

**WeD at DSA: Researching Well-being**  
***ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries***  
***University of Bath***

Two session panel, in association with a third on Human Development.

**Session 1. Researching Well-being: Objective and Subjective**

Chair (tbc): Cecile Jackson, University of East Anglia

**The Social and Cultural Construction of Wellbeing in Developing Countries**

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This paper provides a description of the conceptual framework which is being developed by the ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries. This framework takes a social constructivist perspective on the processes which produce patterns of well-being and ill-being in developing countries. In exploring this the research is particularly concerned to explain the persistence of poverty, often in the face of substantial development expenditures and/or economic growth. The study posits that inequality across the material and non-material dimensions of the resources which people are able to bring to their struggles for well-being, plays an important role in the persistence of poverty.

**Quality of Life and Human Wellbeing: Bridging Objective and Subjective Approaches**

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It has been common to distinguish objective and subjective approaches to quality of life. The first part of this paper surveys these two perspectives. The former draws on Sen and Nussbaum's work on capabilities and the Doyal-Gough theory of human need. The latter includes Deci and Ryan's work on eudaimonic and hedonic components of well-being, Kahnemann on 'objective happiness', research into the health quality of life and other instruments. The second part of the paper then addresses emerging areas of overlap and complementarity between the two. On the one hand, though the former is often assumed to be universal and the latter 'local', the introduction of universal subjective features and of local satisfiers for universal needs begins

to bridge this gap. On the other hand, autonomy and competence needs are enhanced by subjective life-satisfaction, and at the same time contribute to subjective well-being. Finally, the paper discusses some of the implications of this overlap between the objective and the subjective: for theory, social research and social development policy. This paper draws on recent work in the interdisciplinary ESRC-financed Wellbeing and Development Research Group at Bath.

## **'Exploring the relationship between wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, and "subjective" quality of life'**

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The paper is in two sections, which address the theory and methodology of quality of life (QoL) measurement. It examines the relationship between "subjective" quality of life, subjective wellbeing (SWB), and wellbeing and relates this to the WeD project.

In the first section, it argues that while QoL and SWB are often treated as interchangeable, QoL actually has more in common with wellbeing. This is apparent when we compare Clark's definition of wellbeing as "the constituent elements of a good form of human life - whatever that may be" [2002] with the WHOQOL group's definition of QoL as an "individual's perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" [1996]. Both concepts are multidimensional, context specific, and incorporate things people have reason to value, as well as their wants and needs. The paper suggests that the elision of subjective QoL and SWB has occurred because of similarities in their language of measurement (for example, items phrased in terms of satisfaction) and because both are perceived as the domain of psychologists. In the second section, the paper asks whether an extended WHOQOL measure (the "DevQoL") can provide a more expansive and actor-oriented conception of QoL. It then investigates the methodological issues raised by the process of extension and grounding in the field sites of the collaborating countries.

## **Session 2. Researching Well-being: Culture, Structure and Inequality**

**Chair (tbc): Mark McGillivray, WIDER**

### **Studying the Dynamics of Inequality, Poverty and Subjective Being: Getting to Grips with 'Structure'.**

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Using ideas generated in the 'critical realist' tradition I propose that the study of the production, reproduction and reduction of inequality, wellbeing and suffering can be considerably advanced by the use of an ontology that sees all aspects of the world as structured in space and time. The structures which constitute 'objects' (people, all other material animate and inanimate 'things', and social relations of all kinds) give them 'causal powers' (capacities to behave in particular ways) and 'passive powers' (specific susceptibilities to certain kinds of change). In this paper I begin by exploring some of the advantages for development-related research of viewing (1) people, and (2) the small and big social structures they socio-culturally construct, as structured 'objects' occupying space, and moving and changing through historical time, as a result of interactions with other people/other social structures. This ontology can be used to underpin the development of a range of methodologies for studying the dynamics of inequality, poverty and subjective valuations at individual, 'household', other local, country and global levels. I conclude by describing one such methodology for comparative study of local structures which has just been launched in twenty rural sites as part of the WeD programme of research in Ethiopia.

### **Beyond the 'Of Course' of Culture: Approaches to Health and Healing in Bangladesh**

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This paper considers the place of 'culture' in social analysis. It begins by questioning the default incorporation (the 'of course') of culture as commonly used in development studies, as a sign of liberalism, of Otherness, or a marker within modernisation approaches. It then considers the complexity of exploring culture, taking as case example the wide range in forms of healing sought by one rural Bangladeshi family in the course of a few days, which defies any simple compartmentalisation into 'modern' or 'traditional' understandings of health. The paper considers similarities and contrasts between the different modes of seeking healing and the importance of

uncertainty and negotiation within and between each of them. It then considers how this examination of 'cultural practice' is brought together with questions of social structure and political economy. The paper concludes by suggesting that the place of culture may not be as a given input or resource somehow external to 'society', but as an outcome constituted through the interstices of political economy and social action.

## **Administrative Allocation, Lease Markets and Inequality in Land in Rural Ethiopia: 1995-97**

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The evolution of the land tenure system in Ethiopia towards private holdings was accelerating during the second half of the twentieth century before it was abruptly stopped by the reform of 1975. Peasant associations were set-up to allocate and distribute land according to family size. In spite of this egalitarian objective, empirical results indicate significant regional as well as intra-regional inequalities in per capita land distribution two decades after the land reform. The distribution of land is affected by socio-economic characteristics of households other than family size. Inequality in distribution of land is examined by using methods developed in the income distribution literature.

The land reform was an important economic as well as political-administrative landmark in rural Ethiopia. Economically its most important immediate impact was abolishing the obligations of tenants to landlords and giving land to landless people. In terms of the inequality in the distribution of land much less than the usually assumed is achieved.