing a family, particularly in urban areas. A Malthusian explanation of this is that respondents might have delayed having a family in the hope of achieving greater income and security beforehand. Conversely, people may achieve satisfaction in raising a family but at cost of greater material poverty. Finally, and as expected, improvement from a secure base satisfaction was significantly associated with household poverty, at least in the urban sub-sample.<sup>36</sup>

*Table 5. Correlation between satisfaction with latent needs and household poverty.*

	Very poor	Poor	Not poor	F stat	Sig.
<b>(a) Full sample</b>					
Place to live better	2.17	2.02	2.10	3.75	<b>0.03</b>
Raise a family	2.53	2.50	1.95	3.35	<b>0.04</b>
Achievement from a secure base	1.98	2.01	1.94	0.26	0.77
<i>Sub-sample size</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>10</i>		
<b>(b) Two urban sites</b>					
Place to live better	1.94	1.80	2.06	1.83	0.17
Raise a family	2.47	2.26	1.75	2.97	0.58
Achievement from a secure base	1.85	2.12	1.87	7.44	<b>0.00</b>
<i>Sub-sample size</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>6</i>		
<b>(c) Two semi-urban and three rural sites</b>					
Place to live better	2.30	2.19	2.17	2.58	<b>0.08</b>
Raise a family	2.56	2.68	2.25	0.90	0.41
Achievement from a secure base	2.05	1.93	2.05	1.73	0.18
<i>Sub-sample size</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>4</i>		

Notes: Bold indicates 10% significance or higher. See Copestake *et al.* (2007) for further details.

Although limited in scope, this analysis shows that the relationship between locally defined latent needs and poverty is not uniformly linear. Poorer people (particularly in rural areas) may be better off in terms of their place to live and family, while at the same time less satisfied than richer people (including those who have moved to urban areas) with economic improvement. Further analysis reveals more complications. For example, Guillen-Royo (2007) finds that SWB is more strongly associated with household income relative to neighbours than with absolute household income; hence there is a ratchet effect associated with seeking higher income by moving to richer

<sup>34</sup> The poverty data is based on a household income and expenditure survey in the same Peru research sites. Data for both sets of variables was available for a total of 191 men and women, belonging to 135 households. Disaggregated analysis by gender is not shown because it did not reveal significant differences.

<sup>35</sup> Hence, the result disappeared for the sub-sample of urban households only, and was weaker for rural and semi-urban respondents only.

<sup>36</sup> It was also lower for six respondents in the non poor category than for those from only poor households. These respondents might fall into the category of “frustrated achievers” identified by Graham and Pettinato (2002).



areas. These findings echo qualitative research into migration reported by Lockley (2007) who presents narrative data from migrants in the same sites that bring into stark relief the trade-offs between economic improvement, family relations and living environment. Interpretive approach use of the *emic* latent-need concepts is also illustrated by Alvarez (2007). He relates each need and the items loading onto it to the mix of market, state, civil society and household institutions in each research site. This suggests a more comprehensive form of needs assessment that identifies not only variation in goals and goal satisfaction but also how this relates to institutional gaps.

To conclude this section, we have emphasised the potential of wellbeing psychology to offer new forms of needs assessment that identify what individuals in a particular locality regard as important to their wellbeing, without results being biased by group processes or the normative frameworks of outsiders. This goes far beyond research based on simple 'catch-all' indicators of happiness, but a great deal more research is needed in order to realise the potential of these methods to reflect local priorities and needs.

### **3. Wellbeing, regime analysis and room for manoeuvre.**

#### *Modelling wellbeing regimes*

This section turns from exploring normative and practical dimensions of development discourse to interpretive and practical. In all fields of development activity, but no more so than at the level of national state policy, a critical issue is the extent of room for manoeuvre: what realistic prospect do we have of changing anything for the better? As a guard against solipsism (the assumption that only those things we control are important) it is sensible to start out by assuming the opposite: social change as a closed dynamic system, with feedback loops and cumulative processes but with precious few control levers and certainly no emergency stop button. Armed with such analysis, it is then safer to contemplate the next level of complexity and consider where we can best exert our own limited influence.<sup>37</sup>

