Wellbeing and International Development: Promises and Pitfalls

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Abstract
This paper argues that there can be added value from using a concept of wellbeing to interrogate international development thinking and practice. It explains the specific definition of wellbeing that has been employed to direct the WeD research. This is a hybrid definition which combines elements of objective and subjective wellbeing but also seeks to transcend them by recognizing the role of social construction in each. Any efforts to study or use this notion of wellbeing in practice must take account of three dimensions of social being: the material, the relational and the mental (entailing both cognition and affect). The paper goes on to explain the research methodology developed by WeD and outlines the range of data generated by it. The paper moves on to discuss some of the promises and pitfalls of a wellbeing approach. The promises arise from the focus on human flourishing as a means of achieving policy coherence; escaping sterile debates over the roles of market and state; the reintegration of the analysis of social change with analysis of growth and human development; and the ways the concept highlights issues of political organisation and power. Potential pitfalls include the traps of individualism; and cultural relativism. The paper concludes by recognising the utopian character of this conception of wellbeing and considering some of the dangers of encouraging academics, politicians and policy-makers to engage with people's aspirations, hopes and fears.

Introduction
The Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000, provided considerable impetus for a global call to eradicate poverty around the world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that follow from it have been an important catalyst to thinking and activism for poverty reduction. It is increasingly apparent however that the ambitious goals set for 2015 may not be achieved. There are many reasons why this may be the case: for example, the shortfall in financial follow-up on the commitment; the diversion of funds, as well as mental and political effort into global conflicts rather than towards global poverty eradication; or the slow move to realising the place of the goals in development practice. All of these may be part of the story, but another strand of concern is that while the goals are noble and worthwhile they are not supported by a coherent body of thinking about how they are to be achieved. The MDGs may tell us where we want to go, but they do not say much about how to get there. While the goals may have provided us with a sharper sense of collective purpose, the fact that they are not fully underpinned by a coherent theory of development means that for many involved in the development industry it is 'business as usual'.

The primary purpose of the WeD research as stated in the proposal to the ESRC was:

> *"... to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in specific societies."* (WeD ESRC 2001)

The proposal deliberately made a bid for time to think about how a range of different development discourses that addressed poverty in developing countries related to each other and how these could be brought together in empirical study. Its experimental use of a range of research methods has sought to explore the ways in which poverty, inequality and peoples' perceptions of their quality of life are dynamically interlinked in different communities, in four developing countries. The research programme was intended to be policy relevant but sought not to be policy driven. That is, it has tried to take a detached perspective on current develop thinking and practice.

This paper seeks to set out some of main challenges to 'business as usual' that arise when one takes a wellbeing perspective on international development. It will explain how the notion of wellbeing can be conceptually justified in relation to how we think about international development and how it can be operationalised in a methodology for the generation of evidence to support improved development policy and practice. It will conclude by discussing some of the promises and potentials pitfalls of using a notion of wellbeing to interrogate international development thinking and practice and particularly as that pertains to the eradication of poverty.

Wellbeing
The term wellbeing is of course not new, either in the study of development or more generally in philosophy and the social sciences. Many contributors to current debates trace their position back to Aristotle, while notions of wellbeing and debates over what it consists of and how it might be achieved are to be found in the tracts of most established

religions. David Collard in an early contribution to the WeD Working paper series reminds us of Bentham's contribution and that the idea lies at the heart of the utilitarian roots of modern economics (Collard, 2003). It is currently popular to identify Adam Smith's concern with it in his 'Theory of Moral Sentiment' as well as in 'The Wealth of Nations'. The term wellbeing has been prominent in Amartya Sen's challenge to the utilitarianism of contemporary mainstream welfare economics. His debates with Martha Nussbaum, who is cautious of the term precisely because of its utilitarian connection, and the creative and intelligent work of many of their discussants, have enriched the recent development literature (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, Alkire 2002, Gasper 2004). Other important recent contributions include Partha Dasgupta's treatise on 'Human Well-Being and the Natural Environment' (Dasgupta, 2001) and some less prominent work by Robert Chambers on the notion of 'responsible wellbeing' (Chambers 2004). Elsewhere the emergence of positive psychology and the work of Nobel prize-winner Daniel Kahneman and others debating the merits of hedonic and eudaimonic notions (Kahneman et al, 1999, Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2006)) have also raised the profile of the concept of wellbeing in academic and policy circles. Wellbeing is a concept that has much resonance contemporarily across the social sciences but with that comes considerable confusion about what we mean by it.[1]

The research that is reported here has from its outset been concerned with what a notion of wellbeing can contribute to our understanding of the persistence of poverty in developing countries[2]. In exploring this, however, we have implicitly drawn on a lesson which is promoted by positive psychology: That there are benefits which can arise from focusing on the positive rather than the negative. Just as positive psychology has found it liberating to focus on the positive side of the human experience, as opposed to the dysfunctional aspects of the human mind; it is also possible to recognise the potential value of a positive approach to international development. From my own experience, what has impressed me most in working with people in developing countries, is their strength, resilience, forbearance and positivity, often in conditions of considerable hardship and denial. It has never seemed enough to focus on their poverty or their 'lacks', these are obvious enough, what has impressed me more are their efforts, creativity and strengths.

A positive approach to studying poverty in developing countries, however, can be politically difficult. The accusation of 'glossing over' or seeking to distract attention from the suffering and injustice involved in underdevelopment is poignant. The criticism is rejected though, on two grounds. First, much of the earnest concern in contemporary poverty discourses stands in danger of being depoliticised both in study and practice by technocratic and bureaucratic treatments (Hickey and Bracking 2005) and, second, as I will argue, the notion of wellbeing has particular value precisely because it encourages us to place the analysis of power and political relationships at the heart of our concern.

