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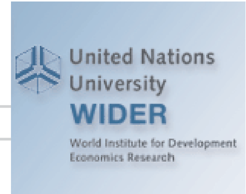

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Wellbeing, Livelihoods and Resources in Social Practice

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WeD

Introduction

> 'When in 1334 the Duchess of Tyrol, Margareta Maultasch, encircled the castle of Hochosterwitz in the province of Carinthia, she knew only too well that the fortress, situated on an incredibly steep rock rising high above the valley floor, was impregnable to direct attack and would yield only to a long siege. In due course, the situation of the defenders became critical: they were down to their last ox and had only two bags of barley corn left. Margareta's situation was becoming equally pressing, albeit for different reasons: her troops were beginning to be unruly, there seemed to be no end to the siege in sight, and she had similarly urgent military business, elsewhere. At this point the commandant of the castle decided on a desperate course of action which to his men must have seemed sheer folly: he had the last ox slaughtered, had its abdominal cavity filled with the remaining barley, and ordered the carcass thrown down the steep cliff onto a meadow in front of the enemy camp. Upon receiving this scornful message from above, the discouraged duchess abandoned the siege and moved on.'
>
> (Watzlawick et al 1994:xi)

This story gives an example of comic reversal in the definition and deployment of resources. Faced with a desperate situation of chronic food shortage and imminent military and political defeat, the commandant resorted to a reckless, apparently irrational act. Rather than consuming the last of their food resources in a final attempt to rally his people's flagging strength, he had the ox and barley hurled over the barricades in a last-ditch, winner-takes-all, symbolic act of resistance. The gamble paid off. The duchess, already wearied by her recalcitrant troops and the lure of other battles to fight, had had enough. The commandant's transformatory interpretation of the resources at his disposal had a transformatory outcome. The use of ox and barley as cultural symbol of shame, scorn and defiance had a material impact far beyond their 'innate' capacity. From simply enabling an insupportable situation to be continued a little longer, they became the means for liberation.

The story suggests a number of cautions for any attempt to advance a naïve, realist account of the resources that people have at their disposal. It points, first, to the way that the character of resources is given by the context in which they are perceived - and the potentially radical way in which they may be re-conceived and creatively deployed. Second it shows the importance of agency, that it is human subjects and their reading of their needs and what they wish to achieve in the situation they face, that defines how resources are understood - and indeed, whether things are perceived as resources at all. Third, it points to the importance of relationship, and the significance of social identities and power relations to both the capacity to use resources and

the outcomes of that use. Finally, it points to the indeterminacy of social practice. However great the creative inspiration of the commandant, the success of his action depended on the response of his opponents. Had they reacted otherwise, the fate of his community and the history of that part of the world would have been very different.

This paper considers the significance of these points to the use of 'resources' as a conceptual category in attempts to comprehend wellbeing. Against the dominant tendency to see resources as stable, fixed categories of assets, we argue that what constitutes a resource in any given context depends primarily on the *purposes* of the people involved. Resources offer means to an end. Only when one has a goal in mind can one identify what resources one has to secure it. For policy makers, therefore, understanding the ends, or purposes, that people wish to pursue must logically precede any identification of the resources they may use to achieve their aims. The social comprehends the economic.

We begin with a brief introduction to the concept of wellbeing and the livelihood frameworks which inform approaches to wellbeing in development studies. In the main body of the paper we pursue in more detail the points made above: the difficulty of fixing categories of resources; the place of subjectivity, agency and contingency in the definition and use of resources; and the importance of social relations. In the final section we return to the issues of wellbeing and livelihoods, considering the needs and purposes of planners, and how these shape the concepts and frameworks that are used. While drawing on various bodies of literature, our contribution derives from the work of the ESRC Research Group at the University of Bath on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD), of which we are both members.

Wellbeing and Livelihood Frameworks

Building on established critiques of narrowly economic approaches to poverty or development and restrictively medical understandings of health, wellbeing offers a rounded, positive focus which includes not only material resources and social relationships, but also the psychological states and subjective perceptions of people themselves. The stakes are high: at the core of 'wellbeing' lies the question of what it means to be human and the essential values and conditions for human flourishing. On the one hand it invokes the universal, and the notion of core dimensions of human wellbeing that are common across time and space (eg Doyal and Gough 1991, Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2000, Ryan and Deci 2001, Alkire 2002). On the other hand it stresses the local, and the particularities of culture and individual experience. In the policy context its key promise is to provide a more holistic, accurate profile of what is really important to people, challenging the default biases of the professionals and enabling them to shape their programmes in more effective ways.