For most social scientists global capitalism remains at the heart of such analysis. While growth first discourse remains in thrall to the Scottish Enlightenment vision of its evolutionary but ultimately progressive power (Herman, 2001), others are interested more in its awesome destructive power and the social reactions this elicits (Polanyi, 1944). The recent resurgence of institutional analysis suggests a path-dependent range of trajectories, linked to the dynamic tensions between productive and distributional coalitions (North, 1990; Powelson, 1997; Bardhan, 2001; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005). Within the social policy literature, Esping-Andersen (1991; 1999) first developed the notion of "welfare state regimes" in OECD countries, distinguishing between liberal, conservative and social-democratic variations which he linked to different political settlements over core values and policy priorities.<sup>38</sup> Gough and Wood (2004) modified these arguments by introducing a comparative analysis of welfare regimes across the globe to capture situations where lack of consensus over core values and priorities reduces the role of the state and its inability to "de-commodify" markets to meet welfare objectives. Their comparative analysis

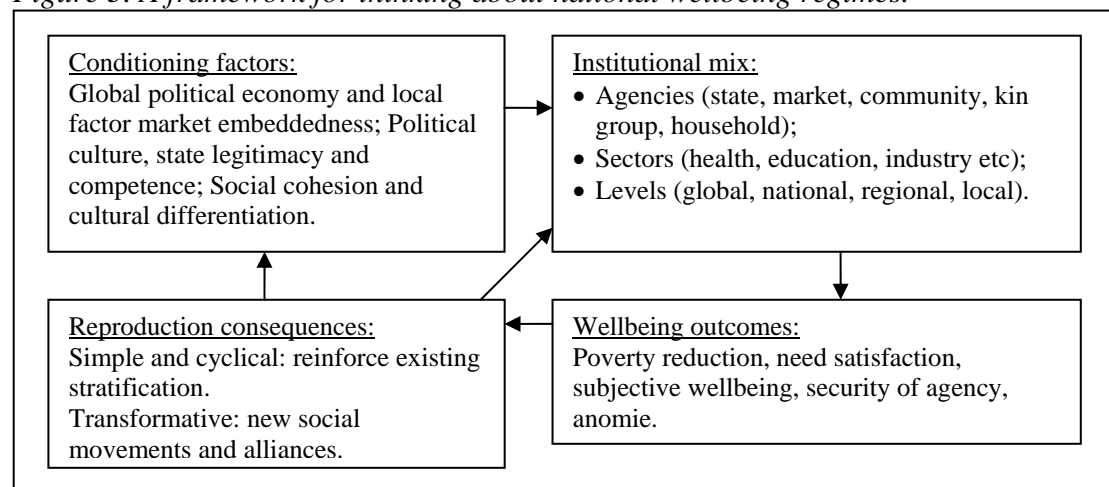
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<sup>37</sup> This point was particularly well incorporated into work sponsored by DFID on drivers of change (DFID, 2005a,b). It is also echoed in Alkire's (2004:185) story of the rider on an out-of-control horse.

<sup>38</sup> The concept of welfare emphasises a minimum level of income security and satisfaction of basic needs. The idea of a 'regime' implies a degree of system stability at the national level that is only possible through the reproduction over decades of some form of political arrangement between major interests (Kalecki, 1976).

distinguished between relatively settled and unsettled societies, and emphasised a more complex institutional mix in welfare provision comprising state, market, community and households in both domestic and international planes. Newton (2007) and Gough (2007) review how the four countries researched by WeD fit into this typology, while Wood and Copestake (2007) explore the potential for pushing it further as an analytical framework for applying to particular countries by moving from the ideas of a welfare regime to a wellbeing regime. This is illustrated by Figure 3. The most obvious way in which to do this is to extent the range of outcome variables from those associated with the term welfare. These in turn have a wider range of potential feedback effects (or reproduction consequences) on an expanded list of conditioning factors as well as on the institutional mix.

Figure 3. A framework for thinking about national wellbeing regimes.



### Modelling social exclusion in Peru

The remainder of this section illustrates this framework with reference to Figueroa's theory of social exclusion. The key question being addressed is how far a more complex conceptualisation of wellbeing adds explanatory value to the analysis. Figueroa's theory is useful for this purpose because it is orthodox in its economic assumptions: the actors in his model improve welfare through higher real income and wealth, and it assumes them to be rational and self-interested in pursuit of this goal. On the other hand, it is no straw doll, being able to explain both sustained economic growth and persistent inequality.

