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# THE WHY AND HOW OF UNDERSTANDING 'SUBJECTIVE' WELLBEING: EXPLORATORY WORK BY THE WeD GROUP IN FOUR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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WeD is a multidisciplinary research group funded by the ESRC, dedicated to the study of poverty, inequality and the quality of life in poor countries. The research group is based at the University of Bath and draws on the knowledge and expertise from three different departments (Economics and International Development, Social and Policy Sciences and Psychology) as well as an extensive network of overseas contacts and specific partnerships with institutes in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. The purpose of the research programme is to develop conceptual and methodological tools for investigating and understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in specific countries.

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# The Why and How of Understanding 'Subjective' Wellbeing: Exploratory work by the WeD group in four developing countries


## SUMMARY

The paper reviews participatory studies carried out in developing countries during the past decade and contrasts their findings with qualitative data from the initial phase of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group's exploration of quality of life. This used primarily qualitative methods to establish the categories and components of subjective quality of life or wellbeing in four developing countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. The comparison supports the proposition that a more open-ended approach provides insight into how people understand, pursue, and preserve their wellbeing.

Subjective quality of life was not simply equated with happiness, but related to the aspects of life people regarded as important. For example, observing religion was part of both living well and being a model person, but not a source of happy memories, which suggests that treating happiness as the 'universal goal' is not sufficient to capture people's motivations. People's values and aspirations were ascertained via three questions: 'When were you happiest?' 'What are the characteristics of a woman or man who lives well?' 'Who are the people you most admire/ respect or the best/ model persons of this community?' The answers revealed many commonalities across sites and countries; for example, having good relationships with immediate and natal family was universally important ('relatedness'). It also revealed cultural differences; for example, 'not being materialistic' was only characteristic of a 'model' person in Northeast Thailand, possibly because of its link to the Buddhist ideal of the 'world renouncer'.

Framing the enquiry in terms of wellbeing rather than poverty enables researchers to explore what poor people have and are able to do, rather than focusing on their deficits, which should produce more credible and respectful representations of people's lives to inform development policy and practice. The desired outcome is development that creates the conditions for people to experience wellbeing, rather than undermining their existing strategies.

**Keywords**
Participatory, Wellbeing, Peru, Ethiopia, Thailand, Bangladesh

**Key readings**

Brock, K. 'It's not only Wealth that Matters - It's Peace of Mind too: A Review of Participatory Work on Poverty and Ill-being'. A study prepared for the World Development Report 2000/01. Washington, DC: PREM, World Bank. (1999).

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## 1: INTRODUCTION

Research into wellbeing and subjective wellbeing is growing rapidly, and represents a paradigm shift towards holistic, person-centred, and dynamic understandings of people's lives, which are nonetheless embedded in particular socio-cultural contexts (Gough et al, 2007). Subjective wellbeing, and related concepts of subjective quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness represent a novel focus on people's feelings and evaluations, which are measured directly rather than through proxies such as 'revealed preferences'. However, previous research on subjective wellbeing has been concentrated in rich Western countries, and this is evident from the samples selected and the design of the measures used (Camfield, 2004). Despite the promise of subjective approaches, they need to be able to bridge this gap at a conceptual and methodological level.

A possible antecedent of subjective approaches in developing countries is participatory research, which emphasises that experiential aspects of poverty such as being respected, having meaningful choices, and being able to preserve one's dignity are just as important to people as material wellbeing. Both approaches are 'experience-near' and aim to not only create a space for people to reflect on and share their experiences, but also to conduct research that generates valuable outcomes for participants, policy makers, and practitioners. However, there are some differences, notably the exclusive focus on the individual in previous subjective research, especially that arising from health psychology.

The Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) ESRC Research Group[1] attempts to bridge this gap by giving equal weight to the ***meaning*** that people give to the goals they achieve, and the ***processes*** in which they engage, as to their resources and attainments. WeD also acknowledges that subjective quality of life is a goal, resource, and valued outcome. Accordingly, it has developed a novel three phase research strategy: firstly, an exploratory phase, which involved identifying elements important to subjective quality of life or wellbeing in the WeD sites and testing a range of methods (see Jongudomkarn & Camfield, 2006 for Thailand; Camfield et al, 2006 for Bangladesh). Secondly, a phase reviewing the substantive and methodological findings of the first phase; and thirdly, a fieldwork phase that culminated in the development of the WeD-QoL Phase 3 instrument, which

[1] See www.welldev.org.uk.

provided data on people's happiness and satisfaction with 'life as a whole' (subjective wellbeing), and the interaction of goals, resources, and values in producing these states.

This paper describes the methodology of the first phase and presents some results. The results are then contrasted with participatory studies carried out in developing countries during the past decade, which are briefly reviewed in the first part of the paper. The comparison of their findings with semi-structured interview data on people's happiest experiences, their perceptions of what it means to live well, and the characteristics of people they identify as local role models (an 'ideal person, respected by all') should enable us to see if a more open-ended approach provides an insight into how people understand, pursue, and preserve their wellbeing. This understanding could help development practitioners support, or at least not undermine, their strategies.