To deliver on this promise, the concept of wellbeing needs to be brought down to earth. As post-colonial scholarship attests, frameworks that aspire to be 'universal' nevertheless remain caught within a particular set of cultural co-ordinates (eg Mehta 1997, Parekh 1995). While the writers on wellbeing noted above differ considerably from one another, they nonetheless exhibit a certain family resemblance. They are all imbued with Enlightenment assumptions of individualism and the primacy of values such as 'autonomy' or 'freedom', which in other intellectual and policy arenas have been the subject of fierce debate (eg Freeman 1996; Evans ed. 1998; Schech and Haggis 2000). In addition, they share a tendency to generalise, abstracting from the particular to provide a universal framework for understanding wellbeing. For effective policy-making, however, what is required is not a template through which diverse realities can

be 'read' in standardised terms. Rather, the need is for a model which is sufficiently open and dynamic that it can be used in a variety of contexts in order to expose the specificity of each. In place of an abstract, universalised notion derived externally, research needs to build up a dynamic picture of what wellbeing means in practice for particular people faced with particular challenges, and the politics involved in their struggles to achieve it.

Within Development Studies, livelihood frameworks seek to offer just such a bottom up perspective. Like wellbeing, they reflect reaction against a narrow emphasis on one-off, income measures of economic status, and seek to give a more holistic, people-centred approach. They recognise that household livelihoods are often diverse, combining various activities of various members, with multiple priorities, strategies, influences, and therefore outcomes. They seek to overcome the compartmentalisation of people's lives according to the arbitrary 'sectoral' divisions of government departments and development agencies, into urban/rural, formal/informal, education/health/industry/agriculture. They also aim to move beyond single 'snap-shot' views of poverty, recognising seasonality changes with the turning year, as well as longer term shifts over time. Through the concepts of 'vulnerability', (Chambers 1989) 'sensitivity' and 'resilience' (Bayliss-Smith 1991) they also seek to capture on the one hand the hazards that households face and the shocks that these engender, and on the other the households' capacities to respond to these. Echoing the move towards 'wellbeing' as focus, the overall inspiration of livelihoods approaches is to move away from negative, outsider categories which dissect people's lives according to areas of professional specialisation. Instead, they aim to offer a positive, actor-oriented focus which emphasises 'strengths' rather than 'needs', and draws on people's own perspectives through participatory methods of research. In aspiration at least, such approaches seek rather than abstracting particulars from their context, to show how the system works in context: how the whole gives character to the parts through the inter-relation of social and economic, human and environmental, people's action and the policy and political context.

The notion of resources, or 'capital', plays a key role in the ways that livelihoods approaches conceptualise the different facets of people's lives. In this they constitute a country cousin to the massive body of work debating the notion of 'social capital' - norms, values and relationships - and the significance of this to development and economic growth (eg Putnam 1993, Fine 2001, Molyneux 2002 etc).[1] The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework advanced by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and researchers at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, thus categorises the types of resource at people's disposal into natural, social, physical, financial, and human 'capital'. Diagrammatically, this allows household livelihoods to be represented as a pentagon whose points rest on each of these different forms of capital. The larger the area that the pentagon occupies, the stronger and more resilient the livelihood it represents (www.livelihoods.org). Caroline Moser's Asset Vulnerability Framework differs slightly from this in identifying five categories of assets derived through research within urban contexts (Moser 1998). These are: labour; human capital; productive assets, including most importantly housing; household relations - the composition and structure of households and cohesion of relations within them; and social capital - co-operation and cohesion within the community.[2] The Resource Profiles Framework, developed at the University of Bath, is distinctive in including culture as one of the resource types, alongwith the more conventional categorisation into material, human, social and environmental. This points to the significance of status and symbolic value in the social interactions which constitute livelihoods. To be seen as 'poor but pious', for example, may enable people to advance claims beyond those justified by their material position or social relationships alone (McGregor 1998).