The full theory is presented in greater detail elsewhere and so is only briefly summarised here.<sup>39</sup> At its heart is a mathematically rigorous equilibrium model of the interplay between four groups of agents: political brokers, capitalists, formally educated labour and labour with minimal education. The less educated labour is also ethnically differentiated from the other three groups. Economic inequality between the two groups is the legacy of a foundational colonial shock, and has economic, political

<sup>39</sup> See Figueroa (2001a, 2001b, 2003). Copestake (2003) compares it systematically with other dual economy models. Altamirano *et al.* (2004) extend the analysis by reviewing research in Peru that emphasises wellbeing as either relationships to things (material), other people (social) and ideas (cultural). Copestake (2007) seeks to integrate this literature and Figueroa's framework into a more general inclusion-exclusion framework. This leaves open more options for change in the balance of economic, political and cultural resources between groups in state, market and community arenas, thereby admitting also the possibility of a wider range of individual wellbeing outcomes and possible regime changes.

and cultural dimensions. The model identifies an equilibrium trap that reproduces inequality on account of the inability of the less educated workers to form a political coalition capable of equalising access to state education, credit and social protection across the ethnic divide. As a result they are systematically deprived.

In terms of the national wellbeing regime framework, important conditioning factors in the model include the following: national government dominated by political brokers whose prime interest is their own power and wealth; a high degree of inequality in income and wealth that is strongly correlated with race; and an excess of labour over that required to utilise all physical capital fully, even at less than subsistence wages.<sup>40</sup> The institutional mix comprises three sectors: a capital-intensive sector controlled by rich capitalists who employ formally educated workers; a small-business sector of formally educated but self-employed workers; and a small-scale low productivity sector comprising self-employed farmers, traders and artisans with little formal education. Formal education is unequally distributed between these sectors, as is access to financial services and to social protection. The critical wellbeing outcome is a high level of income inequality, unequal insecurity and social exclusion of the ethnically subordinate group. Reproduction consequences include capital accumulation, possibly augmented by foreign investment, which does little or nothing to absorb less educated labour and results in sustained or even increasing levels of inequality.

Moving slightly beyond Figueroa's formal presentation of the model it is possible to envisage a further feedback loop through which foreign investment accentuates inequality, causing political instability which turns off or reduces the foreign investment flow. Inequality emerges as the key constraint to capital accumulation and sustained economic growth, and a key tipping point for the system is political pressure to improve upward social mobility in order to reduce both inequality and political tolerance of it (Hirschman, 1973). This can be achieved through mobilization of the subordinate group to secure equal rights as citizens to formal education (thereby reducing dualism in the labour market) as well as improved access to financial services and to social protection (thereby permitting greater risk taking).

Figueroa is sceptical of the prospects for collective action on the part of the poorer subordinate group to secure these political rights on three grounds. First, adaptive and constrained preferences reduce the importance of securing these goals (Appadurai, 2006). This is at root a culture of poverty argument of the kind that underpinned classical dual economy models (Copestake, 2003). Second, he argues that poorer people have less time to devote to higher order needs in the sense popularised by Maslow (1970).<sup>41</sup> Third, he appeals to an Olson's (1965) "free-rider" problem, also described by Lichbach (1998) as the "rebel's dilemma": why risk leading a political movement rather than piggy-backing on the leadership of others? All these three arguments are about agency and rest on questionable psychological assumptions about poor people. The culture of poverty argument has been attacked for essentialising poor people, though interestingly it has more recently been revisited as an empirical hypothesis by psychologists (e.g. Palomar Lever et al., 2004; Burton and Kagan, 2005). The Maslowian idea of a universal hierarchy of needs has also been the

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<sup>40</sup> These are the assumptions behind his more complex *sigma* model, some of them being relaxed when he discusses versions relevant to countries with less inequality, ethnic separation and surplus labour.

<sup>41</sup> To this we can add the problem of risk and uncertainty arising from social and political instability. Deep and often violent conflict possibly encourages a shortening of time horizons, and reinforces a willing compromise with what works, including pervasive clientelism.

subject of extensive criticism within psychology (Guillen Royo, 2007:38; Haidt, 2006) as well as from other disciplines (e.g. Doyal and Gough 1991). And the rebel's dilemma was challenged by Hirschman (1982) for neglecting the extent to which pursuit of public goods is something people opt to do because they find it more meaningful and sometimes more enjoyable than private consumption.<sup>42</sup> In short, dealing with this issue thoroughly requires a broader conceptualisation of the motivation and subjective wellbeing of the subordinate group.

