

Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways Briefing No. 1

An Integrated Model For Assessing Wellbeing

This briefing introduces the model of wellbeing assessment being developed and applied by Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways in its three-year research project in Zambia and India.

Key aspects:

- An integrated approach, which considers what people think and feel (subjective), what they have and do (objective) and the broader environment in which they live
- A multi-dimensional model, comprising eight interconnected domains, spanning material, relational and personal factors
- A contextual approach, which explores the different ways that people understand and seek to achieve wellbeing in varying cultural, political and socio-economic situations
- A mixed method approach, involving qualitative discussion, reflection and case studies, as well as quantitative measures

Why Wellbeing in Public Policy and International Development?

Wellbeing has caught the attention of policy makers and practitioners because it offers new perspectives on what matters and new ways to assess policy outcomes and their impact in people's lives. This is not to say that a concern with wellbeing is something completely new. It advances established agendas to recognise social and political alongside economic issues. It also opens up new conversations about some of the fundamental questions of public policy and society: What does it mean to live well? What is a good society? How can this be promoted and who is responsible for bringing it about?

New perspectives on what matters...

What is positive and desirable is the central focus of a wellbeing approach, rather than what is lacking or negative. This brings a new energy and excitement into tired, problem-focused discussions. It also helps to break down the stigma that can attach to people and places targeted as in need of public action, welfare or development assistance.

Wellbeing is encompassing and holistic, pointing to links across different areas of life (as in the 'work-life balance') or different sectors of policy. Human fulfilment and environmental sustainability are central concerns which complement or challenge more conventional preoccupations with economic growth.

New ways to assess outcomes and impact...

Subjective accounts of how people are doing and feeling are at the centre of wellbeing assessment. At a minimum, this means adding in some questions about satisfaction to conventional household surveys. At the extreme, it can mean that psychological or satisfaction measures are used in place of material measures of welfare. Ideally, subjective accounts are recorded through qualitative and quantitative data and are used alongside other more external forms of assessment.

How programmes are implemented and the terms of interaction between staff and clients is a further important focus for a wellbeing assessment. The quality, not just quantity, of what is provided needs to be considered. The significance of relationships to wellbeing is widely recognised. It is therefore important to explore whether the ways people are being treated respect their dignity and enhance self-confidence.

The Wellbeing Pathways Approach

Wellbeing is experienced when people have what they need for life to be good. Since what is seen to make life good differs by time and place, our model aims to provide a common framework which can accommodate local understandings and priorities.



- The eight points of the star show eight domains of personal wellbeing
- The outer circle indicates the environment that enables and constrains wellbeing
- Around the perimeter are some of the external factors that affect people's achievement of wellbeing
- Wellbeing is viewed as a process which emerges through interaction:
 - between the different domains
 - between different people
 - between people and the broader environment
- The model should thus be seen as dynamic, rather than static, with flow and interchange between its different elements
- All of this is culturally embedded

Layering Objective and Subjective Wellbeing

Wellbeing comprises both subjective and objective dimensions. We explore these through a layering approach which cross-cuts and complements the eight domains of personal wellbeing.

Layer 1. The enabling environment and reflections on it
What is out there (an objective account of collective provision) and what people think of what is out there (subjective reflection on collective provision)

Layer 2. Objective wellbeing
What people can get of what is out there (personal)

Layer 3. Subjective reflection on objective wellbeing
What people think of what they can get

Layer 4. Subjective wellbeing
What this all means for how people are in themselves

This requires a variety of research methods:

- Community profiles to assess the general resource environment, gathered through group meetings, local statistics, participatory methods, conversation and observation
- Survey involving subjective and objective questions and some discussion of meanings
- Statistical tests to assess the validity, consistency and reliability of our model
- In-depth case studies to gain deeper understanding