From Types of Resource to Dimensions of Resources

Having broken the view that 'resources' or 'capital' comprise only income and productive assets, the question arises as to how much work such a framework can do. Can it do more than re-describe, in rather abstract and 'universalised' terms, a basket of assets which poor households deploy? Can it deliver on the promise of a people-centred, integrated and locally derived perspective? How far does it, if at all, add to understanding of the practical problems poor people face and the processes by which poverty and inequality are produced, reproduced and potentially transformed? Does it genuinely figure in the social, or simply re-cast the social in economic terms? Does it, critically, help to identify the *differences* between situations, rather than over-writing the local with a universal model? The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework seeks to answer such questions by setting the 'asset pentagon' within a broader diagram showing the additional factors of 'vulnerability context' and 'structures and processes' that impact on livelihoods and flows of influence between them.[3] This has the advantage of relieving the 'asset pentagon' of much work. Variability apparently derives from these other factors, which will affect the specific content of a particular asset bundle, but leave the basic model untouched. Its disadvantage, of course, is that it introduces a whole further set of variables which again need more investigation, both in terms of their definition and in their relationship to one another and to the whole. This paper, in line with the WeD project more broadly, takes a different approach. Rather than building more *around* the notion of types of resource, it seeks to investigate further the notion of resources itself, and in particular to explore the social processes through which they are constituted and deployed.

An immediate practical issue in operationalising these approaches, concerns the allocation of goods between the various resource categories. As with any framework, in research practice it can be difficult to know what goes where. Take education. In all of the livelihoods frameworks this appears as a type of human resource, as providing skills or aptitudes that add value, basically, to the household stocks of labour. In Bourdieu's (1984) work on the makings of elites and social distinctions, however, education appears primarily as a cultural resource. It is at once a highly transactable sign of status (symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's terms), and the means through which values are inculcated and tastes are refined, which in turn drives the reproduction of social and cultural difference. Should education be classified as a human resource, or a cultural resource? The obvious answer, is that it may function as both.

How can a livelihoods framework accommodate this? Must education appear in two places, with the associated risk of double counting? Or do we need a more sophisticated understanding of the relations between different types of resource? As Winnett (2004) points out, the danger is that livelihoods frameworks produce a kind of inventory of resources, with no clear sense of the relations between them. Can one *count* 'social' resources in the same way as one can sum material assets? Does 'more social' effectively compensate for 'less material', or how can the relative trade-offs between these be calculated? Are all kinds of resources substitutable for all others? How can one move beyond the picture of variegated, but nonetheless rather static portfolios of household assets?

In the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, 'culture' appears along with 'shocks and 'trends' as part of the 'vulnerability context.' Diana Carney (1998:11) sets out the 'key issue' that this raises as follows:

> 'What effect, if any, does culture have on the way people manage their assets and the livelihood choices they make? '

This question conveys the critical need for thinking more deeply about resources. It casts culture as residual, exterior, implying a profoundly materialist understanding of the ways that people conduct their lives. This reflects a broader poverty in the understanding of culture within development circles - it often appears, as indeed in that book, almost exclusively in relation to gender issues, with 'religion' now perhaps more frequently added in. This renders 'culture' as not only externally located, outside of the nitty gritty of everyday (economic) life, but also localised, significant only in particular, marked, areas of society. As noted above, the Resource Profiles Approach gives more space to culture than the other livelihoods frameworks, by identifying a specific category of cultural resources. The difficulty is that this can rigidify rather than overcome the localisation of culture, implying that other 'material' or 'human' or 'natural' assets are somehow a-cultural. Again the danger is that culture becomes a residual category, containing only those 'pure' markers of status - such as honorific titles - that cannot be fitted anywhere else. On deeper reflection, however, it is clear that all of social life is constituted through culture. To be human is to speak a particular language, wear a particular kind of clothes, eat a certain kind of food, use a particular set of tools, marry according to certain rules, value some kinds of goods over others. This is not to deny the existence of some biological universals - the needs that human organisms have to survive - but to recognise that nowhere do we have access to these outside of the mediation of culture. More recent reflection on the RPA under the WeD programme thus recognises that there is a duality to culture: it forms at once a specific form of resource and the context through which all resources are constituted (McGregor and Kebede 2002).