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[1] We could also mention here the various work of: van Praag, Layard, Oswald, Stutzer and Frey, Veenhoven, Cummins, Diener, Max-Neef to name but some of the numerous others who are writing in the field. See also Gasper's discussion of this (2007).

[2] The ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries Group (hereafter WeD), carrying out studies in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand.

The conception of wellbeing that the WeD group has evolved is one that is concerned with human flourishing and the societal conditions within which that can take place. It addresses the issue of how we might live well together in society and it is concerned with development as good change. To proceed we need to be more precise in what we mean by wellbeing and the definition that we have collectively developed is that:

> *"Wellbeing is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one is able to enjoy a satisfactory quality of life."* (WeD, 2007)

The emphasis here is upon a life lived and wellbeing outcomes that are continuously generated through conscious and sub-conscious participation in social, economic, political and cultural processes. It is a hybrid definition of wellbeing that is different from many of the other ways in which the term wellbeing is currently used in academic and policy discourse. It is neither objective nor subjective, but seeks to combine elements of both and transcend them by recognizing the role of social construction in each. This definition means that any attempt to assess or find indicators of wellbeing or to understand the processes that generate (or inhibit) it must take account of three dimensions of social being: the material, the relational and the mental (where this involves both cognition and affect)[3].

Following recent writings from different disciplines[4] we believe that the research affirms the possibility of identifying universal human needs, the denial of which generates harm in all circumstances. These needs include health, autonomy, security, competence and relatedness, the satisfaction of which at a basic level enhances wellbeing everywhere. These needs go beyond the usual material or basic components to include psychological and relational needs. Many in turn require a set of intermediate need satisfiers, such as food, health care, secure livelihoods etc, which have material foundations or are located in, or pursued through social relationships. Significantly, also the WeD definition recognises the need for meaning since it is this that makes social life possible.

People's goals inform the actions they pursue to achieve them, but the goals and the actions are in large part be shaped by the material, social and cultural contexts in which people are embedded, from their family through community, nation state to the increasingly interconnected global society. Thus we cannot study the wellbeing of persons divorced from their social contexts. However, while actions usually take place within local frames of meaning, this does not mean that people cannot act outside these frames. The different forms of relationship within which people are embedded offer opportunities for choice (however constrained) between different goals and of different

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[3] This third dimension of 'mental' is the most difficult to capture in a single world; it refers to the conscious and sub-conscious processes whereby persons receive, process make sense of, and transmit meanings. It calls for attention to a wide range of things amongst which are: belief systems, notions of spirituality, ideology, habitus, personality and mood.

[4] For example L.Doyal and I.Gough *A Theory of Human Need* (1991); R.Ryan and E.Deci 'On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being', *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol.52 (2001).

identities. Thus the pursuit of meaningful action – action consistent with one's values and goals - is ever-present.

The third dimension of our notion of wellbeing addresses issues of happiness or good feeling (positive affect) and recognises that this is in general a good thing, and hedonic psychology[5] tells us much about its causes and its effects. It also shows that happiness is more than the absence of misery. However, we know that hedonic happiness is affected by aspirations and adaptive preferences, so is not always a reliable guide to the broader idea of subjective wellbeing. In addition then the definition recognises a cognitive aspect of subjective wellbeing, interpreted as satisfaction with the achievement of personally important goals in one's life.

Some Implications of this Notion of Wellbeing
Wellbeing is both a state and a process, and it is multi-dimensional. It cannot be simply equated with wealth, happiness or goal satisfaction. Similarly, ill-being cannot be simplistically equated with material poverty, misery or frustrated goal achievement. Two consequences follow from this.

First, the WeD approach allows for a tension between a universalising and a concretising/ local perspective in evaluating wellbeing. On the one hand, wellbeing is functioning meaningfully and feeling well within a specific context. On the other hand it is having resources, capabilities and opportunities to achieve goals which go beyond those that present themselves in local contexts. If this seems imprecise, it is the price that has to be paid for a dynamic and open view of wellbeing.

Second, it follows that there are trade-offs between these different components in the real world, especially for poor people in impoverished contexts. Poor people may have to sacrifice education or food to obtain health care, sacrifice longer-term autonomy to alleviate short-term insecurity, sacrifice peace of mind to survive and thrive in unpredictable modernity, sacrifice short-term happiness to secure longer-term satisfaction. We cannot in the present state of knowledge (and perhaps ever) know enough to sum and compare different people's wellbeing taking account of these trade-offs, and their different valence in different contexts. These two consequences bring politics and power back into the idea and to the real pursuit of wellbeing.

This definition of wellbeing supports an holistic approach to the human being and focuses on the social being. This is not the 'individual', it is not *homo economicus*, it is the social human being who exists in society with others and who is both shaped by and shapes the society in which they live. It is a definition that applies to a person's state of being and as such terms like 'community wellbeing' are misnomers. Nevertheless this definition of wellbeing is ineluctably concerned with the notion of 'the good society' or 'the common good' (Deneulin and Townshend 2007). The ability to effectively pursue wellbeing depends largely on society being structured so as to make this possible.

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[5] D.Kahneman, E.Diener and N.Schwartz (eds), *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (1999).