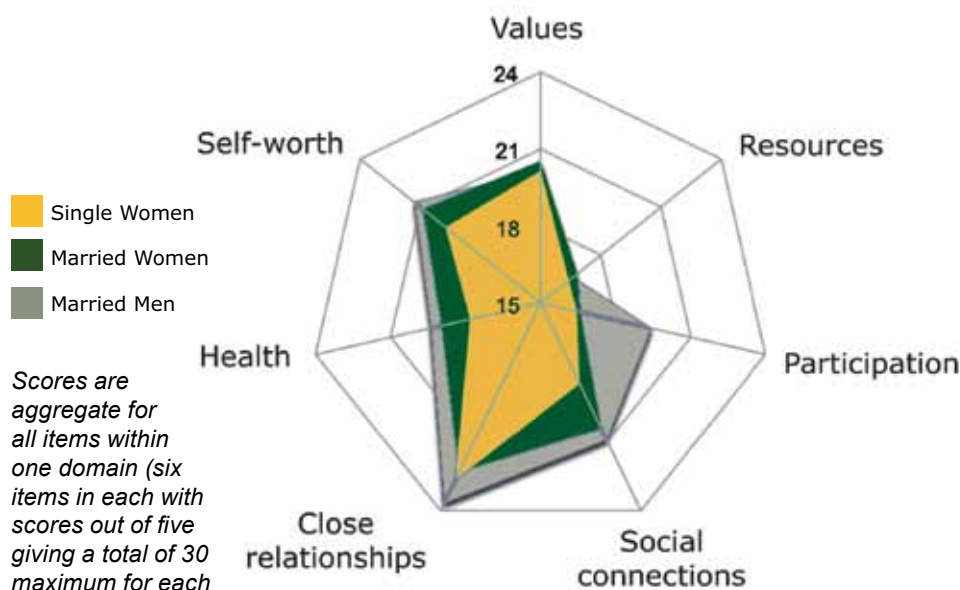
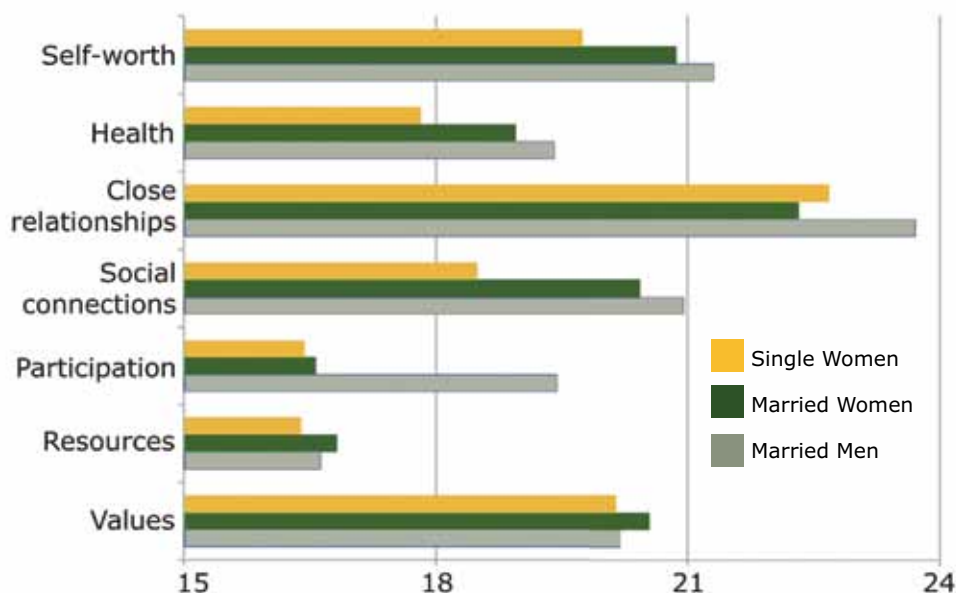
Since wellbeing is grounded in specific contexts, appropriate indicators need to be generated locally. The table below shows possible indicators to illustrate the layering approach across the eight domains of personal wellbeing.



	Layer 1: Enabling environment and reflections on it	Layer 2: Objective wellbeing	Layer 3: Subjective reflection on objective wellbeing	Layer 4: Subjective wellbeing
Economic resources	Range of salaries available locally	Salary received	Satisfaction with salary	How salary enables/disables you: freedom from economic worry
Local environment	Availability and/or quality of health care services	Levels of access to health services achieved	Satisfaction with health care received	How services enable/disable you: confidence of care if fall ill
Agency and participation	Functioning democratic system	Ability to vote freely	Satisfaction with voting process	How agency enables/disables you: confidence you can contribute to political change
Social connections	Existence of local meeting places - churches, pubs, clubs	Attendance at meeting places	Satisfaction with church or pub or club attended	How connections enable/disable you: confidence in community support
Close relationships	Patterns of marriage and divorce locally	Whether married or not	Satisfaction with marital status	How close relationships enable/disable you: security in having someone who cares for you
Competence and self-worth	Availability of opportunities to develop interests and skills	Achievements in life	Satisfaction with what you have achieved	How confidence/self-worth enables/disables you: self confidence in being an able person
Physical and mental health	Patterns of mortality and morbidity in the locality	Own state of health	Satisfaction with state of health	How state of health enables/disables you: sense of being fit and strong for what you want to do
Values and meaning	Local norms and values	Conformity or non-conformity with local norms and values	Satisfaction with your position regarding local norms and values	How values and meanings enable/disable you: sense of being at peace with your place in things

The Model In Use: Research in Zambia and India

These graphs show the patterns of wellbeing generated by applying the model in Chiawa, Zambia, in 2010. Reflecting the poverty of people in the area and low levels of government services, access to resources is the lowest scoring domain. As expected, single women are in general shown to be doing less well than married women, and men are doing best overall. The gender difference is most striking in the domain of agency and participation. Also, perhaps surprisingly, it is married women who report themselves least satisfied with their close relationships.



Scores are aggregate for all items within one domain (six items in each with scores out of five giving a total of 30 maximum for each domain)

Assessing Wellbeing: Summary

Wellbeing is complex and multifaceted

It cannot be captured by a single indicator. It needs to be assessed across different domains, while also recognising relations between them.

Measurement requires meaning

To interpret scores, and especially changes over time, you need to know the frame within which people are scoring. This means that qualitative work must accompany quantitative assessment.

Context is critical to wellbeing

Concepts and methods, as well as data, are culturally embedded and may need to be adapted for local conditions.

Relationship is at the heart of wellbeing - it is not the property of an individual

Assessing wellbeing must therefore consider interactions amongst people and between them and the wider environment.

Politics determine how wellbeing is defined, whose wellbeing matters, and who is seen to be responsible

Assessment needs to guard against the holistic nature of wellbeing being used to mask inequalities and power relations.