This opens up a very different way of approaching the classification of resources and the relations between them. This involves two major departures from the naïve realist account of resources and resource types that underpins the livelihoods approaches. First, as noted above, we need to de-stabilise these reified categories. The common usage of the terms 'capital' or 'resource' conjure specific, if sometimes intangible, identifiable goods whose character is given and stable. The siege of Hochosterwitz, however, shows that the features that goods assume differ markedly by context and use. It is vital, therefore, to open the space to differentiate between (tangible and intangible) *goods* that can be observed objectively to exist, and the transformation of such goods into *resources* (or *capital*) when they are perceived by people as offering the means to meet a particular end. Let us return to the example of education. In both the wellbeing and development literature, this is typically seen as a fundamental pre-requisite for a good life. In fact however, many communities have existed quite successfully without anyone knowing how to read or write. Literacy is certainly an objectively identifiable good (though the means for assessing it obviously vary) but it becomes a *resource* only when people have the need to read. This is not only a semantic point, it also has practical consequences. As numerous adult education programmes have found to their cost, enthusiasm falls and skills quickly fade where there is no immediate need to put classroom learning into practice. The category of 'resources' is thus ultimately a subjective one. Goods certainly objectively exist, but they become a *resource* only when they are perceived by a subject as offering the means to achieve a desired end.

The second move is to question the relations between the different categories of resource. Using a single term for very different goods seems to suggest that these are similar kinds of things which may be added or subtracted, or are fungible one to another. To some extent this seems to be true: strong social networks add value to material endowments; debased cultural status is likely to inhibit access to education or good jobs. But can you 'cash in' a family relationship in the same way as you can raise capital on a piece of land? Is it, beyond this, legitimate to identify particular goods as constituting always and exclusively a particular type of resource?

Land, for example, is classified in all the livelihoods frameworks as a material, physical, or 'natural' endowment. However, land only becomes *a livelihood resource* when transformed through the *human* activity of labour, the *social* contracts of ownership or use-rights, and the *cultural* meanings of value and status. Similarly *cultural* values - such as beauty, or piety - are not free-floating in the ether, but always embedded - or embodied - materially.

The value of this approach is very evident when it comes to the category of social resources. In an unreconstructed livelihood approach, a social relationship - for example, a kinship tie - appears as a chunk, as it were, of social capital. The 'social capital' of a household is then the sum of all the relationships in which the household is engaged. As quantitatively inclined economists have found, this leads into considerable technical difficulties of how to assign values to relationships of differential intensity or utility. But proceeding in this way may not only be technically difficult but also philosophically mistaken. It is good that economics and the dominant development actors now recognise that relatedness and social connections are critical to people's psychological welfare, social status and economic potential. The challenge is to go beyond seeing this as representing one area of life, set apart from others. 'Social capital' (or social resources) is a metaphor, which draws our attention to the importance of social relationship, not a 'real thing' which exists somehow 'out there'. And relationships are not inert, fixed assets, but rather exist as they are *lived.* Any negotiation, any aspect of the pursuit of livelihoods or wellbeing will necessarily have a social side. Issues such as the politics of who is entitled to what, the negotiation of values, the terms of access to key goods, and the significance of interpersonal and social group dynamics in structuring these, are constantly present. Rather than seeing specific goods as constituting always a particular type of resource, therefore, we may more usefully say that all goods have the potential for use as material, social (or political) and symbolic resources. As in the opening story, this brings to the definition of resources a certain indeterminacy: the 'obvious' way of looking at resources (the ox and grain as food) is not the only way, nor necessarily the most useful in a given context. As noted above in the case of education, whether a particular item constitutes a resource in the first place, and then whether it is performing a primarily symbolic, or social, or material function will differ according to the setting, and these functions may in practice be intertwined. As Bourdieu (1998/2001:53) rather chillingly notes:

> 'the most brutal relations of force are always simultaneously symbolic relations.'

