

Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group
Can Policy Cope with A Concept of Wellbeing?

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Individual and Society

- Argue that the adoption of a concept of well-being forces us to pay particular attention to the relationship between the individual and social organisation.

Well-Being and International Development

- Can policy processes and political systems cope with the implications of working with a concept of well-being that incorporates a subjective dimension?
- Implementation of policy depends upon a good appreciation of local realities and a key dimension of this is what people think about what they conceive as well-being and how they want to achieve this.
- Addresses the Nussbaum-Sen debate over core valued functionings

Over recent decades stretching our conceptions of development

- Economic Development
 - Human Development
 - Participatory Development
 - Governance
 - Development as Freedom
- In all of this an overriding policy concern for the study of developing countries
- To explain the persistence of poverty

The analytical poverty-trap

- That poor people are not defined by their poverty
- That poor people can only be understood in relation to non-poor people

Well-being, Development and the Poor

- poverty does not preclude well-being
- the poor pursue well-being
- the non-poor in developing countries often experience considerable well-being

A Proposition

- That the objective of international development could, at its broadest, and perhaps most utopian, be described as:

“the creation of conditions where all people in the world are able to experience well-being.”

Well-being and Policy

- Thus the purpose of development policies and the *raison d’être* of agencies that generate and implement them is:

“ to work towards the establishment of the conditions within which well-being can be achieved by all people globally.”

- Although a bald and naive statement, it is the sentiment that underpins the Millennium Goals Declaration.
- It leaves open the debate over the roles of the state, market, community and individual in the creation of these conditions for well-being
- It also leaves open the very large question of ‘what do we mean by well-being?’

Aims of WeD Research Group

Formal Objective for the ESRC:

To develop a conceptual and methodological approach for understanding the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in developing countries.

Well-being

- **Millstone:** many definitions, amorphous, analytically hazardous
or
- **Valuable Umbrella Concept ?:** can be stipulatively defined and made operational for empirical research

Well-being

- Well-being, first, as a comprehensive outcome
- Parallel to Sen’s notion of valued functionings
(but here confronting Sen’s elision of doing and being)

Well-being comprises a combination of

- What people **have**

- What they can **do**
- And, how they **think** about what they have and can do

Three Dimensions of Well-being

- **Material** – things that people must have in order for them to achieve well-being
- **Relational** – relationships that people must experience in order for them to achieve well-being
- **Cognitive** – meaning that people must be able to ascribe to their havings and doings in order to be able to achieve well-being

Well-being as Outcomes and Processes

- It is necessary, however, to understand that not only are these dimensions of outcomes inter-linked, but so too are the processes that generate them
- and**
- That the outcomes cannot be properly interpreted without an appreciation of the processes

Well-being and Universalism

- To develop the basis for arguments about what a minimal standard of well-being would be and what conditions might make this possible
- To recognise that both of these will always be matters of contestation and that they should be recognised and accepted as such.

Needs and Well-being

- Extending the theory of human need to become a theory of human well-being
- Identifying a broader range of universal human needs, which must be satisfied if well-being can be deemed to have been achieved?
- This extends and challenges the Doyal and Gough, Theory of Human Need.

Needs and Well-being

- Broadening and unpacking the notion of the two basic human needs **health** and **autonomy**.
- These are achieved via satisfaction of an identified set of intermediate needs, which range across the material, relational and cognitive dimensions.

Political Challenge I

- As we have already understood for development, itself it is about competing visions of what the good life is.
- This follows from our inclusion of the cognitive/subjective dimension in our definition of well-being.

Challenge II

- If we are to accept that men, women and children have some kind of right to have their views of what goals they are trying to achieve and how they are trying to achieve them taken into

account in our understanding of development, then the social and political dimensions of the policy challenges are laid more open.

The social dimension

- is recognised by the fact that each vision of well-being is founded in sets of values
- and those values are generated and maintained within particular societal contexts.

The political dimension

- is revealed in the working of systems within social units, from household to global order, that seek to assert and the maintain which sets of values are desirable and superior.

The Individual and Social Organisation

- Following Doyal and Gough, the ability to achieve individual well-being is interdependent with social organisation.
- This is not just about societies enabling or constraining individuals in their pursuit of well-being. But also extends into the arena of meaning.

The Individual and Social Organisation

- It is about the agreement of meaning within societies about what is desirable and socially feasible in terms of well-being.
- When should we be satisfied?

The Individual and Social Organisation

- While this challenging enough at the level of the nation-state, it is all the more challenging at the level of the universal, or to put it another way, in terms of global order.