A similar debate can be opened up about the motivation of the more formally educated group, including capitalists and political brokers. For example, they may be influenced by more inclusive, often nationalist ideology (Calderon and Szmukler, 2004). Figueroa's argument that capitalists will block policies to reduce financial exclusion or to improve social protection, and the educated self-employed will block policies to reduce educational exclusion can also be challenged. There may be scope for three-way compromises or power-diffusion processes particularly as the labour market becomes tighter and as lower and middle class groups become more politically organised (Powelson, 1994; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005). More realistic analysis of the policy process again demands more subtle psychology and a better appreciation of how political issues are socially and culturally embedded. It may be that politicians in a particular country are ruthlessly self-interested rent seekers and takers, who operate in a low trust environment devoid of institutional and cultural constraints on their action. But this cannot be assumed.<sup>43</sup>

There are many specific examples that it would be interesting to pursue further at this point. Building on Figueroa's model, for example, there are live debates over the extent to which wider access to "basic markets" for formal education, microfinance and social protection is possible even in the most unequal countries of Latin America.<sup>44</sup> With respect to social protection, for example, the trend away from supplementary food distribution to non-contributory conditional cash transfers is of particular interest. This can be analysed in standard political economy terms using disaggregated cost-benefit analysis: what is the budgetary cost, who benefits from the transfers, what is the nature of interaction with other services, how efficient is delivery in terms of targeting, leakage and so on. However, the policy evolution cannot be understood without reference also to social and symbolic aspects of wellbeing also. These include transfer of moral responsibility to poor recipients, reinforcement of traditional gender roles within families, induced changes in popular perception of the state, the social and cultural significance of local participation in delivery (Copestake, 2005; Wood and Copestake, 2007).

Finally, it is important at this point to emphasise the need to locate such national level analysis in its international context. The extent of dependence on the international oil price of Chavez' Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela is an obvious example. At the international level there is the issue of how far analysis can usefully

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<sup>42</sup> Hirschman does acknowledge that capacity to sustain ideological commitment to any universal vision of collective future wellbeing is time-bound, often age-bound and requires ever stronger discipline to defend against disappointment. For criticisms from a psychological perspective see Haidt (2006). The free-riding problem is also less for flatter and more anarchic movements where leadership is more diffuse.

<sup>43</sup> For detailed discussions of politicians and political institutions in Peru see Taylor (2007), Crabtree (2006), DFID/NDI (2005) and Tanaka (2003).

<sup>44</sup> From a Polanyian perspective this should also be expanded to include natural resources and struggle over their (de)commodification during an era of global excess demand. In Peru this is manifest particularly in confrontations between mining capital and social communities (e.g. Bebbington, et al, 2007).

be restricted to narrow political economy, and how far the influence of people, networks, values and popular ideas is also important. In the case of Peru, the challenge to the social order posed by Humala's candidacy for President in 2007 and its symbolic resonance can only be fully understood as part of wider regional currents, including Chavinism and the rise of indigenous political movements in other Andean countries. The scope for progressive social policy is affected not only directly but also by the extent to which official donors have also become more directly interested in problems of discrimination and inequality both for their own sake and also for geo-political reasons (e.g. World Bank, 2006).

#### **Section 4. Wellbeing and the management of development**

In the preceding sections I have suggested that wellbeing is of practical relevance to development in three ways: as a discursive opportunity for understanding (if not necessarily resolving) core disagreement over development discourse; as the foundation for a new set of tools to elicit individual and local views on development goals and priorities; and as the basis for more holistic analysis of social change. Much of this discussion can inform traditional approaches to programming development as a linear and logical sequence of action points in pursuit of fixed objectives.<sup>45</sup> For example, discourse analysis can be used to assist in identifying the scope for making the actions of different agencies more consistent<sup>46</sup>, subjective wellbeing studies can assist in needs assessment, and wellbeing regime analysis can inform policy prioritization. However, I argue in this section that taking a more holistic approach to wellbeing has more far-reaching implications than this. I start with a discussion of the practical difficulty of wellbeing regime analysis by suggesting that its very complexity requires a more flexible approach to iterating between learning, reflection and action. I then consider the implications of this for the way power and responsibility is allocated vertically, horizontally and over time within development agencies. Finally, I explore implications for the attitudes and behaviour of individual development professionals.