Resources: Subjectivity, Agency and Contingency

Having begun this paper saying that discussions of wellbeing needed to be brought down to earth, we have proceeded largely with highly abstract and generalised discussion! In partial recompense, in this section we go micro, re-locating to the dingy kitchen of a couple of Caribbean share-croppers, courtesy of Paule Marshall's novel, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People.* We enter as Harriet, the elite, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant wife of a North American Jewish anthropologist, visits a neighbouring house and finds the children alone and hungry. The headline issue is one beloved of development studies: food security. Although the passage is a little long, we relate it here as a powerful cameo of the use of resources in social practice. Where livelihoods approaches have been criticised for failing to offer an adequate account of power and social identities, this episode clearly demonstrates the interplay of different perspectives and priorities amongst differently placed actors.[4] It also offers an opportunity to reflect further on our earlier claims regarding the importance of subjectivity in determining the

character of resources, and to consider how issues of social structure and human agency articulate with this.

> 'Harriet had gone that late afternoon to the hopelessly overcrowded house where Stinger and Gwen lived with their innumerable children…. She arrived to find that Gwen had not yet returned from the fields although it was past five, and the children, left alone in the house all day, had had nothing to eat since the midmorning meal at eleven. She could barely make out their individual faces in the interior dimness of the two tiny cluttered rooms…. But she could sense their hunger, almost see it….
>
> The oldest child, a girl, had been left in charge, and Harriet called her over….
> 'Isn't there anything at all to eat, Brenda?' she said. She could not bring herself to look at her.
> The child also kept her gaze averted. 'No, please,' she said.
> 'Are you sure? Isn't there perhaps something left over from this morning?'
> 'No, please. We've eaten the last.'
>
> But there was nothing in Harriet that could comprehend such a fact, and on sudden impulse she turned from Brenda and made her way out to the kitchen,… remaining the longest time gazing with a kind of numb fixity at the soot-covered pot in which the day's rice had been cooked. It had been scraped clean. Even the burnt part at the bottom had been eaten….
>
> And then she saw them: a half-dozen brown-speckled eggs in a cracked bowl inside the otherwise empty larder. Never thinking to ask herself why they had been left there unused, she strode over to the larder… and took out the bowl….
>
> 'Brenda.'…
> 'Yes, Miss Harriet?'
> 'Is there a frying pan?'
> She didn't turn to look at Brenda as she spoke, or at the other children who, curious and intrigued, had slipped silently up behind their sister, filling the doorway.
> 'Yes, please.' Brenda said.
> 'Would you bring it for me, please.'
> The child held back a moment, her troubled eyes on the eggs, wanting to say something but not bold enough; and then brought her the heavy iron skillet…..
>
> Her most severe test came during the actual cooking, when she had to struggle with nausea at the sight of the littered, food-stained hearth, the grease-encrusted pan, and the suspiciously rancid smell of the butter as she heated it…. But finally, there lay the finished omelette. Harriet was inordinately proud of it. There was something of a miracle about it almost; the fishes and loaves. Above all, she felt an immense relief. She had done her part, she told herself, gazing down at it steaming gently on the plate, to quiet that ravenous presence charging up and down the two rooms…..

[Harriet leaves Brenda with instructions to share out the omelette between them, and makes her way home. When her husband comes in, however, he is furious at what she has done.]

> 'Could you please tell me just what the hell you thought you were doing over at Stinger's today?'

