



ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries

International conference to discuss wellbeing as an idea whose time has come

Leading academics and policy makers will debate this week whether wellbeing is an idea which can contribute to effective public policy making in both developed and developing countries.

Over 100 experts from around the world will attend an international conference on the issue from 28-30 June 2007 at the University of Bath.

The conference comes at a time when there is widespread discussion of government policy being targeted at improving their citizens' wellbeing rather than simply their economic situation.

In Britain, for example, Conservative leader David Cameron has come close to suggesting that the pursuit of wellbeing should provide an overall goal of policies, much as gross national income has done in the past.

The conference includes two special sessions to discuss the concept of well-being. One, 'Wellbeing as a Goal of Public Policy', on Friday 29 June will be chaired by David Walker, the Social Policy Editor of *The Guardian* and has as its speakers:

- Jill Rutter, Director of Strategy and Sustainable Development, Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), and Chair of Whitehall's Well-being Working Group
- Avner Offer, Chichele Professor of Economic History, University of Oxford and author of *The Challenge of Affluence: Self-control and Well-being in the USA and Britain since 1950*
- Felicia Huppert, Professor of Psychology, University of Cambridge. Co-author of *The Science of Well-Being*.

This session will explore whether government should steer clear of any "Ministry of Happiness" or whether the broader notion of wellbeing can be effectively defined, measured and tracked by government departments

The second round-table discussion, "Can wellbeing make a difference for global poverty reduction?", Saturday 30 June, will be chaired by Professor Lawrence Haddad, Director of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

Its speakers are:

- Santosh Mehrotra, of the Planning Commission, Government of India
- Selim Jahan, Senior Adviser, Strategies and Policies for Poverty Reduction, Poverty Group, United Nations Development Programme
- Luc Christiaensen, Senior Economist, Rural Development East Asia, World Bank

This session takes as its starting point the fact that policy-making in international development has for a long period concentrated on economic growth. Recently, this has been challenged by the idea of human development and the expansion of people's freedoms.

Many believe that we are on the edge of a wider goal of the expansion of people's wellbeing. The session looks at what this idea implies for policies on poverty, inequality and development, and in what ways it could improve the effectiveness of policy in the attack on global poverty.

Among the work being presented will be those on caste and well-being in India, ill-health and urban livelihoods in Kenya and Zambia, poverty in rural Bangladesh, social exclusion in Buenos Aires, and research on giving to development charities.

The conference is organised by the research group Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) at the University of Bath, and includes five plenary sessions, 15 seminars and a poster session. The WeD group is funded by Economic and Social Research Council. Bath & North East Somerset Council will host a reception for conference participants at the Roman Baths.

Ends

FURTHER INFORMATION: For further information and interviews, please contact Andrew McLaughlin in the University of Bath Press Office on +44 (0)1225 386 883, +44 (0)7966 341 357.

Also see www.welldev.org.uk