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## WeD – Communicating Between Disciplines

*Allister McGregor*

The WeD research programme brings together academics from a range of different social science disciplines with a common interest in the relationships between poverty, inequality and the quality of life in developing countries. Its purpose is to develop a coherent conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in specific developing societies.

The programme has now been operational for almost a year and is moving into a period of intensive preparation for detailed fieldwork in the four study countries, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. A major feature of the initial months of the project was a programme of reading across normal disciplinary boundaries – from psychology, to economics, to social anthropology, with many stops between. This has stimulated lively debates but also prompted thinking beyond normal disciplinary confines. This ability to draw on ideas from debates in other spheres is one of the distinctive and exciting challenges of the WeD programme.

The contribution here by Ian Gough from social policy, offers an insight into one of the ways in which this cross-disciplinary communication is working. Bereket Kebede's summary of a recent World Development article also contributes to our current understanding of the relationship between poverty and inequality in one of our four countries.



*Allister McGregor is Director of WeD and member of the Department of Economics and International Development, University of Bath.*

## Rethinking Human Needs and Well-being

*Ian Gough*

What is human well-being? We have moved a long way in the past two decades from the old economists' reliance on income per head or subjective utility as its measure. A third space has opened up, going by different names such as human capabilities, basic needs and valued functionings. The common emphasis is on the quality of human lives and on what all humans share in common. This movement is identified with the economics Nobel prize-winner Amartya Sen, but others have contributed from different disciplines such as the philosopher and classicist Martha Nussbaum

and psychologists such as Richard Ryan.

In 1991 Len Doyal and I contributed to this movement with A Theory of Human Need (THN). We began with a sharp distinction between the wants or preferences of individuals and their common needs. The latter refer at a minimum to the 'universalisable' preconditions for avoiding harm, and more expansively to the preconditions for critical participation in one's form of life. We identified two basic needs – health and autonomy, the capacity for practical reason and action. We then claimed that scientific agreement, though always shifting and contested, enabled further intermediate needs to be identified, both material ones

like food, water and shelter, and mental ones, like security in childhood and primary social relationships.

Our distinct contribution can be interpreted as a 'third way' between the approaches of Sen and Nussbaum. Sen refuses to identify a list of basic capabilities, worried that this encroaches too far on the rights and abilities of individuals or groups to identify their own priorities. Nussbaum is willing to challenge these when they conflict with the well-being of, for example, girls and women, by counter posing a 'thick vague' list of central human functional capabilities which people can over time agree on. Our approach is both 'thin and thick': identifying just two universal pre-conditions for human action but filling this out by appealing to our knowledge of what contributes to health and individual autonomy. How well does this approach fare today?

THN has been criticized on three main grounds.

First, it is accused of individualism: the term 'autonomy' conjures up for some a world of selfish and/or heroic ambition and masculine independence. This is not true – we see autonomy as a general facet of the agency exhibited by all humans as part of their interdependence. Nevertheless, more attention needs to be paid to 'asymmetric dependence' both across the lifecycle and between groups: we all need care for substantial chunks of our lives, and thus caring is a critical and inevitably asymmetric feature of human lives and livelihoods.

Second, in drawing such a hard and fast line between objective and subjective states it can be accused of ignoring their interdependence. Emotions are at the same time forms of self-appraisal. Subjective or hedonic well-being fosters more objective or 'eudaimonic' well-being, and vice versa, as psychological research shows. A thoroughgoing objectivism cannot be sustained when studying well-being.

Third, we are accused of being paternalist. Does it not imply that we, or Western philosophy, or experts, know best? In fact, the theory clearly recognises the role of wide participation and experiential knowledge in understanding needs and need satisfiers. Yet the absence in THN of Sen's useful distinction between functionings and capabilities weakens this democratic and consensual intent. Needs are close in character to functionings, such as having good nutrition, whereas capabilities refer to an individual's choice of functionings – the ability to afford and acquire good nutrition. For adults (though not necessarily for children) the policy target should be to expand the latter – if they choose then to fast or eat junk food that is their right. This however, still leaves the problem of adaptive preferences – in particular, the way that poor people constrain their wants in order to cope with privation. Some psychologists identify this as a basic survival mechanism.