##### *Complexity and vertical regulation*

In the previous section I argued that an important foundation for policy is an appropriate model for analysing social change as a real historical process. I further suggested that such models could be made more realistic by going beyond the *homo economicus* ontological assumptions of standard political economy and welfare regime analysis. This entails building up a better understanding of the distinct and often competing "mental models" of different actors in order to identify scope for forging alliances capable of bringing about lasting change (North, 1991). These may include the four development discourses described in Section 1, as well as local/parochial views identified using methods discussed in Section 2. Since mental models exist as a form of bounded rationality or deliberate simplification to facilitate action in the face of overwhelming complexity it should be no surprise if attempts to transcend them prove challenging.

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<sup>45</sup> This embraces the traditional project cycle, logical frameworks and other manifestation of results based management (Eyben, 2006:12).

<sup>46</sup> In donor language consistency refers to alignment and harmonization. It also equates with what Chambers (2005) refers to as congruence. However, here we are concerned with a deeper sense of cultural connection or resonance that can also be linked back to Long's actor-oriented sociology (Long and Long, 1994).

The administrative solution to complexity is generally to set parameters and delegate. The wellbeing regime framework only provides the basis for more effective action when applied in detail to complex specific country contexts and fleshed out with data that is inherently difficult to quantify. It follows that its practical utility to international development agencies hinges on their willingness to allow professionals at the country level and below, more freedom to act on the basis of their own analysis, based on deeper local knowledge. Effectiveness also relies on being able to translate such analysis into a more complex set of local relationships. One difficulty posed by such delegation is that it becomes harder for development agencies to set appropriate parameters (in the form of standard performance indicators and policy guidelines) through which to demonstrate consistency of action between countries. To the extent that effective performance hinges on effective local improvisation it is also harder to bundle intervention into uniform and replicable packages for the purpose of planning, funding, monitoring and evaluation against fixed goals. Improvisation entails not only context-specific diversity of action, but also agility in responding quickly to unexpected events.<sup>47</sup>

Some degree of consistency can nevertheless be claimed by requiring programme managers to comply with ‘cross-cutting’ policy principles (local ownership, abiding by the law, gender awareness, environmental sustainability and so on) and to justify their actions periodically relative to universal measurable outcomes (e.g. poverty reduction, provision of basic needs, and compliance with human rights legislation). But the larger the number of policy principles and universal goals imposed on country teams the more limited is their residual room for manoeuvre. Indeed, freed from the need to operate within a rigorous cause-and-effect model of development, policy-makers can be expected to indulge in even more elaborate goal setting and impose unrealistic norms for what is and is not ‘acceptable’. In order to avoid total bureaucratic gridlock local staff are then likely to find themselves having to develop unofficial modes of action that exacerbate inevitable disconnects between official policy rhetoric and local reality.

Eyben (2005:48) observes that analysis of the problems facing development programming along these lines echoes complexity theory: systems are more self-organised than controlled; there are multiple and overlapping causes, effects and outcomes; all understanding is situated and partial; and the overall effect of any one action on the total system is very hard to predict. She argues that operating effectively in such an environment requires new attitudes to learning and to self-evaluation. It is more important to improvise and to reflect honestly on what happens than to devise detailed and consistent plans. Building open and trusting networks as the basis for cooperation is more important than establishing and maintaining clear hierarchies of control. A practical tool that went some way in this direction was “drivers of change” analysis (DFID, 2005a). This was introduced in part to redress the balance between technical programming of development in line with normative goals and a more realistic analysis of political and cultural opportunities and constraints to proposed changes. But in so doing it implicitly acknowledged the case for a more organic and decentralized approach to management of development, capable of responding in a

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<sup>47</sup> Although not pursued here, the case for delegation need not only be confined to relations within development agencies but can include the full gamut of “power reversals” between them and other stakeholders (Chambers, 2005). Here the discussion connects with the wider issue of empowerment, despite having started from a practical management perspective (how to deal with complexity) rather than the more usual normative perspective (how to empower others for its own sake).

timely way to complex and dynamic situations by nudging events in particular directions.