Moreover, we cannot hope to understand the wellbeing of the person without understanding the role that a whole range of social collectivities play in the conditions that support or frustrate efforts to achieve wellbeing. And, further still, there are social phenomena that are indivisibly collective, but which are nevertheless central to the wellbeing of the person. For example, a sense of identity, or an institution that provides a feeling of security. Elsewhere I have explained and discussed the key elements that underpin of this conception of wellbeing (McGregor 2007). There I argue for the centrality of 'meaning' in our understanding of the construction of wellbeing. Through processes of socialization and acculturation, meanings provide the interlocking of the person and social order (see the work of Maia Green and Sarah White in this conference).

The WeD Methodology
In order to carry out empirical studies using this notion of wellbeing the group devised a comprehensive research methodology, rejecting all single measures or single method approaches. The WeD methodology consists of six inter-related research components for measuring and exploring wellbeing. The six research elements are described in some detail in the Toolbox section of the WeD website and are:
1. Community Profiling
2. The Resources and Needs Questionnaire (RANQ)
3. Quality of Life (WeDQoL)
4. Income and Expenditure Survey and Diaries (I&E)
5. Process research
6. Structures and regimes

(See http://www.welldev.org.uk/research/methods-toobox/toolbox)

Conceptually these six interrelated methods can be grouped in three pairs dealing with outcomes, structures and processes. Following the definition the three main types of outcome that we gathered data on were the needs that had been met, the resources that people and households had available to them in their efforts to achieve their desired goals and the level of satisfaction or Quality of Life that people were able to achieve. The *RANQ* and the *WeDQoL* deal with outcomes and involved both objective and subjective traditions of study. Structures are addressed by the *Community Profiles* and the *Structures and Regimes* work. The Community Profiles deal with near dimensions of social, economic, political and cultural structures, while the Structures and Regimes work deals with wider scale phenomena. Finally, processes are dealt with by the *Income Expenditure* work and the *Process Research*. The former explores the ways in which resources are translated into incomes and expenditures over a year, and the latter deals in more detail with how different persons and households, in different community contexts engage in processes that are key to their wellbeing. The methods were used in a sequence which allowed the accumulation of understanding about the people, communities and nation-states included in the study, and also sought to build trust between the field researchers and the people of the specific communities in which detailed and extended fieldwork took place. The empirical work took place over a period of between 15 months and two years.

Broadly speaking the sequence of the methods follows the order of the list above. After the communities for study had been selected, *Community Profiling* allowed the research to be introduced to the community and then the generation of broad brush profiles of the communities and their people. The approach to community profiles varied to some extent across the four countries but the reports they generated all provided information on basic community demographics and an introductory description of the social, economic, political, and cultural structures evident in the communities studied

The introductory phase of study was followed by the grounding, piloting and application of the *Resources and Needs Questionnaire* (the *RANQ*). The design of this household survey was guided by two of the bodies of thinking that had underpinned the proposal for the WeD research: the theory of human need advanced by Doyal and Gough and the resource profiles approach employed a by a number of development studies researchers at Bath (see Gough, McGregor and Camfield 2007, for a fuller discussion of this background).

The RANQ was developed through multi-disciplinary discussion and in iteration with all of the country teams. This was one of the research moments in WeD when the challenges and tensions of multi-disciplinary and multi-country working were most apparent. Its production entailed compromises on, for example, what items were included, the length of enquiry, and the form of the questions, but the process was guided by the intention of achieving a degree of cognitive and linguistic equivalence across all four countries such that the results from it could be analysed for each country in its own right, and also across the four countries. In this way the instrument sought to be both sensitive to 'local' realities, but also amenable for 'universal' analysis (McGregor, McKay and Velasco 2007). The findings of the RANQ then became a foundational point of reference for subsequent work and as shall be seen in the data section that follows, where possible subsequent samples sought to draw from the RANQ population.

The *WeD Quality of Life* work was carried out in three phases. The first phase was a period of exploratory study where a range of methods and approaches were used to explore what people in the communities said mattered to them for their quality of life. Phase two involved reflection on these findings across the four countries and the formulation of a single instrument – the *WeDQoL* - to be applied to a sample of people across all communities, in all four countries. This second phase produced a provisional definition of Quality of Life for WeD. Closely following the WHO definition of Quality of Life, the WeD researchers adopted the working definition that:

> *"(Quality of Life is) the outcome of the gap between people's goals and perceived resources, in the context of their environment, culture, values, and experiences."*
> (Camfield, McGregor, & Yamamoto 2005)

The third phase of this element of the research involved the grounding, piloting and application of the WeDQoL. Following the definition above, the WeD-QoL is a suite of questions which is interview-administered and which explore different dimensions of a person's perceived quality of life. It includes scales on: Goals, Goal Achievement, Perceived Resource Availability, and Values; as well as adaptations of two

internationally validated scales, the SWLS (Satisfaction With Life Scale, Diener *et al* 1985) and the PANAS (Positive & Negative Affect Scale, Watson et al 1988)

The research on *Income and Expenditure* involved the preparation of instruments to produce data on the income and expenditure patterns of the household as a whole and of the persons within it. Two different forms of instrument were used in this element of the research: a survey was applied at three points across a year in Bangladesh and Peru; while in Ethiopia and Thailand diaries were used on a monthly basis over a full year. Each instrument was designed to capture information on the extent of seasonal variations on income and expenditure over one year. They each captured data on the different categories of incomes (self-employment, wage income, and in kind), expenditures (production costs, food and non-food items), credit and saving behaviour The survey also included supplementary questions exploring subjective indicators as global happiness and life domain satisfaction.