## 2: EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON WELLBEING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (see Appendix two, table one)

Participatory research has become increasingly popular during the past twenty years, evidenced by the mainstreaming of Participatory Poverty Assessments in the 1990s and the World Bank funded *Consultations with the Poor* study (Norton et al 2001, Narayan and Walton 2000, 2002, Narayan, Walton, and Chambers 2000). However, not only can the quality of participatory research be variable, but it often starts with the value-laden term 'poverty' and so misses the opportunity to understand people's lives in their own terms (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; White & Pettit, 2004). This includes acknowledging not only that people in developing countries may not characterise themselves as poor, and that if they do, they may not see their lives wholly in terms of lack or deprivation, which is often the way they are regarded by researchers and practitioners of international development (for an alternative perspective see Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001). Good participatory work can 'widen the lens' to include overlooked aspects of people's lives like companionship, everyday pleasures, and sources of meaning that enable them to sustain their wellbeing in insecure and resource-poor environments (Laderchi, 2001; White & Pettit, 2004; Camfield & McGregor, 2005). However, this potential tends not to be realised when financial and political pressures encourage a relatively superficial research engagement, followed by rhetorical justification back at the office. While philosophers like Sen (1993) and Nussbaum (2000), and more recently 'positive psychologists' like Csziksmenthalyi (1990) have produced inspiring theories of human wellbeing, these have little empirical basis. Conversely,

the applied nature of participatory research has ensured that its exploration of poverty and deprivation is primarily problem or project focused.

The following brief review demonstrates the significant contribution of participatory research to understanding the multidimensionality of 'individual' wellbeing. It primarily summarises the findings of studies that relate to the geographical areas that WeD is working in, but also engages with review and primary data from the *Consultations with the Poor* study. The review establishes the extent of existing research which takes people's wellbeing as its focus, to see what further contribution an open-ended and person-centred approach can make.

Moore, Choudhury and Singh began their research in South Asia with a review of UK Department for International Development (DFID) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) studies from the same area carried out in 1996 and 1997 (1998). These suggested that the main sources of wellbeing for rural people were having land and other assets, sufficient food, diverse sources of income, education, and the demographics of the household (for example, sufficient adult male labour). These factors also applied in urban areas, with a greater emphasis on the types of jobs people held and whether they had secure access to housing.

Mukherjee's study of peasants in Uttar Pradesh (India) confirmed the importance of having land and regular employment, and also highlighted access to basic infrastructure and services, and the need for community unity (1997). This awareness of the importance of social context continues in Moore et al's study, which explored economic and environmental security, instead of focusing on income and expenditure (1998). Their definition of environmental security encompassed not only avoidance of oppression, crime, and violence, and protection of rights, but also enhancing status and self-respect.

Moore et al produced two sets of deprivation indicators: the first resulting from material poverty (for example, insecure livelihoods and poor access to public services), and the second relating to social relationships (for example, poor treatment from public officials, gender inequality and/or discrimination). The second set also included respect and self-respect, which were enhanced by avoiding relationships of dependence. The authors were keen to emphasise that while economic insecurity and poor access to health services and schools were important, the relational issues mentioned above were equally or more important, especially for women, and rarely included in development agendas.

Despite noting the importance of self respect and independence, the authors observe (in contrast to the more romantic perspective of writers like Beck [1984]), that 'there is no convincing evidence that poor people place a very high value on independence, respect or personal autonomy if that is to be traded off against food when they are hungry […] the general consensus [of psychologists] that people focus first on basic material needs, then material security, and then less tangible objectives such as affinity, recognition and self-actualisation appears highly plausible' (Moore et al, 1998).

This conclusion seems to be supported by the findings of Mahbub and Roy who used participatory methods with men and women in rural Bangladesh to explore their definitions of 'personal wellbeing' (1997). These related primarily to basic needs (for example, eating three meals a day, being healthy and having access to healthcare), followed by material security (having children and educating your children), and only then 'living a peaceful life'. Although men also mentioned education and self-development, women focused on the health of their husband and/ or other adult males and having a small family, both of which affected their economic security.

The *Consultations with the Poor* study was carried out in over fifty developing countries between 1999 and 2000 and is undoubtedly the most extensive project of its sort. The study was published in three volumes: volume one, "Can Anyone Hear Us?" which synthesised eighty-one participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) conducted by the World Bank in fifty countries (Narayan and Walton 2000), volume two, "Crying Out for Change" drawing on new participatory field work conducted in 1999 in twenty three countries (Narayan, Walton, and Chambers 2000), and volume three, "From Many Lands", which offered regional patterns and country case-studies (Narayan, D and Walton, M 2002). It was supplemented by Brock's review of participatory research on criteria for poverty, illbeing, or vulnerability, which had taken place outside the PPA framework (1999).

The first two volumes ('Can Anyone Hear Us?' and 'Crying Out for Change') grouped the sources of wellbeing under five headings: material (having a secure livelihood and fulfilment of your basic needs), physical (health, strength, and appearance), security (including peace of mind), freedom of choice and action (including self development and mobility), and social wellbeing (good family and community relationships). These general findings were illustrated by case studies from particular countries; for example, in Armenia single pensioners were consistently ranked as the

poorest because of their isolation, despite the fact that their income levels were no lower than average.

Key themes that emerged from the syntheses were the importance of people's assets and capabilities, and more importantly whether they were embedded in enabling or disabling relationships, which, among other things, affected their access to income. The syntheses also noted the adverse impact of national shocks and policy changes, the culture of inequality and exclusion in government service agencies, and widespread inequality between men and women, which increased female vulnerability.