> For a moment she couldn't imagine he was speaking to her. 'What did I think I was doing?' Her voice, her frown, expressed her bewilderment….
>
> In face of her distress he turned aside, ashamed of his anger. 'Oh, Christ, Hatt, I know you meant well,' he said. 'But if only you had thought to ask somebody first.' On his way home he had stopped off at Stinger's, only to find Gwen quarrelling and the child Brenda in tears. Gwen, it seemed, had a longstanding agreement with the postmaster to sell him all of her eggs. This money was then used toward purchasing the family's weekly supply of staples. It was a very carefully worked out arrangement of which Gwen was proud.
>
> 'Gwen's not mad at you for having cooked the eggs,' he said. 'She understands why you did it, but she blames poor Brenda for not speaking up and telling you who they were for. I'm afraid she gave her quite a thrashing.'
> 'Oh, no!' she cried, and her mind wheeling back she saw Brenda standing bowed and silent amid her sisters and brothers in the doorway.
> 'Well, it'll all blow over, I guess.' he said. … 'If only you would stop and ask, Harriet, before taking things into your own hands! I am sure it never even occurred to you to find out if the eggs hadn't been left there for a reason. I don't know,' he said, slowly shaking his head, 'there's this thing in you which makes you want to take over and manage everything and everybody on your own terms…'
> 'But they were hungry!' Her voice was sharp and emphatic; she had not permitted herself to hear what he had just said. 'Besides, it doesn't make any sense to sell perfectly good, nourishing eggs to buy that awful rice they all eat.'
> 'It might not make sense to you,' he said….. 'but it obviously does to Gwen. She's probably discovered she can feed more mouths doing it her way. I don't know. What I do know is that you can't go around ordering other people's lives and trying to make them change long-standing habits overnight…Everybody doesn't live by your standards. Your values aren't necessarily the world's. Why, the kids didn't even eat the goddamn omelette.'
>
> 'They didn't eat it?' And she was perhaps more stunned by this than anything else he had said….. 'Perfectly good, nourishing eggs…. I don't understand….'
>
> (Marshall 1969/84:175-181, abridged)

As noted above, resources are what people can use to meet their needs and purposes. Logically, therefore, a need precedes the identification of a resource to meet it. But the story above gives a further twist to this. Simply having a need is not enough. The children's hunger is not in doubt. But for them, the eggs were not a resource they could use to meet that need. Why not, when they were, as Harriet appreciates, perfectly good, nourishing food? Because, in that household's livelihood strategy, the eggs were for sale, not for consumption. This is worth underlining. For those children, the eggs were not food - and even when Harriet had cooked the omelette, they did not become so. Probably the children did not even think of eating the eggs - maybe they were not part of their diet, or maybe they had simply internalised their mother's absolute rights over their disposal. What was critical was not which of the conventional asset categories they fitted into - no-one doubts that they were material - but rather the *purpose* to which they had been assigned, and the power relations which circumscribed their use.

Admitting that the identification of a resource is ultimately subjective, is not however to suggest that it is somehow random or indiscriminate. Harriet making the omelette was a (rather catastrophic) assertion of agency, to be sure, but it was an agency both enabled and constrained by structure. At base, this structure is configured by international relations, the imperialism of US interests over the Caribbean. At its simplest, this gives the context for Harriet's presence on the island. At a deeper level, it also shapes her entire understanding of the place and her relationships within it as well as the island people's responses to her. Just as Said (1985) argues with respect to nineteenth century European writers on the Orient, the patterns of international dominance are so strong that *no* interaction across these lines can be innocent of it. The beauty of this passage, however, is that it illustrates graphically how such structures operate not only at the 'public' or macro level, but also within the most intimate, inter and intra personal relations. The macro political structures intertwine with the 'everyday' dominance of adult over child. The eggs did not belong to Harriet, were not in any sense her resource to dispose of, and yet because of who she was she assumed the rights to use them. The children were silenced by fear, the power of Harriet's person even greater than their fear of their mother's reaction. Gwen's anger is vented not against Harriet, the high status perpetrator, but against Brenda, the child who had been pressed into service as unwilling accomplice. Power is not something inert, 'out there', but expressed graphically through speech and silence, action and passivity, the meeting and avoidance of eyes.

These links between macro patterns and micro interaction and the ways that structure and agency together inform subjectivity, are powerfully conceptualised by Bourdieu in his notion of 'habitus'. This is particularly apposite for a focus on wellbeing because it offers an unusually holistic view of human experience, connecting the bodily to the social, and the social to the psychological. Bourdieu describes 'habitus' variously as a 'system of dispositions', propensities, or ways of being in the world; the 'feel for the game' which is so deeply embedded within one that it seems like second nature (Bourdieu 1977; 1990). Its role is to generate regular practices, perceptions and attitudes, that are not governed by rule or conscious calculation. The habitus is developed through childhood and experience and is shaped by the social structures in which these take place. Far from a set template which always marks out a predetermined pattern, the habitus is a principle for the 'improvisations' that for Bourdieu are the stuff of social life. Critically, however, inscribed within it is awareness of one's own social location and hence the different locations of others and how these are placed in relation to one's own. In linking structure and agency, it also offers a critical orientation towards *social practice*. Social (and economic) life is seen as something done, achieved through time in risky interaction with others, never settled or utterly predictable, but requiring new and creative responses as established attitudes and propensities confront the demands of a new context or 'field'.

