

Wellbeing and Development Policy and Practice in the 21st Century

Panel Abstracts

'So what is wellbeing? a framework for analysis in social and development policy and practice'

Sarah White (Convenor), University of Bath

This paper draws on the work of the ESRC Research Group into Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD), to set out an approach for the analysis of wellbeing in social and development policy and practice. The paper offers a simple definition of wellbeing, and then explores the three basic dimensions that this comprises: the material, the relational and the subjective. It argues that wellbeing is a process which is inescapably political and always grounded in a particular time and place. Contrary to dominant approaches, the 'home' context of wellbeing is not the individual but the community: wellbeing happens in relationship. It considers some potential hazards in taking wellbeing as focus, and concludes by considering how a wellbeing analysis might be applied in social and development practice at the community level.

'Monitoring what matters most? Subjective wellbeing assessment in development practice'

James Copestake, University of Bath.

Smart goal setting is widely regarded as necessary for effective management of development. But this begs questions about who chooses such goals and why, particularly the danger that preoccupation with official goals and indicators drowns out the views of others and risks alienating them completely. The development 'industry' - above all industries - should also be responsive to the needs, aspirations and feelings of its ultimate 'clients'. This paper argues that this accountability deficit can in part be addressed by supplementing use of universal indicators of human development with ones based on systematic monitoring of poor people's own wellbeing aspirations as well as their perception of progress towards them. This can be done by adapting established tools for researching client satisfaction. The paper presents a case study (based on data from Peru) of one of many ways of systematically finding out what people hope, think and feel - as well as how to turn the results into useful indicators. Such data can be combined with standard indicators to reveal differences in outlook that affect poor peoples' responses to development initiatives. Potential pay-offs include enhanced political legitimacy, better working relationships and reduced mismatches between policy rhetoric and implementation reality.

“What’s the use of ‘well-being’ in contexts of child poverty? Approaches to research, monitoring and children’s participation”
Laura Camfield*, Natalia Streuli* and Martin Woodhead,**
***Young Lives, University of Oxford, **Open University.**

Monitoring, protecting and promoting ‘well-being’ are central to realisation of children’s rights. Yet definitions of the concept are both variable and can appear conceptually confused. Competing research paradigms engage with the concept and its measurement, while applications of well-being in policy are equally contested. This paper outlines some of the major debates, as a starting point for reviewing three contrasting approaches to well-being: indicator-based, participatory and longitudinal research. In particular, it focuses on applications of the concept in contexts of child poverty worldwide. We suggest there are some promising signs of integration amongst these approaches, and argue that well-being does have potential as a bridging concept, at the same time highlighting inequalities, acknowledging diversities, and respecting children’s agency.

Drawing on the experience of *Young Lives*, a 15 year, four-country longitudinal study of child poverty, we suggest that methods for studying child well-being in global contexts should be dynamic and sensitive to culture and time, as well as to the trade-offs that children are required to make between themselves and others. We argue that dynamic approaches are especially important in research with children as they address how people change in time. Well-being is understood by *Young Lives* to be about real people and the social contexts they inhabit. It can act as a lens - similar to culture - which recognises that outcomes of deprivation are influenced by children and their responses to and interpretation of events. Accessing children’s views in the context of their communities is important and can increase the accuracy and credibility of research data. Crucially, well-being research also foregrounds subjective meanings and experiences, and provides the background for interpreting ‘best interests’. While shared visions for well-being can set parameters of acceptability and underpin basic entitlements, detailed specification must be negotiable, especially taking account of the views of the principal stakeholders, namely children, their caregivers and others centrally concerned with their lives.

‘Schoolchildren’s well-being and life prospects: justifying the universal tax on childhood.’
Neil Thin, University of Edinburgh.

Is a ‘well-being’ approach to development distinctive and better than other approaches? A good way to find out is to try applying it to what is arguably the core and archetypal global development project: the challenge of improving lives by providing universal schooling. Schooling is the world’s most ambitious and optimistic social experiment, yet perhaps because it has been so readily accepted as a good thing to do (for various reasons not all of which have to do with children’s well-being), its relationship with children’s well-being and life prospects has been inadequately explored.