A positive illustration of this link is provided by DFID's aid programme in Peru between 2000 and 2005 (DFID, 2005b; Wilson and Eyben, 2005). A combination of its relatively small budget and the experience of in-country staff enabled it to enjoy more local autonomy than most other country programmes (Eyben, 2006). This enabled them to make decisions about how best to pursue a rights-based agenda informed by detailed knowledge of the local policy context, and to implement them in a flexible way by building up trustful networks with like-minded agencies and individuals. Peru was also going through a particularly fluid period, following the resignation of Fujimori and his replacement by a transitional government under Paniagua. Eyben acknowledges some risks in this approach, particularly of becoming locked into clientelistic relations and losing independence of judgement. Nevertheless, the DFID Peru case study provides an interesting contrast to country programmes where the proliferation of general policy guidelines and preoccupation with measurable targets has greatly limited local room for manoeuvre.

A last point on vertical division of power concerns the scale of intervention. By moving quickly from pilot to project, to programme and policy levels, development agencies address the criticism that they are simply too small to be significant. Scaling up requires larger budgets, and is an indicator of success that can improve career prospects. But with every increase in scale it is harder to ensure that interventions are adequately tailored to reflect local context and priorities. And the more holistic the underlying vision of wellbeing the sharper the dilemma. There are also potentially misleading professional incentives to scaling-up, because it is often easier to estimate potential cost savings than losses that may arise as the outcomes become more hit-and-miss. Decentralised intervention also requires investment in local capacity to provide political and administrative oversight that goes against the interests of those higher up the power chain.

#### *Complexity, incorporation and specialization*

Much development activity is managed in discrete silos or columns, each addressing some different aspect of wellbeing and delegated to appropriate teams of technical specialists. So long as it is accurately identified as a priority then there is an efficiency case for concentrating resources on one particular aspect of the wellbeing of a particular disadvantaged group, drawing in those with appropriate specialist expertise. But excessive or badly structured specialization risks turning development workers' tasks into abstractions, and separating them from real social human beings.<sup>48</sup> Once under the control of specialists there is then a danger that one priority is pursued at the expense of other dimensions. Alkire (2004:192) suggests this is at the heart of anti-development discourse "the major problem... is that development initiatives, even if they try to reduce poverty, define as exogenous (out of their field of concern) other capabilities *that people really valued* and allowed them to be nonchalantly undermined" (italics in original). In other words, it's not that better education, health or food security is necessarily a bad thing but that in prioritising them other dimensions of wellbeing (above all valued aspects of local culture) are ignored and ultimately damaged.

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<sup>48</sup> This is true also of academic tasks such as writing this paper, except in as much as I am aware that it will feed into live performances with real people in conferences, lectures and tutorials as well as influence my position in real social networks.

This suggests that one consequence of a more holistic wellbeing perspective is the need for more emphasis on continued consultation with intended beneficiaries, mediated by those who have a broad understanding of development rather than specialist expertise. To the extent that development has to be managed in smaller and more locally specific bundles than the economics of specialization change.<sup>49</sup> This connects with debate over the tension between multi and discipline-specific education in development studies. Woolcock (2002), for example, makes the case for training development and public policy professionals to be skilled in detective work, trans-discourse interpretation and mediation between those with narrower interests and visions.

More generally, this analysis can be framed in the language of cultural theory developed particularly by Douglas and building on Durkheim (Giddens, 1971; Eriksen, 2001:82; Douglas, 2004). Coordination takes place in two ways: establishment of constraining rules and regulations (“grid”); incorporation into a wider collective identity (“group”). In a healthy organisation the balance between them is managed through challenge and response among individuals and factions with preferences for different forms and levels of regulation and incorporation. The analysis above suggests top-down development inclines to a strong grid, strong group bureaucratic norm. The danger of this is anomie and apathy among those who identify weakly with both the group identity, ideology and discourse of the donor and with its grid structures. Wellbeing discourse, with its emphasis on the importance of relationship to ideas and to people as well as to material goods can help agencies identify where they are failing to connect with other stakeholders through their neglect of differences in these domains. Likewise it departs in part from political economy analysis of welfare regimes by seeking to incorporate more Durkheim into the analysis, and gives more emphasis to achieving cultural resonance as well discursive consistency and organisational congruence.