Brock supplemented the *Consultations with the Poor* study with a review of participatory research on criteria for poverty, illbeing, or vulnerability, covering fifty eight groups of children and adults in twelve developing countries (1999). In rural areas the criteria primarily related to food security, followed by lack of work, money, and assets (predominantly land). Participants also noted the vulnerability of particular groups (for example, households with an older or female head), and individuals at different stages in the life cycle, or living in different household types. In urban areas the primary concern was the immediate living environment, for example, crowded, unsanitary housing, dirty and dangerous streets, and violence inside and outside the household. Lack of land was also an issue, in so far as it affected housing. Rural and urban areas noted poor health as both a cause and effect of illbeing, which generally related to the quality of housing in urban areas and water in rural ones.

Brock's findings foreground experiential aspects of poverty such as fear, insecurity, hopelessness, and powerlessness, which all impact on people's agency and mobility. Participants recounted not feeling accepted or respected by others, and feeling powerless in the face of officialdom. The perceived uncontrollability of their lives in the face of environmental or physical changes, made them feel more vulnerable, reducing their confidence and ultimately their agency. Participants described a reduction in their choices; for example, participants in a Participatory Rural Appraisal exercise conducted in South West China distinguished between what they 'could do' in the past and now 'have to' or 'are forced to' do (Herrold 1999, in Brock 1999). They also experienced a reduction in their ability to avoid relationships of dependency, and consequently independence had become an even more important criterion of wellbeing. In Sri Lanka the definition of being rich was that 'you don't have to stretch out your hand to other people', which reflects a common ideal of self-sufficiency among rural households. Although the experience of lack of control limits people's choices and

opportunities for action, it doesn't appear to be as central to conceptions of poverty as dysfunctional family or community relationships. For example, where people are embedded in communities that have been corroded by poverty or the social dislocation caused by out-migration on a large scale.

The individual studies for the WeD countries from *Consultations with the Poor* lack some of the richness of the aggregated data and are mainly focused on material wellbeing. For example, the main wellbeing criteria for rural respondents in Ethiopia were size of farmland, livestock (including oxen), access to fertiliser and agricultural equipment, and being able to feed your family throughout the year (Rahmato & Kidano, 1999). The very rich were also able to lend money to the poor. Urban respondents also mentioned food security ('able to eat as much as they want') and livelihoods (having your own business and/or permanent, pensionable employment), but added 'living in good houses with good quality furniture' and 'can afford to send their children to good schools'. Respondents from the capital, Addis Ababa were even more specific about the material dimensions of wellbeing: people should own commercial trucks, stores, hotels or bars, run grain mills, and 'live in nicely furnished houses that they own'. The Thai PPA defined wellbeing as having enough money to save, a house, car, and a regular job or business (Paitoonpong, 1999). Being physically and mentally healthy, having a good wife and loving family, and living in a good environment were also important. Interestingly, illbeing was characterised in less material terms, for example, having many problems, being unhappy, unemployed, in debt, and not having money for your children.

The key criterion for wellbeing identified in the Bangladesh PPA was having savings and capital produced by employment opportunities or cultivable land. For example, large landowners in rural areas who produce a surplus, or homeowners in urban areas who let houses, were defined as rich (Nabi et al, 1999). However, it was also important to have a good house, healthy and relaxed family members, good clothing, sufficient food, and the ability to educate your children. The Peruvian PPA focused on poverty rather than wellbeing, and identified many structural deficiencies, for example, the access to markets and formal credit, judicial system, and neighbourhood cooperation (DFID/ World Bank 2003). Unemployment and underemployment were concerns in urban areas, as was the vulnerability of small-scale agriculture in rural areas. Physical security in urban areas, domestic violence, institutional discrimination and corruption, and gender inequality were also identified as sources of illbeing.

Clark's study of rural and urban people in Western Cape (South Africa) explicitly addressed understandings of wellbeing by combining open and closed-ended survey questions to explore people's 'visions of the good', and their evaluation of the complementary visions of Sen and Nussbaum (2000). His study identified the following as the three most important aspects of a good life in Murraysburg and Wallacedene: 'good' jobs (good in the sense of working conditions as well as salary), secure and good quality housing, and education to enhance people's future prospects. Access to income was important across all age groups, primarily as a means to support family and friends, but also a route to a better life. However, income was not as highly ranked as jobs, housing, and education. Respondents also mentioned the importance of having a good family, religion, health, good food, and happiness, which Clark took as a demonstration that that 'respondents were aware of many of the better things in life but chose to emphasise their urgent needs' (ibid, p15). Many of the specific aspects of wellbeing proposed by Sen and Nussbaum were not judged important by respondents; for example, longevity, opportunities for sexual satisfaction, and literary and scientific pursuits. Clark also criticised Nussbaum for ignoring the centrality of the care and support offered by friends and family, by focusing on the 'virtuous' act of giving love, rather than receiving it.

Finally, a study in rural Mexico by Garcia and Way developed locally defined indicators of wellbeing, which exemplify the wide angled perspective on wellbeing described earlier as they included not only jobs, income, health, and housing, but also relationships between men and women, self esteem, and the reaffirmation of cultural identities (2003).