More than most other dimensions of development, schooling envisages socially inclusive approaches to social transformation which seek to optimise prospects for good lives and good societies, rather than just minimising ill-being and social injustice. Yet policies and learning strategies relating to schooling in poor countries have yet to pay substantial and systematic

attention to links between schooling and pupils' well-being and life prospects. Incipient attention to this theme in richer countries should not be seen as a luxury that poorer countries can't afford, since it is socially irresponsible to undertake any promotion of schooling, let alone compulsory schooling, without systematic attention to well-being. It is imperative that affordable and simple methods are developed to assess and analyse links between schooling and children's well-being and life prospects. Expanding on the University of Bath's 'wellbeing' approach, a fourfold analytical framework is recommended here for exploring this theme by looking at *resources*, *motivations*, *achievements*, and *meaning*, plus *minimizing avoidable harm*. This amounts to a distinctive 'well-being' approach to schooling which differs from both 'rights-based' and 'poverty reduction' approaches, and from any other approaches which either assume a priori that certain kinds of change are good, or which reduce development policy and practice to harm reduction and meeting minimum standards.

'To Trap the Golden Deer? Splintered Families, Migration Planning and Well-Being in Later Life in Rural Bangladesh.'

Priti Biswas, University of East Anglia; Tim Finan, University of Arizona; Himangshu Kr. Gachi, SD Degree College, Shabdarpur, Bangladesh.

Over the last forty years, recurrent episodes of socio-political violence have engendered the mass migration of Hindu families in Bangladesh to neighbouring India, especially along the southwest border regions. Past experience shows that some individuals and families under threat have fled suddenly, but for most Hindu households, transnational migration has become a deliberate, long-term livelihood strategy framed in a narrative of security but designed to achieve economic and cultural goals. This long-term migration is planned well in advance and is highly diverse. Children are sent to school or to live with relatives; marriages with Indian men are arranged for young daughters with high dowries; or advance dowries are accepted in exchange for young men who will later settle in neighbouring India. Almost always, this movement is sequenced in time, in the sense that close or extended family members follow those who have migrated and settled before. When seen as a comprehensive livelihood strategy, this form of transnational migration is fraught with uncertainty and risk. While the literature has documented wide variation in the success of the transnational experience for the immigrant, less is known about the structural risks assumed by the sending households who adopt migration as a long-term, multi-generational livelihood strategy in the context of political instability. We argue here in fact that this form of transnationalism can leave a trail of fractured households marked by increasing generational vulnerability.

This paper specifically examines the impacts of younger generation migration on the economic and emotional security of the elderly household members who stay behind and grow increasingly older. As the Bangladeshi Hindu families through time essentially create binational identities, the livelihood security of the elderly can become more precarious. Household assets, such as savings, may be transferred to India to finance the migration or to invest;

and the absence of family members may inhibit the ability to liquidate other durable assets, such as land. As assets become locked or moved across the border, the livelihood situation of the elderly often deteriorates and becomes unable to respond to the stresses and crises associated with old age.

While the narrative and the collective aspirations of the Hindu Bangladeshis fuel this long-term migration plan, it effectively splinters families, with economic and emotional consequences that affect primarily the elderly left behind in Bangladesh, who waits to migrate. Nonetheless, the migration narratives within these families are pervasive and dominant, and consequently there is little investment in well-being improvement in Bangladesh itself. The possibility of moving to India wanes for those household members who remain—leaving them increasingly exposed to an uncertain future as they grow older. This paper provides in in-depth, ethnographic account of this dynamic household process by analysing the life stories of 20 Hindu families in which younger members have migrated to India as part of a long-term family plan for well-being enhancement. The analysis demonstrates how the reigning narrative of migration as an explicit livelihood strategy plays out through the life course of Hindu families, especially the impacts of this narrative on the well-being of the elderly members of the household. In this sense, this paper provides a more nuanced version of transnationalism and its impacts while it also documents the dynamics of poverty as experienced by elderly people in rural Bangladesh.