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Researching Quality of Life in Developing Countries – *Laura Camfield*

Subjective 'quality of life', namely how people experience and evaluate their lives, is an important part of WeD's exploration of the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in developing countries. But what is subjective 'quality of life'? How can we understand the quality of life of people in developing countries?

In Britain, at least in popular culture, we have a common sense understanding of what quality of life means which enables us to talk about the effect a new job will have on our quality of life, to compare one person's quality of life with another, or even respond to a researcher's questions about our quality of life.

Perhaps it's easier to say what quality of life isn't: It isn't whether you feel happy or sad at a particular moment, though this can be very influential on your judgement of quality of life (as can the weather, apparently, according to Kahneman and Schkade). Usually it isn't just one thing, even money, so we describe quality of life as 'multi-dimensional'. It isn't something that can be judged from outside, even by a close friend. Most importantly, it cannot be externally defined, or at least when it is, there's always space for someone to say 'no, that's not my quality of life you're measuring'. How then can we explore and measure it?

WeD's approach to quality of life is to move continually between 'universal' theories about the way the world is, or implicitly should be, to 'local' realities. This enables us to explore what people value, or what they feel gives quality to their lives. These understandings are then compared with the ideas of philosophers, policy makers, and people working in development, with the aim of understanding the differences and disjunctures between what 'we' think is good for 'them' and what people want for themselves and their families, in order to bring them closer together.

Our quality of life research is divided into three phases; the first was to understand how different people in

different places characterise quality of life. This entailed exploratory data collection using a mix of methods ranging from semi-structured interviews to reports from our field researchers living in the sites ('participant observation'). This enabled us to explore relationships between quality of life at different levels, for example, the individual and their community. The first phase of fieldwork took place in 24 rural, peri-urban, and urban sites in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Thailand and Peru. It included men and women at different stages of their lives, for example students and grand-mothers, with a range of identities and experiences.

The second phase involved analysing the data and reflecting on what we had learned. We also tried to integrate our findings into the WeD theoretical framework and explore how they connected to other ideas about quality of life and subjective wellbeing. As a result we adopted the following definition of quality of life:

The outcome of the gap between people's goals and perceived resources, in the context of their environment, culture, values, and experiences.

This brings together the World Health Organisation's emphasis on a 'flesh and blood' person in a particular socio-cultural environment with the idea that people's quality of life is determined by the 'gap' between their expectations and their reality, as Calman has argued. There are obviously a number of gaps that are important to people, for example, between yourself and your neighbours ('keeping up with the Jones'),



or between what you have and what you feel you deserve. However, we have chosen to focus on the gap between what people want to do or be and the resources they have to achieve this, as this is the most relevant to international development research and intervention.

Following a week's workshop with our international collaborators we then compiled a plan for the remainder of the quality of life fieldwork. This will involve the development of a 'suite' of measures called the WeD-QoL, based on the above definition. The WeD-QoL includes measures of the following:

-  What people want to do or be in order to feel that they are living a good life (their goals)
-  What they think they have or can draw on to enable them to achieve this (their 'perceived' resources)
-  How satisfied they are with the way their resources enable them to fulfil their goals
-  How satisfied they are with their life as a whole
-  What they value
-  Whether they experience more 'positive' or 'negative' emotions

Most of these measures have been developed using the responses to the interview and focus group questions asked in the first phase, but we have also adapted international measures of 'life satisfaction' (from Diener) and feelings or mood (from Watson). These will enable us to compare the happiness and life satisfaction of people from the WeD sample with those from other studies. We will also be able to analyse the results of the WeD-QoL alongside other WeD data so that we can look at the relationships between people's quality of life and what they earn or buy (Income and Expenditure Survey), or between the resources they have reported (Resources and Needs Questionnaire) and what they perceive to be their resources.

WeD recognises a number of aspects to the quality of life research that need to be kept in balance. Firstly the need to take a 'grounded' and pragmatic approach to quality of life, that connects what people in communities are experiencing and the way they perceive their experiences, with how these are measured by experts and policy makers

'Cortamonte' festival in Javja, Peru



outside the community. Secondly, the need to preserve the concept's holism and rich theoretical and philosophical history, stretching back to Aristotle and the Buddha.

The first aspect is expressed in the design of the WeD-QoL, which was particularly influenced by the results of the fieldwork in Peru. The Peruvian team approached the abstract idea of quality of life by looking at what people wanted to do or be in order to feel that they were living a good life. Let's take the example of being a successful farmer. To achieve this, people needed a range of resources from the latest agricultural equipment to a large, healthy family who could work in the fields. They also needed support, for example, from relatives or a local farmers' association. Personality traits like being cheerful or generous were also valuable because they helped them maintain good relationships within their family and community. These relationships were both enjoyable in themselves and the best way of getting help at harvest time. The team also asked people to talk about their happiest and unhappiest memories to get a personal sense of what was important to people and what types of experience affected the quality of their lives.