The participatory research described above demonstrates the way individual priorities reflect specific and socially constructed values, preferences, and time horizons (Laderchi, 2001), although it says little about the trade-offs made in people's coping strategies. The focus on 'process' as well as 'outcome' in the WeD research aims to capture these dynamics, and also to understand how people experience wellbeing through 'the analysis not only of subjective components of wellbeing, but the subjective, socially and culturally constructed experience of wellbeing as a whole' (White & Pettit, 2004, p.8-9). For example, people may choose to create an impression of material prosperity through consumption funded by credit at the expense of their material security in the long-term. A complete picture therefore comprises not only people's *objective* endowments, but also the *subjective* and *inter-subjective*, which comprise people's social interactions, perceptions, and the ethical or moral aspects of wellbeing, reflected in what people value (McGregor, 2007). The 'being' of wellbeing helps us by

drawing our attention to states of mind and subjective perceptions, as well as ‘state of body’ and material endowments.

## 3: THE WeD APPROACH TO SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE

### 3.1: Methodology

Our approach to ‘experienced’ wellbeing or subjective quality of life (QoL) is based on the assumption that people make conscious and articulable judgements about the quality of their experiences, albeit that the way these are expressed depends on socio-cultural norms. This reflection is influenced by the interplay of social, physical, and psychological processes. These include any gap between people’s goals and the extent to which they feel they can, or have achieved them, which relates to their perception of resource availability. It also includes people’s experiences (which occur in a particular historical and social context), their immediate environment and mood, and their personality. People’s perceptions of how well they are doing in the context of their values and aspirations, and the achievements of others in their community, are an important and under-recognised dimension of wellbeing. They are also implicated in the production and reproduction of poverty as poor people can unconsciously limit their aspirations for themselves and their children, and operate within shorter time horizons that reduce their opportunities for change.

The goal of the WeD QoL research is therefore to produce a methodology that creates a space for self-evaluation, where people can tell us what they value, what they have experienced, and how satisfied they are with what they have, and what they can do and be. This was addressed with a three-phase strategy, which worked towards developing a measure of Quality of Life that explored the subjective dimensions of the relationships between people’s needs or goals, their perception of the resources available to fulfil their goals, and the satisfaction that they achieve with respect to their goals.

The first phase, which is the focus of this paper, was exploratory, and involved identifying elements important to quality of life or wellbeing in the WeD sites and testing a range of methods. The second phase reviewed the substantive and methodological findings of the first phase, and formulated a draft instrument and a plan for its implementation in the third phase. The third phase of fieldwork phase generated QoL data for individuals already included in the research programme. It culminated in the development of the WeD-QoL Phase 3 instrument, which had two components: a battery of four ‘native’ scales that measure Goals, Resource Availability, Goal Achievement, and ‘Personal’ and Social Values, and two adaptations of

internationally validated scales that measure satisfaction with ‘life as a whole’ (Satisfaction with Life Scale, Diener et al, 1985) and the presence of positive and negative affect (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, Watson et al, 1988).

The initial exploratory phase began with a workshop in Bath exploring the components of QoL for each of the WeD countries, followed by workshops with QoL ‘experts’ such as NGO staff in the countries (see Camfield, 2005; Skevington, 2004). The Global Person Generated Index (GPGI), an individualised QoL measure, was also piloted in three of the four countries (Martin et al, 2004; Camfield & Ruta, 2006). The GPGI measures the gap between people’s aspirations and their reality by asking them to nominate aspects of life that contribute to their wellbeing and rate them according to how important they are and how satisfied they are with them (Ruta et al 1994, 1998). The first part of the exploratory work took place alongside Community Profiling[2], which asked questions relating to quality of life and wellbeing (see particularly the Wellbeing and Illbeing Dynamics in Ethiopia study, WIDE), and the Resources and Needs Questionnaire[3], which used both ‘consumption adequacy’ questions to establish people’s satisfaction with areas like food and healthcare, and a standard ‘global’ happiness question (GHQ).

The second, and more intensive, part of the exploratory fieldwork took place in rural, peri-urban, and urban sites in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Thailand and Peru. It was carried out by local researchers, who received full training in the methods used and participated in the piloting. The majority had spent at least one year attached to the site, enabling them to build a rapport with the inhabitants. The average sample size for the countries was 360 (range 314-419) and age and gender were used as the key ‘breaking variables’, followed by religion or ethnicity, and socio-economic status. In Ethiopia respondents were purposively selected from four rural and two urban sites in Oromiya, Amhara, and Addis Ababa regions to represent: men and women, young (<24yrs and 24-30 yrs), middle aged (30-50yrs) and old (50+yrs), and orthodox and protestant Christians and Muslims. In Thailand respondents were selected from a mixture of five rural and peri-urban sites in the South and Northeast of the country to represent young (18-30yrs), middle aged (31-59yrs) and old (60+yrs) men and women.  In the South respondents were also selected for religion (Buddhist and Muslim) and by wealth (rich and poor), based on participatory wealth rankings from

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[2] See www.welldev.org.uk/research/methods-toobox/com-prof-toolbox.htm.
[3] See www.welldev.org.uk/research/methods-toobox/RANQ-toolbox.htm.