Finally, however, Harriet's intervention offers a paradox to this picture of power and the agency related to it. As bell hooks (1983) argues, there is a power that belongs to the margins and limitations for those who live at the centre and assume that the centre is the whole world. For the children, hunger could be borne for the present. It was probably not unusual for them and they understood the domestic economy was one in which they had to endure. For Harriet, on the other hand, the children's hunger was literally unbearable: she could not look at them. Her agency was both an expression of power and of weakness: it was predicated on her ignorance of the ways Gwen made ends meet and her refusal or inability to quieten the clamour within herself and see the world through the children's eyes. Above all, however, it came out of her own desperate need to act, to resolve things, to find herself valid through their reception of her gifts. The needs that Harriet was responding to were not so much the children's, but her own. The outcome was that Harriet made things worse. Materially, of course, in wasting the assets

Gwen had carefully set aside for sale. But beyond this, the incident is shot through with symbolism. Harriet's actions at once betrayed her lack of faith in Gwen's capacity to care for her family, and undermined the strategies Gwen had set in place. Gwen's fury at Brenda was not only an expression of her grief at the material loss she had suffered. It was also borne of humiliation, that her struggles to feed her family should be so shamelessly exposed, and anger, that the settlement that she had made in a difficult situation should be so thoughtlessly overturned.

Resources, Relations and The Needs of Planners

The value of broadening definitions of 'capital' or 'resources' from the material or financial to include the social or cultural is not self-evident: it becomes meaningful in the context of a policy discourse which privileges economic understandings of what is important. When the framing shifts so the meaning changes. A woman feeding her children probably does not consider what she is doing as the reproduction of human resources. For an economic analysis to express it in this way is on the one hand to capture something critical about what is going on, which challenges more conventional views of 'productive' (read valued) activity. This is undoubtedly useful, reflecting as it does feminist arguments regarding the essential inter-relationship of 'productive' and 'reproductive' labour, and hence the importance of women's work, much of which might otherwise be discounted. On the other hand, to see what is happening *simply* in these terms is to commit what Spivak (1988:271) has called in another context 'epistemic violence.' It distorts what is taking place, posing it in quasi market, calculative terms, and suppresses what it means for the woman and children themselves. Most importantly, perhaps, it obscures the primacy of identity and relationship (motherhood, family, belonging) which is the 'home' context which makes the action meaningful. The significance of this may perhaps be made clearer by reference to the work of John Finnis and his colleagues. They suggest that "basic human values" are revealed by "the reasons for acting which need no further reason" (Grisez, Boyle and Finnis, 1987:103 in Alkire 2002:185). In line with this, one might imagine that if the woman were asked why she was feeding the children, her answers would refer to their needs (hunger) and the fact that they were *her* children. Although it does not come through as clearly as it might in Finnis's categories of basic reasons for action[5], the fact of belonging to others and having others who belong to you is in fact a primary motivation for action, and offers reasons for action which need no further justification. Critically, of course, attending to the relations between people rather than the 'resources' which are exchanged, also suggests the importance of the terms on which exchanges take place.

Despite their differences from one another, all of the livelihood frameworks have a common characteristic. They are methods to help *outsiders* produce a ‘livelihoods map’ of a community - insiders find their way around differently. On the face of it they appear less like a map than a photograph, presenting profoundly realist claims about ‘people's perspectives’ and the resources available. In fact, however, like maps, they use a set of common symbols (material/human/social) and conventions (capital/resources) to represent the contexts they observe. As the contours on a map chart the underlying topography, bringing out what is hidden to the naked eye, so these frameworks seek to make explicit the structural patterns of livelihoods and vulnerability. Inevitably this involves a selection of data, choosing to highlight some things and omit others, and so ‘flattens’ the reality, reducing both its complexity and, critically, the animation within it. The danger with these frameworks is that they provide not simply a means of mapping, but are already themselves partially constituted as maps. Instead of explicating and having the flexibility to adjust to a particular national or regional context, they

may serve to over-write it, as they re-present people's distinct realities in the framework's terms. At worst, they may even have a desired route already marked out on them! The point of a map is that it is tied to, and derives from, the analysis of a particular place. It is by their capacity to highlight the *specificities* of the contexts that they describe and to show the *differences* between them that the quality of these frameworks must be judged.