Process Research refers to the element of WeD fieldwork that involved in-depth work with a smaller sample of people and households. The aim of the process research element was to understand some of the key processes and relationships that different persons and households engage with to achieve wellbeing outcomes. This element used a range of different research methods (including qualitative work and ethnographic case studies) with a sub-sample of people and households, as well as a re-analysis of the existing WeD data to discern the types of processes that are important in formulating wellbeing goals and strategies.

The *process research* involved two distinct approaches. The 'thematic' approach involved the selection of a set of prominent 'wellbeing' issues that had been identified by ongoing work as significant for the communities studied. A sample of different people and households were then interviewed on their process experiences in relation to these themes. Bangladesh, Peru and Thailand used the 'thematic' approach to explore the following themes: Bangladesh: income expenditure and debt; politics and community institutions; marriage and family relations; and crises (health and floods); Peru: social identity; migration; collective action; and consumption: and Thailand: health; collective action; and livelihoods and migration.

The 'core case' approach which was employed in Ethiopia involved diary work and repeated interviews with selected core sample of people and households, over an extended period of time. The Ethiopian team used this approach to explore a wide range of themes affecting wellbeing.

The purpose of the 'thematic' and 'core case' approaches was the same: to illuminate a number of key relationships that these people and households engaged in as they sought to achieve their desired states of wellbeing. Where possible, case studies were developed to overlap with people and households covered by other research components (especially the RANQ) so as to permit cross-analysis.

The final research element, which has come to be called *Structures and Regimes*, was what we initially called 'big structures' work. It deals with those wider, regional, national and global elements of social, economic, political and cultural structures that members of the group regarded as essential for our understanding of the specific community based wellbeing outcomes and processes that we were seeking to understand. It was undertaken in recognition that micro or community based studies can have a propensity to lose sight of the bigger picture. In an effort to systematise this work across the four countries and as the work progressed, the group decided to adopt and adapt the welfare regimes framework that members of the group had previously been working with (see Gough, Wood, Barrientos, Bevan, Davis and Room, 2004).

Adapting the regimes approach serves to relate the wellbeing outcomes and processes observed in particular communities to nation-state systems and features (and to some extent to aspects of global, regional and some sub-national features). It seeks to locate the research sites within national and global structures of power, exchange and information. It also highlights how actors within the research sites mediate between the households and outside organizations, including government, business and civil society. The data for this component was mainly secondary and included both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase, data collection was focused on collecting identical indicators across all four countries. The second phase involved shaping this data and supplementing it to conform to the guidelines of the regimes work. Secondary data was supplemented by qualitative data from other WeD research, particularly the community profiles and the process research to connect the national level structures with community level realities.

Because all of the instruments employed are derived from the same conceptual framework, and also largely use the RANQ sample as a point of reference, they can be analysed in relation to each other. The data generated by them has been lodged in an integrated database to facilitate this analysis.

WeD Data
The WeD empirical work focused its efforts in the detailed study of a small selection of rural and urban communities in each of the countries. Initially, it was agreed that each country would select no less than four rural and two urban sites. The sites were to be chosen in order to illustrate some of the key variations in the conditions within which people were seeking to pursue their wellbeing in that country. The sites were not intended to be and are not representative; rather they were selected with reference to a country-team driven rationale for the study of wellbeing outcomes and processes. All the country-team narratives take some account of closeness and remoteness from key centres of development and growth. In Bangladesh and Thailand this notion of closeness and remoteness is perhaps the strongest element of the rationale for selection, albeit that it is difficult to find any community in Thailand that could be called remote in the same sense as in the other three countries. The Ethiopian site selection took account of ethnic difference but focused only in two of the country's largest regions, Amhara and Oromiya. The Peru site selection was guided by the notion of ethno-linguistic corridor that was

envisaged as flowing between Lima up to the highlands of Huancayo and Huancavalica, and down again into the cloud forest area to the east of the Andes.

In the end particular country team requirements and often the country-rationale for the study led to the selection of a slightly larger number of communities for study than was initially envisaged. The number of communities studied, listed by site-type, is given in Table 1 below. As was noted above, community profiles were prepared for each community and have been updated, incorporating more information, as the research continued (for details of these see the website).

Table 1: Number of types of community included in WeD research, by country.

Country	*Rural Communities (more remote)*	*Rural Communities (near-urban)*	*Urban Communities*
Bangladesh	2	2	2
Ethiopia	3	1	2
Peru	3	2	2
Thailand	3	2	2
Total	**11**	**7**	**8**

The initial plan was for the Resources and Needs Questionnaire (RANQ) to be applied to not less than 1,000 households per country across the range of rural and urban communities. This was to be done on the basis that where a community contained less than 250 households then we would seek to cover all of the households with the questionnaire and where communities contained more households then an appropriate a sampling strategy would be adopted to select 250 households for coverage. The outcomes of the approach to RANQ coverage is reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of households and persons included in the RANQ, by country.

Country	*No. of Households*	*No. of Persons*
Bangladesh	1500	7273
Ethiopia	1450	7873
Peru	1004	5046
Thailand	1183	5384
Total	**5187**	**25,576**

The combination of the greater number of communities selected, but that a number of the communities were smaller than 250 households, meant that the final number of households covered by the RANQ is marginally greater than was originally envisaged.

