

# Newsletter



## ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries

### Contents

Director's Welcome - 1

Contact details - 1

News - 2

People - 3

From the Inaugural Workshop -

Abstracts 3-4

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### Director's Welcome

Welcome to the first newsletter of the ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries. Our formal goal is "To develop a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in specific developing societies." As a headline statement this can appear cold, academic and detached, but a common concern of all our researchers here and abroad is with the struggles and trials of poor people. Despite years of spending in the name of 'development', the persistence of poverty and the widening of inequality are more striking than are success stories.

There is much caricaturing of the gap or difference between academics and practitioners in the development industry, which can damage the relationships between the two. But, prosaic as it may seem, the view held in WeD is that a sound social science understanding of the processes involved in reproducing poverty in particular communities is essential to underpin anti-poverty policies.

The main challenge facing the WeD group is to bring together a range of diverse but related conceptual discussions about poverty, inequality and people's experiences of their quality of life, in order to design a dedicated programme of empirical research to be carried out in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. It is this iteration between concepts and the reality of the field which WeD regards as its potentially distinctive contribution. We have just held our inaugural Workshop, described elsewhere in this Newsletter. The Workshop was a great success in beginning to forge a team across all of the countries of study. However, by bringing together sociologists, social anthropologists, economists, political scientists, social psychologists we were also reminded of a common challenge for both academics and practitioners - how to develop meaningful ways to debate different disciplinary (or departmental) contributions to our understanding of harsh realities.

Allister McGregor

# News

The WeD Research Group started in October 2002:

- The first major event was the **Inaugural Workshop** (13-17 January 2003). This took place at the University of Bath and was the first WeD meeting of all members of the project from Bath and the four case countries, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand.
- The Workshop was followed by an initial meeting of the **WeD Advisory Group** that oversees the general strategy of the project. Comments were made about the Inaugural Workshop and advice given on user connections and ethical considerations.
- There will be an **International Workshop in Ethiopia** on 1 March 2003. This will provide an opportunity for dialogue between WeD members and the Ethiopian social science research community and to introduce the programme to a number of key local donors and NGOs.

## Inaugural Workshop

This was the first opportunity for general discussion of two groups of papers: general-conceptual and country-specific. The four collaborating country teams presented papers on the current understanding of poverty and wellbeing in their respective countries. The three general-conceptual papers outlined respectively the resource profiles approach, the theory of human needs and quality of life framework, and a fourth provided a critical overview of the frameworks.

In the country papers the contrasts and similarities between the project countries were highlighted. In terms of economic development there is a wide variation; for example, the per capita income of Thailand in purchasing power parity is about 10 times that of Ethiopia, the poorest country in the sample. There are also important similarities; the vulnerability of Bangladesh and Ethiopia to natural disasters, the former usually in the form of flooding and the latter drought, is a case in point. The abstracts of all papers and the names of participants in the workshop are included in this Newsletter.

In other sessions we began identifying important components ('domains' and 'facets') of the subjective quality of life (QOL) of people in the four countries. Beginning from the current versions of WHOQOL, country groups suggested including new domains on cultural identity, security and un/certainty, relational issues, meaning and material aspects. In addition, a large number of specific facets of quality of life were suggested; for example, confidence in institutions, corruption, fate, membership in different communities and status.

In addition to the sessions on QOL, parallel meetings on the following were held:

- Realities of the project countries (What are the key characteristics of each country? How are these related to conditions in the other countries?)

- Theory/conceptual frameworks (Progress towards an overarching conceptual framework)
- Methodology (What combinations of methods are to be employed? What types of data will be collected and how will they be analysed?)



**Participants in the Inaugural Workshop** From top left: Katie Wright, Suzy Skevington, Ian Gough, Douglas Saltmarshe, Mark Ireland, Joe Devine, Aluala Pankhurst, Bereket Kebede, James Copestake, Peter Davis, David Clark, Monjun Nahar, Adrian Winnett, Iqbal Khan, Sarah White, Adolfo Figueroa, Bayesid Dawla, Awae Masae, Fatema Mahmuda, Laura Camfield, Susan Johnson, Jane French, Buapan Promphakping, Pip Bevan, Becky Lockley, Geof Wood, Shahana Rahman, Pragai Jirojanakul, Ayalew Gebre, Zulfiqar Ali, Allister McGregor, Teofilo Altamirano, Abbas Bhuiya

The discussions on the conceptual framework emphasised the need to transcend the initial three frameworks of WeD (the resource profiles approach, the theory of human needs and quality of life). This calls for a framework that captures the specific features of the project countries, integrates other approaches by engaging in various literatures, clarifies the link between objective/subjective measures of wellbeing and improves our understanding of the dynamic link between agency and structure. The discussions on methodology came up with a work plan for the development of fieldwork, grounding and piloting, main data collection and the analysis/write-up phase.