If what is said above is correct, and resources are identified by subjects in relation to particular purposes, how can it be that the apparently universal characterisation of resources has held sway for so long? We believe there are two parts to the answer of this question, both of which relate to the structural formation of development discourse and practice. The first is the dominance of economics over development thinking. As critics from Kark Marx to Karl Polanyi to Pierre Bourdieu have pointed out, the economic thinking that dominates current intellectual approaches is one that obscures its own particularity, and effectively silences other voices. What is critical for the argument in this paper, is that the economics of capitalism mystifies the primacy of social relations between people and re-presents them as relations between people and things, or even as between objects themselves. This is a major argument that cannot be dealt with here, but we believe is a critical issue for future discussions.

If this domination of a particular form of economics offers the structural aspect of the answer, the second part concerns the agency dimension. We believe that there are, in fact, subjects of the livelihoods analyses, subjects whose interests and purposes define which goods are featured as resources and how these are classified. Despite the claims to the contrary, these subjects are not the local people whose lives the frameworks claim to describe. Rather, the subjects are hidden. They are the planners and policy makers themselves, who, as Bernard Schaffer pointed out several decades ago 'have their needs too' (Schaffer 1985). Not only have they needs, but also they have quite a clear idea of their purposes ('alleviating poverty' or 'sustainable development') and have so internalised their own ideology that, rather like Harriet, they can mistake their own priorities for the perspectives of the people themselves. This is part of what Chatterjee (1993:207) describes as the 'necessary self-deception' on which planning is predicated. To carry out their work, the planners must constitute their objects as things external to themselves, about which they may gather information. And yet this leaves 'beyond' an 'underestimated residue' in which the planners are themselves the object of the agency and politics of those within the state and civil society.

> 'This residue, as the irreducible, negative, and ever-present "beyond" of planning, is what we may call, in its most general sense, politics.' (208).

If the promise of 'wellbeing' to offer a genuinely new, more holistic and more people-centred approach is to be fulfilled, there is a vital need for much more critical, sociologically and politically engaged thinking. This must go beyond the rhetoric of 'it all depends on the context' so beloved of social development specialists, which elides their own proto-disciplinary perspectives with those of 'the people', and leaves all powerful explanatory models in the hands of the economists. The point is not to deny the importance of the economic, but to broaden understanding of what that may comprise, and to situate it securely within the social, cultural and political. Instead of being shy of theory, it is vitally important that social analysts of development draw on the wealth of critical thinking that exists in the disciplines they represent. The test of such an approach will be that it adds explanatory value to simple observation, and genuinely explicates the particular, rather than simply re-describing it in alienated terms. This paper makes some suggestions of how to move forward. This is to approach livelihoods and the attempts to secure wellbeing as a form of social practice. To recognise that any interactions that

take place will be fundamentally constructed through social and cultural structures and power relations. To recognise that our own positions as planners or analysts are not 'unmarked' or innocent, but utterly implicated in these patterns of power. To let go of the conceit of agency which is predicated on structures of global injustice, admit the primacy of people's own priorities and purposes, and seek ways of listening better to these, rather than assuming we already know what they are or should be. And to recognise the creativity and indeterminacy of social practice, and expect to be surprised.

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[1] It would be instructive to consider this literature in some depth here, however its volume makes it impossible to do so.

[2] Although it does not include this within the five asset categories, the framework also recognises the importance of social and economic infrastructure and the mix of public and private provision of this, to people's welfare positions.

[3] The 'vulnerability context' comprises: 'trends' -in natural resource stocks, population, technology, politics and economics; 'shocks' - climate or conflict; and 'culture'. The 'structures' comprise levels of government and private sector, and 'processes', laws, policies, incentives and institutions (Carney et al. 1998).

[4] We have abridged the original text for the sake of brevity.

[5] These are: life itself; knowledge and aesthetic experience; excellence in work and play; friendship; self-integration; self-expression, or practical reasonableness; religion.