As was noted the Income and Expenditure (I&E) work was carried out using two different instruments. In Ethiopia and Thailand, the diary method was applied monthly over a year to approximately 70 households in each. The survey was administered to 300

respondents in Bangladesh and 250 in Peru in 3 rounds, reflecting 4 month intervals over one year. This element of the research drew considerably on the RANQ results and the overlap of people included in I&E from the RANQ is very good.

Table 3: Number of households covered by Income and Expenditure Research and overlap with RANQ, by country.

Country	*Number of Households*	*Number from RANQ*
Survey		
Bangladesh	300	300 (100%)
Peru	254	254 (100%)
Diary		
Ethiopia	72	72 (100%)
Thailand	74	73 (99%)

The WeD-QoL Phase 3 instrument was administered to approx 370 men and women in each country (approximately 60 per research site) in the local language by a team of interviewers selected by each of the country teams. The majority of respondents to the WeD-QoL Phase 3 also completed RANQ and as many as possible had been involved in other elements of the research. The coverage of the WeDQoL instrument across the four countries is given in Table 4, below.

Table 4: Number of persons included in WeDQoL and overlap with RANQ, by country.

Country	*Number of Persons*	*Number from RANQ*
Bangladesh	373	373 (100%)
Ethiopia	371	314 (84%)
Peru	550	302 (55%)
Thailand	376	366 (97%)
Total	**1,670**	**1,355 (81%)**

The variation in the degree of overlap with the RANQ is explained by the sampling requirements for the WeDQoL. Non RANQ persons were included to achieve a broader range of coverage and were sampled proportionately according to age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion. In Peru the lower proportion of the overlap with the RANQ is explained by the fact that in the Peru study the WeDQoL work had a much greater scope and that its overall sample size was larger.

The process research element generated a wide range of in depth inquiries across the four countries. Most prominent amongst the themes selected were wellbeing and collective action and all countries undertook work on this theme. A nexus also emerged around the theme of livelihoods, migration and wellbeing.

Tables 5 and 6 report the theme coverage in Bangladesh and Thailand. The Peru study addressed the themes of Collective Action, Consumption, and Migration. In Ethiopia the

core household diaries dealt with a wide range of issues including: life events; health and illness; food; work; education/learning; rest and recreation; expenditure; sources of income; social interaction; participation in local organizations; religious and ritual activities; interactions with the wider world; interactions with government officials; disagreements and resolutions; satisfaction; household decision making; plans for next month; poverty dynamics; migration; adult lives; old lives; young lives; elites; and destitutes.

Table 5: Number of households included in process research and overlap with RANQ in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh	Number of households	Households from RANQ
Floods and Health*	80	80 (100%)
Identity and Households	95	n.a.
Collective Action	66	n.a.

*23 of these households also participated in the QoL and I&E

Table 6: Number of households included in process research and overlap with RANQ in Thailand.

Thailand	Number of Households	Households From RANQ
Health*	209	209 (100%)
Collective Action**	102	102 (100%)
Livelihood***	107	107 (100%)

*51 of these households also participated in the QoL and I&E
**5 of these households also participated in the QoL and I&E
***67 of these households also participated in the QoL and I&E

Promises and Pitfalls of Wellbeing
The analysis of the data generated by the research programme is ongoing and given that you will hear a considerable amount more about these over the coming days, I will not here make detailed reference to specific parts of the data and analysis. Rather I will focus on the types of questions and arguments about development that have been raised by this approach to wellbeing. Despite naïve models of linear relationships between data, knowledge and decision-making, policy-focused academic study is always caught in a strange half-world: having to engage with ongoing and evolving debates in academia and practice whilst analysis of data progresses. The two, of course, feed back on each other. In the remainder of this paper I will suggest some key questions that I have identified as a result of simultaneous engagement with the evidence that is beginning to flow from the WeD analysis and the ongoing policy debates. There are I believe a number of main promises that we might explore in a wellbeing approach, but it is important also to

recognise that there are some major potential pitfalls which may inhibit its progress and contribution.

Promises

The reintegration of the analysis of social change with analysis of economic growth and human development

Does the concept of wellbeing indicate how we might better reintegrate the analysis of social change with our understanding of development?

The definition of wellbeing that is promoted here is one which is profoundly social in character. By contrast, the conceptual frameworks that underpin the analysis of economic growth and human development are both focussed on the individual and each arrives at a view of society through aggregation of individual conditions. Neither provides a convincing basis for the exploration of social development and change. The definition and methodology for studying wellbeing outlined here emphasises social relationships and the role of socially constructed meanings in determining how we experience wellbeing. The four WeD country studies illustrate different ways in which this approach offers insights into the dynamics of social change. In Bangladesh, the evolution of the political culture and the increased social integration of the formal political parties have considerably changed the conditions for wellbeing that confront most Bangladeshis over the last 15 years. In Thailand the runaway nature of social and cultural change as consequence of rapid economic transformation has placed questions about the direction of social and cultural change at the top of the political and public agenda.

Many economists, of course, have long recognised the importance of social change in relation to economic growth. The discourse is one of 'institutions'. The 'old institutionalists' such as Veblen offered extensive discussion of the relationship between modernisation and social change, and more recently North and then Rodrik offer discussion and persuasive analyses of the role of institutions and institutional change in supporting or enabling growth. It is only to a lesser extent that they discuss the role of 'institutions' in helping societies cope with or adapt to economic growth. This has been more the focus of a different literature, for example, those that address 'adjustment with a human face' or 'social protection'. In these, however, there is a tendency towards treating social change as a residual consideration. Growth is unquestioned and is the paramount consideration; it is then a matter of coping with the losers.