Overall, the inaugural workshop has helped in

- Clarifying conceptual and methodological issues
- Broadly identifying a work plan for future activities
- Highlighting the similarities and differences between the project countries
- Creating personal contacts between members of the project in different countries enhancing the sharing of experiences.

For more information and news see the **WeD Website** at [www.welldev.org.uk](http://www.welldev.org.uk). This site contains further information concerning the WeD Research Group including conceptual frameworks, methodology, research and research methods.

# People

## DrdrBath

- **Director:** Dr J. Allister McGregor, Department of Economics and International Development
- **Deputy Directors:** Professor Ian Gough, Social Policy Sciences and Professor Suzy Skevington, Psychology
- **Post-doctoral Research Officers:** Laura Camfield, David Clark and Bereket Kebede

There are 12 other researchers in the Bath team, including Dr Hartley Dean from the London School of Economics.

## Bangladesh

- Dr Zulfiqar Ali - The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka
- Dr Iqbal Khan - The Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy, PROSHIKA, Dhaka
- Dr Abbas Bhuiya - Centre for Health and Population Research, Mohakhali, Dhaka

## Ethiopia

- Dr Alula Pankhurst, Dr Ayalew Gebre, Dr Melesse Getu - Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University,

## Peru

- Dr Adolfo Figueroa and Dr Teofilo Altamirano - The Center for Social, Economic, Political and Anthropological Research, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima

## Thailand

- Dr Buapan Promphakping - The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Khon Kaen, Khon Kaen
- Dr Awae Masae - The Faculty of Natural Resources, Prince of Songkla University, Had Yai
- Dr Pragai Jirojanakul - International Affairs Unit Praboromarajchanok Institute (PBRI) for Health Manpower Development, Ministry of Public Health

Humour can often illustrate the difference or similarities between cultures. Alula Pankhurst suggested that collecting jokes would be a fun exercise in cross cultural comparisons. We hope to feature his, and other jokes, in future editions of the WeD Newsletter - space permitting!

# From the Workshop: Abstracts

Full copies of these papers will shortly be found on the WeD Web Site [www.weldev.org.uk](http://www.weldev.org.uk) or request from Becky Lockly [r.c.lockley@bath.ac.uk](mailto:r.c.lockley@bath.ac.uk)

## Country Papers

### BANGLADESH - *I.A. Khan and A. Ali*

The paper presents an overview of the current understandings of poverty and wellbeing in Bangladesh based on existing literature. The paper is divided into three sections. The first is an overview of the poverty situation examining magnitudes, trends and poverty groupings. The next section looks at how poverty is conceptualised in different approaches: consumption based, Participatory Poverty Analysis (PPA), resource profile and livelihoods approaches. The final section presents two methodological challenges: (i) the mismatch between conceptual understanding and operationalisation, and (ii) issues related to integration of different methods.

### ETHIOPIA - *A. Pankhurst and A. Gebre*

After a brief introduction of Ethiopia, the paper looks at the current data on poverty and inequality and discusses specific issues relevant to wellbeing in the country; the latter includes drought and famine, war and conflict, the HIV-AIDS pandemic and inequality. Inequality can appear in different contexts:

wealth, rural-urban, regional, gender, age, class, religion, ethnicity and caste. Changing views on the conceptualisation of poverty by governments, donors, NGOs, academics and local people are discussed. Static versus dynamic models of poverty and the use of quantitative and qualitative data are discussed. The paper concludes by identifying methodological challenges of studying particular social groups: pastoralists, migrants, internally displaced and homeless people, beggars, street children, occupational groups of craft workers and female urban occupations.

### PERU - *T. Altamirano and A. Figueroa*

In the last 20 years, the study of poverty has become one of the most salient issues in Peru, both conceptually and politically. According to several studies done in the past, there is no single definition, neither of poverty, nor quality of life. As these two concepts have wide scopes, the approaches have had different perspectives, depending on the theories and methodologies and special emphasis given. All authors agree that both poverty and quality of life are not just absolute concepts. The boundary of who is poor or not, is also relative or sometimes subjective. Some authors emphasise its cyclical process, its reproductive nature, and its absolute contents as it relates to measurable and tangible aspects such as income,

# More from the Workshop

education, occupation, nutritional level, health, and so on.