community profiles. In Bangladesh, four rural and two urban sites were selected in Manikgani and Dinaspur, and respondents were purposively sampled to obtain a representation of men and women, younger (<40yrs) and older (40+yrs), Muslim and Hindu, and rich and poor (selected using participatory wealth rankings). The sample size for each country is shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Sample composition for the exploratory quality of life research**

| Countries | Bangladesh (~336) | Ethiopia (~373) | Peru (419) | Thailand (314) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Areas** | Manikganj & Dinaspur | Oromiya, Amhara & Addis Ababa | Huancayo, Huancavelica, Junin & Lima | Songkhla (149), Khon Kaen (146), Mukdaharn (63), & Roi-et (56) |
| **Sites** | 4 rural (2 close to a town, 2 remote), 2 urban | 4 rural, 2 urban | 2 rural, 2 peri-urban, 2 urban | 2 South Thailand (50% Muslim), 3 Northeast Thailand; mixture of rural & peri-urban |
| **No: of SSIs** | 73 | 120 | 419 | 102 |
| **No: of FGDs** | 21 (10-12 participants) | 36 (6-8 participants) | - | 36 (6 participants) |
| **No: of PGIs** | 28 (urban) + 14 pilot (rural) | 120 + 8 pilot | - | 102 + 14 pilot (peri-urban) |
| **No: of SWLS** | - | 120 | - | - |
| **No: of GHQ** | 73 | - | - | - |
| **Main sampling criteria** | Younger (>40) & older (50+) men & women; Muslim & Hindu; locally identified economic groupings | Young (>24 & 24-30), middle-aged (30-50) & old (50+) men & women; Orthodox & Protestant | Balanced quota samples with equal numbers of men & women & a range of ages; Catholic, Protestant & ‘no religion’ | Young (18-30), middle-aged (31-60) & old (61+) men & women; Buddhist & Muslim (South); rich & poor (South) |

The methods used included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and administration of the GPGI in Ethiopia, Thailand, and urban Bangladesh (Camfield & Ruta, 2007), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) in Ethiopia (Diener et al, 1985), and a Global Happiness Question (GHQ) in Bangladesh[4].

### 3.2: WeD data

Phase 1 generated a large amount of data on the characteristics of wellbeing at individual, household, and community levels, and more personal data on hopes, fears, sources of happiness and unhappiness, coping strategies, and a number of country-specific topics. We plan to 'triangulate' this data with other qualitative and quantitative data, for example, Community Profiles and Resources and Needs Questionnaire, which highlight the objective constraints that people face in their pursuit of wellbeing, and the extent to which their values are reflected in their actions. Read as a whole the quality of life data provides a rounded picture of people's lives, which focuses on their aspirations and values. It attempts to avoid respondents giving standardised accounts by supplementing questions about what it means to live well, with ones addressing personal sources of happiness and happy memories. One reason for this is that psychological studies have demonstrated that people's judgements are more accurate when they focus on specific areas of their lives, rather than giving a 'global' assessment (Schwarz & Strack, 1999). Additionally, while people's memories are notoriously inaccurate records of the past, the way they choose and 'perform' a salient memory during an interview gives an invaluable insight into their current state of mind (Kahneman, 1999).

Although the concepts of 'living well' and 'happiness' are clearly related, the data suggests that respondents found it easy to distinguish between a general question about what a person would need to live well and a specific one about their happiest memory. For example, Nazrul, a poor middle-aged man from Bangladesh, proposes "financial solvency", having a "good business" and "education" as aspects of living well, but says that his happiest memory was of his marriage.

The following section explores the data from three questions, which were asked across the four countries (the slight variations in the wording are largely artefacts of the translation into English):

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[4] For more detail on the methodology see Camfield, 2005 and "WeD Toolbox No. four: The WeD-QoL (WeD measure of individual Quality of Life)", http://www.welldev.org.uk/research/methods-toobox/toolbox-intro.htm

1. ‘When were you happiest?’ or ‘What were the happiest moments of your life?’
2. ‘What are the characteristics of a woman or man who lives well?’
3. ‘Who are the people you most admire/ respect or the best/ model persons of this community?’

It begins by summarising the data (also summarised in Appendix one, tables one to three), and then explores the findings from individual countries. This brings out differences in content and emphasis that are necessarily ‘glossed over’ in the summary, but which point to more ‘contextual’ results. Although the sample sizes were relatively large for a qualitative study, they only represent a small proportion of people in each site, and a much smaller proportion in each country, which limits the generalisability of the findings. For this reason, please read ‘Bangladeshi women/ Ethiopian men said …’ as a reference to the particular group of Bangladeshi women and Ethiopian men who participated in this study and not to Bangladeshi women and Ethiopian men in general. While this study cannot presume to speak for all, hopefully the themes explored will resonate with people researching and living in these countries. Finally, the responses to the question on the characteristics of wellbeing are compared with data from the participatory studies described in section two to see if themes from the earlier studies have emerged or been elaborated further in the WeD data (see tables one to three, Appendix two).

### 3.2.1 When were you happiest?

*Overview*

Happy memories predominantly related to experiences of ‘relatedness’ and ‘competence’, for example, intimate relationships with a spouse or parent, and goal achievement by/ for yourself or your family. Being married and having a loving and supportive relationship with your partner appears to be a universal source of happy memories (albeit slightly more for women than men), and is linked to recollections of the wedding itself and the early days of marriage. Bangladeshi women in particular linked the first years of married life to economic solvency, freedom, and having a closer relationship with their spouse; what might be called the ‘honeymoon period’. Of course, this finding may say more about the softening effect of memory as for South Asian women the first years of marriage are often the most stressful as it entails leaving their natal home and getting to know their new husband and his family (see Ewing 1991 and White 1992 for further details).