In any processes of development and social change there will be winners and losers. What this research does is encourage us to disaggregate the winning and losing: some people may win in terms of material improvement but only at the cost of, for example, losses in terms of the quality of their close relationships. The theme of migration as studied in all of the WeD countries provides a wide range of illustrative evidence of this. One way to think of the role of a wellbeing analysis is that it can be used to identify who is winning and losing in respect of which particular dimensions of their wellbeing and then seek to provide some explanation of the mechanisms and processes that are at work

to produce the observed adverse wellbeing outcomes. The notion of transformative social protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004), however, takes the idea further and encourages us to think about what types of social transformation can be enabled by social protection measures, such that the systemic societal or welfare-regime features that generate ill-being outcomes are addressed (see also Barrientos and Shepherd here).

There is however a further level which raises a more fundamental question. This is addressed by Nic Marks here and has been a focus of NEF work and that of others before: it is the question of what type of economic growth we want. A focus on wellbeing offers the possibility of undertaking an ex-ante analysis of the wellbeing consequences of different proposed patterns of growth, to consider as a society whether we regard these as desirable. This would involve asking questions of whether the predicted outcomes are just or are sustainable or, more basically, just whether they are likely to be good for our societies.

Human Flourishing and Development Policy Coherence
Can a focus of wellbeing represent a mechanism for encouraging greater policy coherence?

While current discussions in development theory and policy often recognises the inter-connectedness of development issues, debates have struggled to enunciate a conception of development that provides a unified focus. In contemporary policy writing a major and recurring concern is the quest for 'coherence'. Sweden's Policy for Global Development; titled 'Shared Responsibility', enunciates this very clearly. It states that, "A coherent Swedish policy for global development should be based on an integrated approach to the various roles and contributions of different political and policy areas to the promotion of equitable and sustainable global development." (2003, p18). The UK's recent White Paper (2006) recognises that the elimination of poverty must be tackled at a range of different levels from the international political and policy environment; to the governance of the nation state; and down to the specific conditions in which men, women and children experience their poverty and insecurity in developing countries. While it explicitly recognises the need for 'joined-upness' across policy issues, including, for example, governance, trade, and climate change, it does suggest how this might be achieved either by aid givers or recipients.

Our review of the wide-ranging wellbeing literature has resulted in us arguing for the centrality of the social human being in both study and development policy (McGregor 2007). Following Bevan (2007), I argue that the social human being is a whole person, with a biological, psychological and emotional constitution, who actively engages in the reception, interpretation and construction of meaning; who lives in time and is different from other social human beings in terms of their internal constitution, their needs and their relationships in society. Some time ago W. Arthur Lewis observed that economic growth was not the purpose of development, rather it was a means to increase the choices available to people. This now widely recognised and has been a key message of Amartya Sen's work, but it is a view that is not always consistently applied in policy and practice.

Following Robert Chambers' arguments for development as 'good change', the fundamental purpose of development policy it seems is to provide the societal conditions for human flourishing and to attack those conditions that produce human suffering. As such the concept of wellbeing has the potential to be a unifying concept for theory and policy. By focusing our attention on the conditions that enable human flourishing or which result in suffering, the concept of wellbeing presents itself as a potential mechanism for encouraging policy coherence

It could be argued of course that the increased poverty focus of many development agencies and governments over the fifteen years or so has also acted as a mechanism for coherence in the way discussed here, but the increasing proliferation of different 'poverties' or dimensions of poverty means that the poverty focus can now be highly diffused. Moreover, the poverty focus is also essentially negative and as such often stymies strands of development thinking that are more focused on positive visions of development.

Despite the Millennium Development Declaration and many other high-level development policy commitments and statements it is not clear that the wellbeing of the social human being is consistently the central concern of development efforts. A well debated 'dysfunction' of bureaucracies and policy agencies is that they tend to suffer from 'goal displacement'; that is their attention to specific targets or concerns have a tendency to result in them losing sight of what the major and fundamental purpose of their organisation is. At its worst the perpetuation of the organisation becomes the major goal, at the expense of its substantive purpose.

Having wellbeing as a central organising goal will not in itself solve the problem of coherence; that is a broader challenge to political and policy agents. Nor does it supplant all other policy objectives, but it could go some way to providing us with a way of teasing-out wellbeing clashes and conflicts across different policy spheres. The paper here by Mackintosh, Biritwum, Mensah and Simonetti explores the migration of health professionals from Ghana to developed countries and provides us with an excellent illustration of policy incoherence within and between governments. In the WeD research in Thailand researchers identify clashes of coherence within the same policy initiative; where there is simultaneous promotion of entrepreneurialism and individualism, alongside collective action and the values of community cohesion (see Schaaf 2007).

Escaping sterile debates over the roles of market and state
Can a focus on the institutional conditions that support (or inhibit) wellbeing help us to escape sterile debates over the primacy of either state or market led development?

The literature on development theory and policy has for years been plagued by sterile and entrenched debates over whether development should be led by market or state[6]. The debates tend to ideology, albeit they are often dressed up as technical analysis. It is clear from more subtle analysis and from careful observation of economic history that it is not

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[6] One could add here the role of civil society also.

a case of either or. The analytical framework for studying wellbeing that has been described here encourages us to explore what combinations of market and state institutions provide the conditions within which people can reasonably strive for and hope to achieve some degree of wellbeing.