The Peruvian researchers found that while there weren't any goals that were applicable to all people in all sites (i.e. universal), they could talk about universal 'tendencies' like needing food, shelter, a partner, and a family. The same thing applied to resources where everyone mentioned the importance of communication, good relationships, social connections, and being able to barter and sell their produce. Typically people got support from

their families (which included friends and neighbours in urban and peri-urban communities), the government, local charities, and the church. The only personality traits or ways of behaving that were valued by everyone were helping each other and being a hard worker. Interestingly, while the 'modern' ideals of being 'progressive' and a 'professional' were important to people from peri-urban and urban sites they were never mentioned by villagers.

The findings from Peru connect with themes identified in other countries, which also found significant differences between the perspectives of men and women of different ages, locations, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. The most important areas of life for people in all countries appear to be your close relationships (family, 'natal' family, and partner), followed by material wellbeing (your income, assets, whether your basic needs are satisfied, the environment of your home and community, and your access to local services), and relationships with your community and the wider world (for example, relatives living in the cities or overseas and the regional government). Religion (for example, believing in God or the human potential for enlightenment, conducting acts of worship, and living ethically) appeared to be very important in Bangladesh and Thailand and fairly important in Ethiopia. Similarly, education for themselves and their children was a priority for people in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, although not in Thailand or Peru (except in peri-urban areas).

So what does this tell us about quality of life? When we look at the responses from Peru alongside those from Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Thailand, we can see that the basic ingredients of a good life are very similar. For example, having a partner, a family (and a support network that extends beyond it), a good home, a pleasant environment, and

enough money or other resources not to have to worry about meeting the daily needs of your family. But the types of 'ingredient' (rice in Thailand or teff in Ethiopia) and the way they are combined (rice porridge or injera bread) produce very different 'recipes' for a good life. Similarly, a comparison of responses to questions about people's goals from Ethiopia and Bangladesh (both low income countries) suggest that the main priorities for people from Bangladesh are maintaining family harmony, getting salaried employment, and being educated, while for people in Ethiopia they are having your own home, enough

to eat and drink, and being respected by your neighbours.

Curiously the greatest differences are not between people from different countries but between men and women of different ages whose different identities or experiences cause them to value very different things. For example, in Thailand the older generation wanted to be healthy and able to attend the temple, while young men wanted good jobs and motorbikes. Similarly, young men in Bangladesh were the only group whose hopes for the future focused

on themselves ('becoming rich'), rather than the happiness and prosperity of their children.

WeD's task will be to investigate how the diversity of responses to the quality of life research can be used to help local decision-making and inform wider policy that can better fulfil its promise of improving people's quality of life.

Laura Camfield is a WeD Research Officer, Psychology, based at the University of Bath.

Wellbeing and the Millennium Development Goals

Julie Newton

The year 2005 will be an important milestone for the fight against global poverty with the UN review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September. Activities including the UK's Presidency of the G8 and the EU, the Commission For Africa, and the Make Poverty History campaign have the potential to add significant momentum towards these goals, especially amongst Northern policy makers. The MDGs comprise a framework of 8 universal goals and 18 targets to achieve a minimum level of wellbeing by 2015 agreed upon at the UN Millennium Summit, 2000.

The MDGs are considered "the most broadly supported, comprehensive, and specific poverty reduction targets the world has ever established" (Millennium Project, 2005). At the international level, they provide a powerful means of shaping development policy both globally and nationally. In spite of overwhelming support from the public and key political figures, there is still concern over the ability of such initiatives to effectively contribute to the eradication of poverty.

The Millennium Project report reviewing progress towards the MDGs states that many regions remain far off track. It attributes this failure to four overarching reasons: governance failure, poverty traps, pockets of poverty and specific policy neglect. The report makes ten recommendations necessary for achieving the MDGs

Millennium Development Goals

- 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 Achieve universal primary education
- 3 Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4 Reduce child mortality
- 5 Improve maternal health
- 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7 Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8 Develop a Global Partnership for Development

by 2015 ranging from a big increase in official development assistance to the realignment of existing development strategies including "quick win" actions.

Research undertaken by the WeD Group will contribute to these debates by highlighting how such universalist poverty reduction strategies relate to local realities. A key dimension of WeD's research is the tension between universal models of human welfare and quality of life and the way that people construct their wellbeing.

In particular, the findings will highlight the diversity and complexity of

local experience and the dynamic ways in which policies interact with local circumstances. Although the MDGs provide an effective mechanism for mobilising the global community, policies aimed at their achievement need to be relevant to different local capacities and contexts, and this entails an effective understanding of local realities. In particular, WeD is carrying out research which will provide:

- Detailed information from people within the four countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Thailand and Peru) on how policies relevant to the MDGs are 'translated' and implemented into the local context and what this means for people in practice.
- Insights into what is important for local people in their struggles to escape poverty and what the MDGs might be missing out.

For more details see:

UN Millennium project report at: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org>

Investing in Development: a practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (Sachs, 2005), see <http://unmp.forumone.com/>

MDGs and corresponding targets: http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp

Julie Newton is a WeD Research Officer based at the University of Bath.