Though the basic structure of THN appears sound, it would help to distinguish two further basic needs alongside health and autonomy.

1. Mental well-being, cognitive capacities and competences, to recognize the importance of the subjective and the emotional in human well-being.
2. Affiliation, belongingness and relating, to recognize the centrality of collective membership and identity in well-being. THN does stress both close primary relationships and social participation, but these need to be brought to the centre ground.

The last decade has witnessed a growing consensus in thinking about well-being and increasing cross-disciplinary collaboration in researching it. The theory of human need can adapt and contribute to this important debate. At stake for the poor and the South is a more ethical, more humane and less wasteful strategy of development. **Ian Gough is Deputy Director of WeD and Professor at the Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath.**

# Ethiopia

## Growth, Poverty and Inequality in Ethiopia *Bereket Kebede*

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Both narrow economic indicators such as GDP per capita and other measures like life expectancy attest to this. The recent past of the country has seen momentous changes. A more liberal economic policy came into effect with the overthrow of a left-wing government in 1991 following a long civil war. Peace, improvements in



**Women in eastern Ethiopia** pounding grain for a funeral. This village, Adele Keykey, has been the focus of surveys by members of WeD.

economic policy and relatively good rains resulted in growth for most of the 1990s. The effect of growth on poverty must be examined to understand the changes in people's welfare. An article my colleagues and I wrote examines how consumption poverty changed between 1994 and 1997 in Ethiopia.

The article uses the "cost-of-basic needs" approach to define the minimum expenditure required for subsistence – the poverty line. This is mainly determined by the amount of money that can purchase a basket of food, containing the types of food items consumed by poorer households, that provides the minimum energy/calorie requirement – the food poverty line. In addition, an estimate of minimum non-food consumption is considered. All figures are converted into real terms since prices differ between regions and across time.

Consumption poverty has significantly declined between 1994 and 1997 mainly in rural areas (see Table 1). While the decline in poverty in rural areas was statistically significant, that in the urban areas was not; rural households have benefited more than urban ones. This

higher decline in rural poverty virtually eliminated the gap between rural and urban areas (look at poverty levels in 1997). But note that the poverty measure used does not reflect the provision of services (for example, educational and health facilities); urban areas definitely have better access to these services.

**Table 1: Estimates of Poverty (%)**

| Region   | 1994 | 1997 |
|----------|------|------|
| Rural    | 41.9 | 35.5 |
| Urban    | 37.5 | 35.5 |
| National | 41.2 | 35.5 |

Households with a higher proportion of very young and old members – higher 'dependency ratios' – are particularly vulnerable in both rural and urban areas; they are more likely to be poor, to remain poor or to fall into poverty and be unable to escape. Households with heads with primary education are in a better position especially for urban than rural areas; the returns to education seem to be higher in urban areas. Rural households with larger land size and cultivating new export crops are in a better position.

These results have policy implications since rural land is administratively allocated and macroeconomic policies directly affect the returns from export crops. The occupations of household heads are strongly related to status of the household in urban areas. Households in private business or that are own-account workers fare better. Poverty among unemployed households is less than among casual workers; the unemployed probably require higher (reservation) wages to be induced to work.

Changes in poverty are caused either by changes in income levels or redistribution of income. For example, if distribution of income worsens with economic growth, the impact of growth on poverty will be reduced – most of the additional income is enjoyed by the well to do. This is exactly what happened in Ethiopia. Table 2 shows estimates of the growth and redistribution components of changes in poverty. Growth would have decreased poverty by approximately 10.6% if income distribution had remained the same. But income distribution worsened increasing the poverty level by 5.9%. The full impact

of growth on poverty was not realised due to worsening income distribution.

**Table 2: Growth and Redistribution Components of the Changes in Poverty, 1994–97**

| Region   | Change in poverty due to: |                |
|----------|---------------------------|----------------|
|          | Growth                    | Redistribution |
| Rural    | -10.2                     | 6.5            |
| Urban    | -9.0                      | 3.2            |
| National | -10.6                     | 5.9            |

The results underscore the importance of income distribution for poverty alleviation. Worsening inequality can significantly erode the beneficial impact of economic growth. This is one of the reasons why issues in inequality occupy a central place in the WeD programme.