In some situations markets function well to provide people with the opportunities to achieve aspects of their wellbeing, the research reveals other cases where well functioning markets work to produce negative wellbeing effects. For example, in Thailand where well functioning credit and consumer goods markets combine to generate levels of indebtedness which are cited as major obstacle to wellbeing. The indebtedness of rural household in particular is widely regarded as a major development problem generated by rapid social change and spiralling aspirations. There is nothing new in what is implied here, the wellbeing approach encourages us to support the role of government in regulating markets and where necessary supplanting them. The key question in respect of regulation is "for what?" Not for economic growth; not for the functioning of the market in itself; not for efficiency: although all of these may be important considerations they are not in themselves the primary goal of the regulation of markets. Following Lewis markets are a means to an end, the argument here is that the primary purpose of public and regulatory policy is the creation of the conditions for human wellbeing.

The experience of globalisation and the literature on it have prompted a backlash against a *carte blanche* for unfettered market forces. Barbara Harriss-White has for long been a chronicler of the illbeing consequences of real working of markets in South Asia and here she explores her concerns for the wellbeing consequences of current patterns of globalisation. The cautious reintroduction of the term 'capitalism' into development debates after years of banishment is a welcome indication that there is some increasing room for manoeuvre in which some of the tenets of market ideologies can be critically explored. See also the paper by Des Gasper here. However, while the renewed interest in capitalism offer us a way to reintroduce topics that have been taboo in the discourse for a number of decades (exploitation and alienation, for example), there are hazards in returning to old languages and with that old entrenched positions. We need to consider whether wellbeing represents a different and sufficient language for study and public debate.

Despite academic tendencies to obfuscation, wellbeing is a term that people do understand – the work reported here confirms that wellbeing is a universal concept; people in all of the societies we worked in can identify a notion of wellbeing that is meaningful to them. Improvement in wellbeing is also what politicians tend to promise people when they are to trying to get them to vote for them. It seems then that it behoves academics that have some commitment to our imperfect systems of democracy: not to look down contemptuous of politicians and their blithe promises; and not to look down on people for having their own conceptions of what they mean by wellbeing. Rather it is important to engage in those debates and discussions and to contribute by seeking to bring some order and evidence to them.

Highlighting Issues of Political Organisation and Power.
Can the notion of wellbeing bring issues of political organisation and the exercise of power back to the heart of our analysis of development?

A key insight from adopting the wellbeing approach has been that it forces us to take account of the fact that social human beings are different from each other. People differ in gender and in age, but also in terms of their histories, their abilities, their values and desires (see Bevan and Pankhurst here). Amartya Sen uses the terms diversity and heterogeneity to recognise 'difference' and it is this that discourages him from offering a list of core human capabilities. These differences mean that social human beings engage differently with each other and with the wider structures of society. They are also differently able to conceive of, to pursue and to achieve wellbeing. The studies in all four countries identify inequalities not only in terms of what needs are being met, but what levels of resources they are able to command and also in the goals they can aspire to.

The recognition of difference also suggests that not all visions of wellbeing and the strategies that people may wish to adopt to achieve it will necessarily be compatible with each other. A quick look around us, in our locality and at events globally, suggests that we cannot all simultaneously achieve all our wellbeing goals and at the same time maintain a coherent and inclusive society (or a sustainable natural environment). Far from being a fuzzy, feel-good concept, wellbeing is a profoundly political one. There are trade-offs to be confronted and the wellbeing framework and methodology give insights into the ways in which some people's views of wellbeing conflict with others and how in some circumstances the pursuit of wellbeing by some, results in the denial of the opportunities for wellbeing for others.

This aspect of the concept of wellbeing challenges us to consider how we are to live together in society. This is a question that is to be addressed and is being asked currently at all levels of human society: How are we to live together in our neighbourhoods and communities? How are we to live together in our nation states? How are we to live together in the global community? Our ability to consent to live together in social collectivities depends in large part upon the perceived legitimacy of the systems of governance of those collectivities. By recognising the significance of people's own conceptions of wellbeing the approach highlights some of the challenges for the construction of political legitimacy and of effective systems of political governance. The legitimacy of systems of governance has and will increasingly depend on the capacity of those political systems to engage with and comprehend the wellbeing aspirations and strategies of the people from whom they expect loyalty.

The term governance here encompasses the organisation and functioning of systems of political representation (e.g. the relationship between national and local government), as well as the policy processes where the formulation and implementation of policy have day to day implications for people in how they conceive of and seek to pursue their wellbeing. While the notion of participation is now widely accepted in the development business, it is less clear how it becomes effectively embedded in political systems and cultures. It is doubtful whether this is something that happens through externally imposed

Poverty Reduction Strategy procedures. Votes and the market are two superficial phenomena whereby people are expected to express their preferences and desires, but the analysis of power suggests that they are not enough and that we are seldom fully free in either. The sovereign consumer is a myth and the politics and power that lie beneath the use of one's vote on national polling day are substantial. The person centred focus on wellbeing suggests that we must give renewed attention to those finer-grained political systems that articulate the substantive politics of everyday life with those of wider political systems (see Devine here).

Pitfalls

The traps of individualism
Will the identification of wellbeing with individualism render the notion unworkable?

The term wellbeing is strongly associated with the pursuit of personal individualised goals. This may be an irretrievable hazard for working with the concept in study or policy. There have been years of ideological campaigning both by politicians and by corporations that we can and should all have whatever we want. We have been experiencing the American Dream writ large on the global public stage (Friedman 1994).