## Country Papers Continued ...

The relative content refers to its dynamic and changeable nature over time within a socio-cultural process. The notion of poverty depends on ethnic and/or class composition as well. Consequently, the objective and subjective meanings of poverty and quality of life tend to differ from one place to another, from one culture to another, from one country to another.

In regard to the theoretical and methodological approaches, there are five current perspectives from the last two decades to analyse the different natures of rural and urban poverty and quality of life in Peru: a) the economicist; b) internal social, cultural and economic differentiation; c) the class analysis; d) culture of poverty approach; e) the social exclusion and inequality analysis.

### THAILAND - *A. Masae and B. Promphakping*

Thailand has been a country with significant economic growth in the past. Before it faced economic crisis at the beginning of 1997, it had seen one of the highest GDP growth rates in the world. Despite the country's economic achievement, poverty issues have always been significant.

The paper presents an overview of the current understandings and policy issues related to poverty and wellbeing in Thailand. Special focus is given to north eastern and southern regions of the country. The first part of the paper deals with national level issues: the relationship between development and poverty, rural development plans with focus on poverty, defining and measurement of poverty, the economic crisis and the setback to poverty reduction, and the current policy regime. The second and third parts emphasize on poverty issues and current situations in southern and north eastern regions of the country. The fourth part discusses methodological challenges in studying poverty and wellbeing in Thailand.

## Conceptual Papers

### Resource Profiles and the Social and Cultural Construction of Wellbeing

#### *A. McGregor and B. Kebede*

The paper presents the ontological basis of the Resource Profiles Framework (RPF) by positing it in an agency-structure context. The basic elements of the research programme (people, physical things, relationships and structure) that provide the basis for research under WeD are identified. In particular, the inter-relationship between culture and structure is examined. It argues for integrating culture into the analysis of needs, wellbeing and poverty, an area undeveloped in the literature. Moving on from the more anthropological roots of the RPF the paper then explores recent developments in economics relevant to the research in WeD. Throughout the connection between the RPF, the Theory of Human Needs and

the Quality of Life literature both on conceptual and empirical levels is explored. The paper concludes by presenting some aspects of the fieldwork; types of data to be collected and instruments to be implemented are discussed.

### Needs, Capabilities and Wellbeing: Relating the Universal and the Local

#### *D. Clark and I. Gough*

The first part of this paper addresses a central question of the WeD research programme: the relation between 'the universal and the local'. It contends that local perspectives, preferences and values can be legitimately challenged under certain circumstances. It then turns to three major contributions to developing a universalist conception of wellbeing: Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's work on functionings and capabilities, and Len Doyal and Ian Gough's theory of human need. The relation between these, especially need theory, and the WHO-QOL and Research Profiles approaches is then briefly discussed in part two. Finally, it draws out some implications of the universal-local distinction for the future research methodology of the WeD programme.

### Quality of Life and Wellbeing

#### *L. Camfield and S. Skevington*

The purpose of the review is to integrate the fields of quality of life (QOL) and subjective wellbeing (SWB) and to look at the implications of this body of work for research on poverty, inequality and human needs. First we critically appraise important factors that are known to impact on SWB. Then we consider recent developments in the assessment of quality of life starting from a health perspective and extending its conceptualisation into the general field. We examine advances and shortcomings in theories and methods, and identify areas that still require conceptual elaboration and technical development. Lastly we compare the three different frameworks adopted by the WeD group, and summarise some key issues that will affect explorations of QOL in cross-cultural studies of poverty.

### Discursive Repertoires and the Negotiation of Well-being

#### *H. Dean*

This paper considers ways of linking the resource profiles (McGregor and Kebede 2003), human needs (Gough and Clark 2003), and quality of life (Skevington and Camfield 2003) approaches through the notion of competing and overlapping discursive repertoires. It draws upon and reapplies previous work by the author (Dean 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002) and is presented in five parts. The first develops the conceptual distinctions underpinning the heuristic framework that informs the paper as a whole. The second, third and fourth parts discuss the relevance of discourse to the resource profiles, human needs and quality of life approaches respectively. The final part considers some methodological implications.