**Source:** A. Bigsten, B. Kebede, A. Shimeles and M. Tadesse (2003), "Growth and Poverty Reduction in Ethiopia: Evidence from Household Panel Surveys", World Development, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 87–106

**Bereket Kebede is a postdoctoral fellow at WeD and member of the Department of Economics and International Development, University of Bath.**

## Social Exclusion in Peru T. Altamirano, A. Figueroa & K. Wright

The Peruvian research group considers the concept of well-being to be intimately connected to that of social exclusion. The use of language is one exclusionary factor to be explored in this study as researchers trace Quechua and Spanish-speaking groups from one of the poorest provinces in Peru (Huancavelica) through to Huancayo in the central highlands to the capital city Lima.

Results from the 1993 census reveal the percentage of Quechua speakers to be extremely high in Huancavelica and also significant in Lima's shanty towns (the 'pueblos jóvenes') especially amongst those aged over 65. In addition, the percentage of people speaking Quechua increases with age suggesting the decline of the language in more recent periods.

**Percentages of Quechua speakers in study areas**

|               | All | 5–14 yrs | 15–64 yrs | Over 65 yrs | Source: 1993 Census, Instituto Cuánto |
|---------------|-----|----------|-----------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Huancavelica  | 60  | N/A      | N/A       | N/A         |                                       |
| Huancayo      | 13  | 2        | 16        | 44          |                                       |
| Lima (shanty) | 15  | 2        | 19        | 36          |                                       |

## Thailand – A. Masae and B. Promphakping

The WeD project in Thailand is constituted of two components: in the south and northeast of the country. In the South, the research team has been formed with five members. The team includes Dr. A. Masae (social anthropologist), Dr. B. Somboonsuke (agricultural system specialist), Dr. W. Dhammasaccakarn (behavioural research specialist), Ms. S. Kiatpathomchai (agricultural economist) and Ms. M. Sabaiying (demographer). The first meeting of the research team focused on creating a common understanding of the nature and objectives of the study. Sampled rural communities will be located in three districts with different resource bases – rice, rubber and fruit, and fisheries.

B. Promphakping is leading the project in northeast Thailand. Dr. R. Boonmathaya and Dr. S. Yongwanich are co-opted as members of an advisory team; they are Dean and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences respectively.

A. Masae and B. Promphakping are lead WeD collaborators from Thailand. Masae is a member of the Faculty of Natural Resources, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai. B. Promphakping is a member of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Khon Kaen, Khon Kaen.

Key issues to investigate are: To what extent does the process of social exclusion differ in each locality? Do ethnic groups have the same access to public goods irrespective of where they reside? Where do they consider their quality of life to be higher? And how does this fit with their material wealth?

**T. Altamirano and A. Figueroa are lead WeD collaborators from Peru based at the Center for Social, Economic, Political and Anthropological Research, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima. K. Wright is a member of WeD and the Department of Economics and International Development, University of Bath.**

## Conferences/Workshops Attended by WeD

**Sarah White** visited the **Centre for Health and Population Research in Bangladesh (ICDDR, B)** on April 13, 2003. During her visit she gave a seminar on 'Health and Culture.' In her talk she asked how to make sense of culture in understanding people's search for healing and understandings of well-being by citing an example from a Bangladeshi village. She also raised questions of how we can approach culture, recognizing its structural aspects (opportunities being different for different people, especially by wealth, gender and community) and how complex, hybrid and open for negotiation it is.

*The WeD Working Paper Series can be found at [www.welldev.org.uk/research/progress.htm](http://www.welldev.org.uk/research/progress.htm)*

**Laura Camfield** recently gave a paper to the third annual conference on the **Narrative and Memory Research Group** based at Huddersfield University (see [www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/dbs/psysoc/research/nme/conf.htm](http://www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/dbs/psysoc/research/nme/conf.htm) for abstracts from previous conferences). The paper was drawn from her PhD research and explored how people living with dystonia – a chronic neurological condition involving involuntary muscle spasms in one or more body parts – use themes of causation to integrate their condition into their life history and account for it to others. Excellent presentations were given by the keynote speakers on performing bodies and embodied memories (Professor Andrew Sparkes, Exeter) and on supporting the cultural identity of Afghan and Bosnian refugees through participatory art projects (Dr Maggie O'Neill, Staffordshire).