Harmonious and mutually supportive relationships within the household were important; and it was also important for women in the patrilocal societies of Ethiopia and Bangladesh to maintain a connection with their natal family. This may also explain why celebrating holidays like *Meskel* (the Ethiopian New Year) was a common source of happy memories for Ethiopian women as it usually involved returning to their natal home. People had happy memories of childhood as a time of material and emotional security (men and women in Bangladesh and Peru, and women in Ethiopia), 'exploration' and/ or education, and relative independence. Perhaps this is the reason why the birth of children didn't appear as a universal source of happiness as it brought what respondents describe as a period of freedom, personal development, and intimacy to a close. Nonetheless, the birth of children was an important source of happy memories for people in Ethiopia and urban Peru. It also appears as an important source of happiness in Bangladesh in other WeD research on marriage and family life. Having good friends ('people to drink coffee with' in Ethiopian terms) also emerged as important and was mentioned explicitly in all countries apart from Peru. In rural Peru respondents mentioned attending local fiestas, a central part of which is the opportunity to celebrate with friends.

Another group of memories focused around people having enough to satisfy their basic needs, often linked to stories of childhood abundance ('I was raised with honey, butter and milk' Ethiopian woman). For example, people often recalled having a good harvest or getting a good price for their produce, although in Peru the presumably positive experience of need satisfaction was characterised as 'overcoming scarcity', possibly to emphasise the effort and skill involved in satisfying basic needs in what was perceived as an unyielding environment.

Personal achievements, and in Bangladesh and Thailand those of your children, were also explicitly mentioned by people in all countries apart from Peru (for example, travelling overseas or holding an important post in the community). In Thailand the main type of achievement was having a job, which appeared to be valued at least as much for the pleasure it gave people's parents ('it made my parents happy and proud of me being able to get a job at Ja Na hospital' young Thai man) and the fact that it retrospectively justified continuing in education.

Being in good health was a source of pleasure for people in Ethiopia and Thailand (in Ethiopia this was linked to the ability to continue working), but not apparently in Bangladesh and Peru. However, the Peruvian category of 'rest and recuperation', which was particularly common in urban areas,

appears to capture the experiential aspects of good health. Happy memories that were specific to Ethiopia related to religion (‘I am happy during the fasting times of *Ramadan* and *Eid-el-Fetir*’ Ethiopian man), living and working on the farm (‘living on my farm makes me very happy and secure’ Ethiopian woman), and the attainment of national security (‘I was happy when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front seized Addis Ababa and ended the long war’ Ethiopian male). The latter may reflect the use of conscription in Ethiopia, which had a great impact on the lives of a generation of men and their families.

*Data from the countries* (see Appendix one, table one)
The happiest episodes of life for **Bangladeshi** men and women of all ages were those where they had no worries or responsibilities, did not have to work, had their wants fulfilled, were economically solvent or self sufficient, and enjoyed close relationships and the achievements of themselves or family members. A quarter of respondents described childhood and youth as their happiest period as they were cared for by their parents, and didn’t have to work, or worry about meeting their daily needs. For the same reason, a fifth of male respondents characterised student or school life as their happiest period, and this was equally important for younger women who linked it to life before marriage when they were able to continue their education and live with their parents. Men also described life before marriage as a time of economic solvency and peace. Older and younger women recalled early married life as a happy period and associated it with economic solvency, freedom, independence (especially for older women), and close relationships with their spouses (also mentioned by some men). Other memories related to specific incidents such as meeting national figures, earning the community’s respect, or completing a training course. They also related to other periods when the respondent had no worries or responsibilities or immediately prior to migration (young men only).

The happiest moments for **Ethiopian** men related to experiences of good health and physical capability, and the birth of their children.  This was followed closely by periods of material sufficiency, their marriage and/ or their relationship with their spouse, and memories of specific achievements like surviving a period of imprisonment for political activism. Ethiopian women also described the birth of their children as one of their happiest moments, followed by their marriage and/ or their relationship with their spouse, and memories of childhood and other periods when they were cared for by others (for example, during pregnancy). Good health and their relationship with their natal family were also important sources of happy memories. Some happy experiences were gender specific; for example,

only men mentioned periods of mental peace (predominantly older men), their relationships with the community, improvements in national security, and building their own house, while only women fondly recalled their childhood, being cared for by others, and the marriage of their daughters. There were also visible differences in importance between shared categories, for example, personal health and education were mentioned twice as frequently by men as by women, while their relationship with their spouse was mentioned twice as frequently by women. As might be expected in a predominantly patrilocal society, maintaining good relationships with their natal family was mentioned three times as often by women as by men, and this was also true for celebrating the holidays, which usually involves returning to your natal family.

The happiest episodes for **Peruvian** sites involved time spent with their family (their natal family and their spouse and children) and memories of overcoming scarcity. Being in a couple, periods of 'solteria' (providing opportunities for travel and new experiences), and rest and recuperation were also important, although these were most frequently mentioned in urban areas. Fiestas (a traditional system of redistribution and social prestige that also functions as an 'escape valve') were specific to rural areas, while memories of the birth of their children were only mentioned in urban sites.

Family relations characterised the happiest periods for all groups in the **Thai** sites, followed closely by education (with the exception of respondents aged over sixty). Memories involving good friendships and economic security (having assets) were also universally important. Other happy memories came from being healthy, engaging in religious practice, and having a spouse (women), having a job (men), living in a clean and pleasant environment and having a good appearance (adults over sixty), and getting a good price for produce (adults aged thirty-one to sixty).