### *The primacy of the personal*

Several of the arguments advanced so far in this section suggest the importance of personal abilities as a means to better management of development: to understand and interpret other people’s perspectives; to build trusting relationships and networks; to adapt quickly to change and to improvise. Thinking about wellbeing should not only encourage a more rounded view of others, but also of ourselves: just as poor people should be regarded as people first and poor second; so should professional people regard themselves as people first and professional second.<sup>50</sup> This point has been made particularly strongly by Chambers (1997; 2005) and is echoed by McGregor (2007:321-2) in his argument for keeping the “social human being” at the heart of development research and practice.

The same point could arguably be made of practice in any field of activity. We hope our dentist will be pleasant and respectful, but if it came to a trade-off most of us would nevertheless opt for the one most skilful with the drill, even if his or her chair-side manners left much to be desired. Development practice differs to the extent that

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<sup>49</sup> The argument here runs in parallel with debate over agricultural performance and research. Where agro-industry operates on a huge scale within fairly uniform environmental parameters then there is a stronger case for specialised research. To the extent that it operates in “complex, diverse and risky” environments then farmers’ themselves are the experts and it is harder to justify investment in narrow technical expertise. (Chambers et al. 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Or to paraphrase Italo Calvino, development (like the universe) is a mirror within which we are able to contemplate only what we may have come to know about ourselves.



interpersonal behaviour can have a more direct effect on the core goal of diffusing power in society. More fundamentally, the inequality of access to and control over resources that is inherent in many aid relationships creates particular strains on personal relationships. Carr *et al.* (1998) observe this effect closely in the labelling and othering associated with technical assistance for training, while Grammig (2002) alludes to the same issue in his observation that even where counterparts enjoy mutual professional respect and friendship their relationship is still mediated by differing political interests and identities that are built in to unequal power over allocation and disbursement of funds. While there is no avoiding the inequality of control over global resources within which development is embedded, the effect of this can at least be reduced by questioning the functional separation of who decides when development initiatives start and finish from who is responsible for their implementation in between.

Specialisation through successive stages of the intervention cycle (in project identification teams, implementation units, and review bodies) also helps us to avoid sustained personal relationships and commitment through which we are more likely to accept personal responsibility for the outcome of our work. Indeed, it is perhaps not entirely cynical to argue that rapid circulation of staff – particularly expatriates in country offices – serves at least in part the need of donor organisations to forget in order not to have to confront the unbridgeable gap between official policy and ground reality. Or to put the matter another way, if donor staff were forced to spend more time in one place, then much of the discourse that frames how they operate might more quickly be shown to be unrealistic.

Figure 4. A reflexive framework for appraisal of development interventions.