Conferences/Workshops Attended by WeD

Ian Gough and Geof Wood (WeD Bath) were invited by the Social Development Division of the World Bank (February) to present their work on welfare regimes in developing countries (recently published by Cambridge University Press). The Bank was interested in the Bath approach for lessons on how to develop context-specific measures of welfare institutions, and how to broaden social development thinking beyond the scope of the Millennium Development Goals. Ian and Geof also attended the "Words into Action in 2005" (January) seminar hosted by DFID and UNDP. Development aid, debt and trade issues were examined with reference to the challenges and opportunities offered by the review of the MDGs and other key events in 2005. Keynote speakers included Chancellor Gordon Brown and Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development

Allister McGregor (WeD director) attended "Towards 2005 – does the Media Matter in the Fight against Global Poverty?" conference (November) organised by BBC World Service Trust and DFID. Key speakers included Gordon Brown, Jeffrey Sachs and Hilary Benn.

The WeD Working Paper Series can be found at www.welldev.org.uk/research/working.htm

Geof Wood and Julie Newton (WeD Bath) attended the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) meeting on "Human rights and the Millennium Development Goals: contradictory frameworks?" Key speakers were Robert Archer (International Council on Human Rights Policy) and Simon Maxwell (ODI).

Laura Camfield (WeD Bath) presented the paper "Living well or living badly: do national and local experts agree?" (November) at the "International Society for Quality of Life Studies: Advancing quality of life in a turbulent world" Philadelphia, USA (November). She participated in the planning meetings for ISQOLS 2006 and the ISQOLS Encyclopaedia project. ISQOLS is the

main organisation for Quality of Life research within the social sciences and, like WeD, brings together perspectives from a number of disciplines. Laura also attended the "Political Interactions, Research, Advocacy and Representation" conference (November) at Goldsmiths College, London.

Joe Devine (WeD Bath) attended an international conference (January) organised by Cornell/SEWA/EDP/WIEGO on "Membership Based Organizations of the Poor: Theory, Experience and Policy" in Ahmedabad, India and presented a paper entitled "Change and the everyday politics of community based organisations".

James Copestake (WeD Bath) presented "Researching the links between economic development and wellbeing: A view of the Andes" at a seminar for the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading (January).

Teófilo Altamirano (WeD Peru) presented WeD findings at the "Sustainability of International Migration" conference, Colegio de la Frontera, Tijuana, Mexico and gave a talk at Colegio de México, Cuernavaca on the "Cost/benefits of internal and international migration: the case of Peru" (October). He attended conferences at the University of Valencia, Spain on "the impact of remittances in rural societies in Peru" (November) and the

International Organisation for Migration Conference, Buenos Aires on the "Government of the social and demographic growth of Metropolitan Lima" (December). He also gave an interview to the local television network on the role of remittances at the domestic level within the Peruvian economy.

Alula Pankhurst (WeD Ethiopia) gave an overview of the WeD research agenda to the local DFID office in Ethiopia (March). He also participated in a World Bank workshop on Empowerment Issues within Ethiopia (February).

Publications

Ian Gough and Allister McGregor edited a special issue of Global Social Policy on "Human Well-being: Communicating between the Universal and the Local". The issue included Ian on "Human Well-being and Social Structures: Relating the Universal and the Local", Allister on "Researching Well-being: Communicating between the Needs of Policy Makers and the Needs of People" and an article by Teófilo Altamirano, James Copestake, Adolfo Figueroa, and Katie Wright-Revollo's on "Universal and Local Understanding of Poverty in Peru". See Global Social Policy (December 2004), Vol 4(3), SAGE publications. (for copies contact j.french@bath.ac.uk)

Key Dates

Jonathan Dimbleby will chair a Roundtable discussion organised by WeD at Bath during the ESRC's Social Science week (20–24 June) to discuss the crucial question of how to make aid more effective in the context of key development events in 2005.

"Pathways to Resilience: an international conference" hosted by the International Resilience Project, University of Kings College, Halifax, Nova Scotia (15–17 June)

"Rethinking development: local pathways to global well-being: second international conference on gross national happiness" at St Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada (20–24 June).

Social Policy Association Conference 2005 with the theme of "Wellbeing and Social Justice", University of Bath, UK (27–29 June)

Development Studies Association (DSA) Conference 2005 with the theme of "Connecting People and Places: Challenges and Opportunities for Development", The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, (7–9 September)

Fifth International conference on the capability approach with the theme of "Knowledge and public action: education, responsibility, collective agency, equity", UNESCO, Paris, France (11–14 September)

Jorge Yamamoto (WeD Peru) has been invited to speak at the **International Summit of Positive Psychology 2005**, Washington D.C., (29 Sept–1 Oct). This prestigious invitation was a result of the organisers learning about the QoL methodology being used in Peru.

To view the WeD Newsletter on-line see the website at www.welldev.org.uk/news/news.htm

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