### 3.2.2 What are the characteristics of a man/woman who lives well?

In Peru this question was asked as 'let's suppose that I would like to move to live here. What would I need to be happy?' (Supongamos que yo quiero mudarme para vivir aquí. ¿Qué cosas necesito para ser ***feliz***?). This was because the less abstract form seemed to work better in remote rural communities. The English translation is imprecise as 'feliz' apparently conveys a sense of living of well, while 'alegre' is closer to the usual definition of happy.

*Overview*

The most important element in all countries was good family relationships, both with your immediate and natal family (‘relatedness’). This was obviously expressed in slightly different terms: Peruvian respondents emphasised being part of a couple, while Bangladeshis focused on their relationships with their children and their children’s wellbeing (for example, whether they were healthy, educated, and living a moral life). Relationships with children were particularly important for older Bangladeshi women whose future wellbeing depends on maintaining good relationships with their sons.

Economic considerations were important, although again there were variations in the way they were expressed; for example, having a job was more relevant to Bangladesh, Thailand, and urban Peru, while agriculture and agricultural inputs such as land and livestock were more important in rural Peru and Ethiopia (where the possession of livestock is also an important signifier of status).

Health was mentioned in all countries except Peru, though the omission of health may be artefactual as according to the Peruvian research team it was mentioned in other areas of the research. Having a good house was similarly important everywhere except Bangladesh, although housing was mentioned in response to a similar question in Bangladesh about a good life for a household.

Respondents from Peru mentioned access to electricity and clean water at home, while respondents from Ethiopia focused on transportation and agricultural extension services to support the production and marketing of perishable produce (e.g. tomatoes). Being respected or having a good appearance was mentioned everywhere but Peru, however, the categories of ‘being a professional’ in urban areas and being able to host fiestas in rural ones suggest that status is equally important here. This links to the definitions of poverty discussed earlier in the paper where lack of dignity and respect was identified as a key aspect of being poor.

Education was mentioned in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and peri-urban Peru (where it was apparently valued as a scarce resource), but not in Thailand or rural and urban Peru. In these locales it may be perceived as of little relevance, possibly due to its variable quality and loose relationship with finding employment, or possibly because it is either relatively inaccessible or completely ubiquitous (for example, Thailand offers universal education up to age thirteen or fourteen). Independence, in the sense of not being dependent on others (for example, parents or patrons) was mentioned in

Bangladesh. The responses suggest it is an important dimension of being respected, as it reduces the power of external others over the household, and prevents people from 'gossiping'.

*Data from the countries* (see Appendix one, table two)
All the **Bangladeshi** respondents mentioned good health, and all the Muslim respondents[5] mentioned following the teachings of Islam as characteristics of people who were living well. Education in general was significant for men and younger women, and being able to educate your children was important for women.

Older men and women both felt that having personal wealth or income (i.e. not being dependent) was an important element for a good life; however, their rationale for this was slightly different. Older men associated personal wealth with being able to live an honest life, live in peace with others, buy land, and conduct business, while older women saw it as a means of having more power and respect in their son's household. Both groups wanted to be provided for and cared for by their sons, and a dutiful son was also a source of pride and respect, especially if they were employed or made a good living. The quality of the relationship with sons and daughter-in-laws (e.g. if they were affectionate and confiding) was more important to older women than being materially provided for, though the two are obviously connected. Young men characterised living well as being educated, inheriting wealth, being employed and having good health; all of which contributed to securing or improving incomes. Young women focused on good health and household incomes, but were also concerned with the health and upbringing of their children.

The main characteristic of people who are living well in the **Ethiopian** sites was being economically secure and having sufficient produce or income to meet their needs (for example, having a good stock of grain in the barn). Education seems to be very important, both for yourself and your children, as is having good community relationships. People who are living well are also characterised as working hard, engaging in business activities, having a good house, owning land with sufficient oxen to plough it, and being in good health. Some characteristics were only mentioned in one site, reflecting the different demands of different environments. For example, in one of the rural sites, having access to an irrigation scheme was a vital part of living well as this reduced people's dependence on the rains and enabled them to increase their incomes by growing vegetables to sell at market.

[5] Three of the rural Bangladeshi respondents were Hindu and seven of the urban ones.

Similarly, one of the most important aspects of living well in the provincial town site was having connections.

The **Peruvian** team didn't identify any aspects of living well that were the same across all sites. However, they did observe 'universal tendencies' like the need for good quality housing (with access to water, electricity, and sanitation), appropriate sustenance, and having a partner and family. The following aspects of living well were found in all the Peruvian sites, with context specific variations: *House* (the size, style, and condition of the house varied from site to site and between individuals within sites); *Sustenance* (this referred to animals and agriculture for rural sites, and jobs for urban ones); *Land* (for urban sites this only referred to land for accommodation, but for rural sites it also covered agriculture and cattle); *Being part of a couple* (not necessarily married); *Family*; *Furniture and appliances* (these became both more important, and more complex and sophisticated in urban areas); *Power supply and water.*

All focus group respondents thought that family relationships were the most important aspect of a good life for a **Thai** person, and this was supported by all of the interviewees except North Eastern women who named income instead. In second place came income or job or assets, spirituality (Southern men only), family relationships (North Eastern women only), health (people aged thirty-one to sixty only) and good appearance (Southern women only). People's third choices mainly related to income or job or assets, with the exception of Southern men who named living conditions, people aged over sixty who nominated spirituality, and people aged eighteen to thirty who mentioned good appearance. Although there seems to be more diversity than in the responses to questions about household living well (partly because this question was asked in both interviews and focus groups, eliciting slightly different responses), family relationships remain the clear priority.