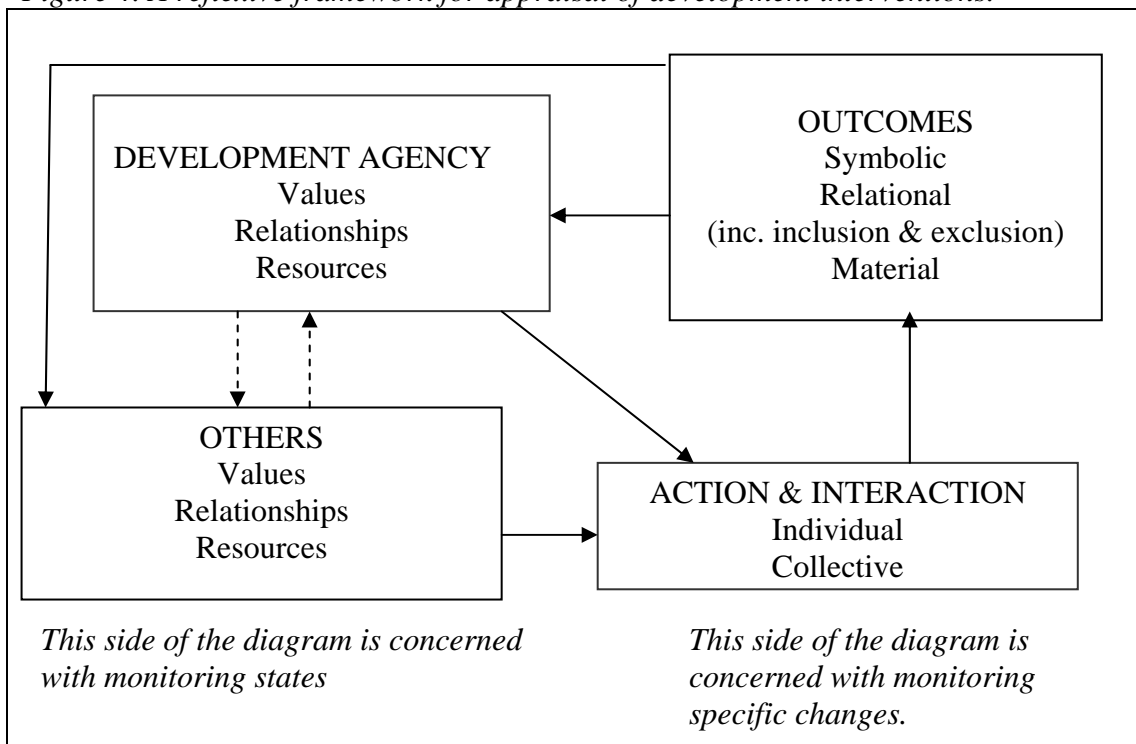


Figure 4 suggests a simple intervention model intended to encourage both reflexivity and a more holistic perspective based on a fuller conceptualisation of wellbeing. It first defines agencies by their values, relationships and resources. Values include formal goals, but also the importance implicitly attached to different states and roles.

Relationships may be both positive and antagonistic. Resources include claims over material, natural, human assets and knowledge. Together they influence how different agencies act and interact with each other over time, with outcomes (symbolic, relational and material) which in turn alter their states.<sup>51</sup> These symbolic and relational effects are reinforced in the way development agencies act – e.g. through choice of language, staff recruitment, forms of consultation and collaboration. For example, as Eyben (2005) acknowledges in her discussion of the DFID Peru experience, the social positioning of a development agency unavoidably affects the status and political influence of others. These symbolic and relational effects can be more important (in both their direct and indirect effect on wellbeing) than intended material effects, yet they are often ignored or downplayed.

## **Section 5. Conclusion**

The overall argument of this paper can be briefly summarised. Section 1 suggested that talk of wellbeing can be helpful in analysing differences in the way people think about development. This was illustrated by distinguishing between four contemporary development discourses and analysing the ontological assumptions underpinning them. Focusing on the normative dimension of development discourse, Section 2 argued that there is potential for eliciting local perspectives on wellbeing through the use of psychometric scales about the nature of wellbeing. Although much more work is needed to make such methods user-friendly they have the potential to enable development agencies to be more attuned to those they set out to assist. Moving on to the interpretive dimension Section 3 argues that an enlarged definition of wellbeing (embracing relational and symbolic as well as material dimensions) permits more subtle understanding of opportunities and obstacles to institutional change. Finally, on the practical dimension of development, Section 4 argued in favour of more improvisation and delegation of power, as well as resistance to overspecialisation.

In exploring these different arguments, the paper has emphasised the relevance of wellbeing not as a distinct discourse but as a discursive space within which to understand better when, how and why those involved in development connect or fail to connect with other stakeholders. Of course, clearer identification of ontological differences will not automatically result in harmony and cooperation, sweetness and light. But it can nevertheless assist in the messy business of seeking common ground and negotiating ways forward where incomprehension and confrontation might otherwise prevail. By acknowledging and affirming local cultural diversity, discussion of wellbeing can also act as a useful counterpoint to the forces of globalisation and centralization. However, the paper has not argued that a failure to use this discursive space automatically condemns a development initiative to failure. There may be good grounds, in particular times and places for adopting a narrower discourse. Maybe in the past decade development in India merited a stronger ‘growth first’ discourse, whereas in Peru it merited more ‘rights first’, Zambia more ‘needs first’ and the UK more ‘local first’. That is debateable, but what is clear is that such judgements can only be made in the context of a wider debate about wellbeing.

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<sup>51</sup> See Bevan (2004) for a thorough discussion of the time dimension. If development agencies do nothing, then cycles of action, outcomes and altered states of ‘others’ continue without them. But the downward dotted line is a reminder that the mere existence of a development agency can affect the way others perceive themselves and behave, while the upward dotted line indicates how the values, relationships and resources of development agencies are also constantly being influenced by others.

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