The distinction between wellbeing as a profoundly social phenomenon or as a vehicle for individualism marks a major fault line in many national and global political discourses. At its heart is a personal dilemma that we all recognise and it is one that Avner Offer studiously explores: how are we to square our love for the good life with the obvious need for sacrifice to meet other ends?

Some of these other ends are in respect of our own future, and economics deals well with the notion of deferred gratification. Some of the ends are in relation to near others (our children, parents and siblings) and as Prasanta Pattanaik notes economics deals less comfortably with these. Some of the ends are in respect of distant others (those that we live with in our imagined communities of the nation-state, or that we recognise that we share a planet with - see Micklewright and Schnepf here) but Pattanaik notes that conventional economics deals with these less well still.

The current challenges of climate change and environmental degradation are high on the political agenda and as such it is appropriate to ask what sustainable wellbeing might look. It is certainly not a wellbeing that is focused on the individual but rather one that is concerned with connecting our individual choices with issues of how we are to live together. The notion of sustainability that is mobilised here is not one that is concerned only with the natural environment but one that encompasses the ideas of social and political sustainability. It resonates with Chambers' call for a notion of 'responsible wellbeing': where we are able to recognise and take responsibility for our individual behaviours in what outcomes they produce in our local, national and global society.

Cultural Relativism
Will wellbeing be sunk by the view that it encourages unfettered cultural relativism?

If everyone's view of wellbeing is to be taken into account, then is everyone's view of what wellbeing is equally valid? As noted, not all visions of wellbeing are compatible and some will be in conflict with each other. I argue here that in order to deal with this we need a notion of bounded relativism: that is, relativism that seeks to take account of and value cultural difference but which has a means of arbitrating between different cultural positions. As Doyal and Gough emphasise, this is what the struggle for universals is all about. However, as noted elsewhere (Gogh and McGregor 2004) there is an equally dangerous tendency for universals to dictate and to dominate other cultural or local viewpoints. The suggestion implied by the discussion of politics and power above is that the resolution to conflicts over visions of wellbeing must be resolved by political systems and processes. In this, however, knowledge and evidence have their place. The notion of wellbeing that we advance here hinges on its relationship to harm (McGregor 2007), and as such harm represents a possible anchor for debates over the acceptability of competing views of and strategies for wellbeing.

While this definition of wellbeing strongly builds on notions of social construction it is also possible to recognise the political dangers of this. As Baggini and others argue, in commenting on aspects of the 'clash of civilisations' debate, it is necessary to create a space in public deliberation which allows us to recognise that " the choice is not between relativism or dogmatism" (Baggini 2007). Baggini attacks post modernist social constructionists for their failure to recognise the real life political consequences of their arguments. He suggests that:

> "They owe us an apology for failing to either see themselves, or make it clear to others, that in the everyday world we can and must distinguish truth and falsity, right and wrong, even if on close examination these terms do not mean what we thought they did. Science may not be God-like in its objectivity, but it is not just another myth. Moral values must be questioned, but if discrimination against women, homosexuals or ethnic minorities is wrong here, then it is wrong anywhere else in the world. Truth may not be the simple phenomenon we assume it to be, but falsehoods must be challenged."

The idea of using comparisons of harm as an arbiter in debates over relative values remains important, even where we recognise that many harms are socially constructed. In Thailand an urban youth not having the newest pair of trainers may result in a sense of status loss which may have harmful effects, but it is possible to compare the harms produced by this with the harm that might result from not eating well for a week. The argument here is the public deliberation over relative harms could be an important feature of how conflicts over competing wellbeing claims can be resolved. As this research has demonstrated and particularly through the WeDQoL it is possible to systematically explore what people regard as their needs and wants and how satisfied they are in achieving these. The challenge then is to incorporate information and methods such as this into our systems of policy decision-making.

Conclusion: the biggest challenge:

Finally, at the outset of the WeD research David Collard reminded us of Bentham's many contributions to the discussion. He concludes citing Bentham's warning to 'beware the ipsedixitists!' The ipsedixitists are those who would wish to superimpose their notions of what wellbeing should be on others. The notion of wellbeing that we have advanced is one sense utopian, but it also recognises the deep politics that flow in how notions of wellbeing are shaped in our societies.

This approach to wellbeing invites academics and policy-makers to engage with peoples' aspirations, their hopes and their fears. On the one hand this is not an unfamiliar area for policy and politicians. On the other it is an area that many argue is or should be beyond the scope of government. But it is not new ground for academics or politicians. Keynes in particular had an acute understanding of the role of confidence and expectations in the functioning of the economy. While politicians have and still do seek to manage and manipulate public feeling. In an effort to control wage inflation Harold Macmillan told the British people in 1957 that 'they have never had it so good,'. More sinisterly, there are numerous historical and contemporary examples of the politics of envy and hatred. In these we witness the political manipulation of aspirations and of perceptions of what other people have or can do, as been a means of mobilising violence and oppression against those others.

In the commercial world, marketing and advertising seeks to manipulate people's aspirations, hopes and fears most of the time. We and our children are told what we should have; what we should want; what we should do; what we should think. Perhaps a final value of the wellbeing discourse is that seeks to make all of these issues the subject of more open and transparent public debate and deliberation, as opposed to obscuring them behind rhetoric of individual choice, freedom and liberty.

But this notion of wellbeing is a utopian concept and the paths to utopias are littered with the wreckage of authoritarianism. George Orwell and Aldous Huxley are only two of many widely cited 20th century authors of fiction who have painted pictures of the potential dystopian consequences of the blind pursuit of utopia.

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