**Ian Gough** attended the **WIDER International Conference on "Inequality, Poverty and Human Well-Being"**, Helsinki, Finland, 30–31 May 2003. Plenary lectures were given by Ravi Kanbur (Cornell University) who argued for a reintegration of theory, application and policy debate in development economists' work on poverty and inequality,

and by Frances Stewart (Oxford University) who reviewed four approaches to the definition of poverty – monetary, capability, social exclusion and participatory – and then compared measures of each in India and Peru, showing remarkably little overlap between the four. Other notable contributions were made by Mark McGillivray (Senior Research Fellow at WIDER) on the general structure of well-being indexes, Lars Osberg (Dalhousie University) on sustainability and well-being, and James Foster (Vanderbilt University) on measuring the distribution of human development.

About twenty were also invited to attend a Special Workshop on Measuring Well-being. This was an invigorating meeting with state of the art presentations by international experts including Des Gasper (Institute of Social Studies at The Hague – ISS) on concepts of well-being, Steve Dowrick (ANU) on economic well-being and Ruut Veenhoven (Erasmus University) on subjective measures of well-being. Ian was given a special half-hour slot to introduce the WeD Research Group programme at Bath, and fielded a lot of questions.

**Katie Wright** attended a workshop entitled **"Colombia and Peru: Between Development and Turmoil"** held at Canning House on the 10th of April 2003. Friz Dubois from Latin Source, a network of independent advisers, commented on Peru's economic outlook. He stated that the stability of the exchange rate has kept the economy strong although violent rioting against privatisation led to some depreciation. The main weaknesses in the economy are: that tax revenue dropped sharply, a very

underdeveloped capital market and significant levels of fiscal deficit, disappointing levels of private investment and the informal sector continues to be high. In political terms, Toledo is extremely unpopular, the polls for his popularity dwindling from 59% in August 2001 to a mere 21% by March 2003. On the whole, it was felt that Peru will have decent economic growth this year and the next but this will not be enough to create jobs. Friz argued that though Toledo has been in power for over eighteen months, levels of social inequality are as high or even higher than they were under Fujimori and that this trend does not look set to change.

## 'Bath' Goes to Ethiopia

Between 23rd February and 7th March five members of the Bath WeD group made visits to Ethiopia. The centrepiece of the visits was two linked interdisciplinary workshops. Members of the visiting group also held discussions with social scientists from departments of Addis Ababa University and with people working at development-related institutions. The group also visited two of the rural sites. A longer report of the trip by Pip Bevan and Alula Pankhurst and the papers presented and summaries of the ensuing discussions will be available on the Ethiopia WeD website which is scheduled to go on-line soon.

## Published Book

**David Clark** is a postdoctoral fellow at WeD and member of the Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath. Edward Elgar published his book, **Visions of Development – A Study of Human Values**, in August 2002.

## Key Dates

A WeD team from Bath will visit Bangladesh in September, attending a workshop organised by the country collaborators and field visits to regions covered by the project.

**The Development Studies Association (DSA) Conference 2003 with the theme "Globalisation and Development" will be held between 10–12 September this year at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. WeD will organise a set of sessions on well-being and development. There will be a report on the sessions in the next issue of the newsletter. For more information refer to the DSA web site at [www.devstud.org.uk](http://www.devstud.org.uk).**

The Second International Positive Psychology Summit will be held between 2–5 October 2003 in Washington DC where Suzy Skevington will talk about the WeD Group's work. For more information refer to the website [www.gallup.hu/pps](http://www.gallup.hu/pps)

To view the WeD Newsletter on-line see the website at [www.welldev.org.uk/news/news.htm](http://www.welldev.org.uk/news/news.htm)

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