### 3.2.3 What are the characteristics of a man/woman who is an ideal person/respected by all?

*Overview*

The aim of this question was to explore the characteristics and ways of behaving that are respected and valued in each country; reassuringly there is considerable overlap. For example, helping near or distant others is universally important, although interestingly in Bangladesh people didn't appear to value receiving help or support from people outside the household, possibly because of the detrimental effect on people's status of being a dependent, or indebted to others. This is contradictory, considering

the importance of patron-client relationships in Bangladesh, which often provide access to employment, any state services or benefits, and are the main component of people's 'welfare regimes' (Wood, 2004).

Behaving responsibly towards your family is also important (for example, refraining from extra-marital sex was mentioned in Ethiopia and Thailand), as is being educated or knowledgeable, partly because this enables you to give good advice to others. 'Model' individuals also behaved courteously and ethically towards others and maintained harmonious relationships within the community. Interestingly, supporting your family was not mentioned in Bangladesh (educating your children was mentioned in one of the sites in Dinaspur; supporting your parents was not mentioned at all), which may be an example of how core values are often inarticulable (see also 'being respectful' in Thailand). Being religious was important everywhere except Peru, and being respectful to others was also near universally important. Behaving respectfully is so central to the Thai ethos that it was probably the main component of 'behaving well', which may explain why it wasn't mentioned explicitly. The fact that the things that are most important to people are often the most obvious, and therefore not worthy of mention is a problem in qualitative subjective research[6]. However, to some extent it can be overcome when it forms part of a long-term research engagement, and the data can be triangulated with other qualitative and quantitative methods. For example, the data reported here made more sense in the context of the community profiles, and the 'process' research, which explored how people tried to realise their aspirations, ideally in a way that was compatible with what they valued. Having multiple 'data points' is important as even when similar methods are used, responses differ according to the context of the question, the dynamics of the situation, and the strength of the relationship with the respondent. The quality of life data can also enrich other elements of the project; for example, bearing in mind the value Thai respondents place on family life, labour migration can be viewed as a significant sacrifice, which needs to be rationalised in terms of the benefits to the family from increased income.

Being hospitable was mentioned explicitly in Ethiopia and Peru, while in Thailand the focus was on community participation, for example, leading the community in worldly or spiritual activities, or teaching traditional instruments. Interestingly, observing traditional cultural forms was valued more in Ethiopia than Peru (where it was characterised as 'being

[6] It can be an advantage to be a foreigner in this situation, as respondents are relatively tolerant about answering 'stupid' questions such as 'what does 'behaving well' mean?'

conformist'), however, both categories occurred alongside their opposite of being progressive or 'modern'. A similarly contradiction was that Ethiopian respondents valued both having a good appearance and engaging in conspicuous consumption (e.g. wearing urban fashions and 'drinking beer rather than water at home'), and practicing moderation and temperance. Not being materialistic also appeared in Thailand, but this may be more connected to religion and the powerful Buddhist ideal of the 'world renouncer' (reflected in the number of public figures who take temporary ordination as a monk during the rainy season).

*Data from the countries* (see Appendix one, table three)
In **Bangladesh** the most important characteristic was being benevolent and altruistic, named by over ninety per cent of focus groups. Approximately three quarters of respondents also mentioned being educated, practicing religion, and having a good character. Being honest was also important (sixty three per cent of respondents), as was being respectful towards others (forty four per cent), well behaved and courteous (forty four per cent), and imparting good advice to others (thirty one per cent). These characteristics appeared to be equally valued by men and women, and older and younger age groups.

Being disciplined and hardworking was the most valued characteristic in **Ethiopia**, for example, 'spending time only on farm activities', 'doing whatever job they can get', and 'striv(ing) very hard to attain their objectives'. Family orientation was nearly as important (for example, 'having children from a single wife/ avoiding extra-marital sex', 'keeping children nearby', and encouraging 'reciprocal and supportive family relationships'). As was being progressive or modern (or being seen as such) by 'practicing new farming techniques', 'not sacrificing draft oxen to fulfil social and culture obligations', and 'enjoying western life styles'. Supporting and/ or being supported by family, friends, and community members was also important and included characteristics valued in other countries, for example, giving advice, resolving disputes, and 'having a big heart for the poor'.

Many of the remaining characteristics related to self-presentation and social performance, for example, conspicuous consumption ('building a big house in town'), having a good appearance, practicing moderation or temperance, being respectful and respected (for example, as a *Haji* or an 'inspiration to other farmers'), and being sociable and hospitable. Hospitality also brought material rewards in that someone who 'received neighbours and relatives happily in their home' was more likely to be able to 'attract and manage labour' during harvest time. Material sufficiency was also valued, largely

because it enabled people to be independent ('doesn't need to beg a loan from a rich man') and avoid activities that might damage their status such as working as a daily labourer or, if they were a farmer, having to buy food from the market. Finally, religion was very important and encompassed regular church attendance, faith, respect for God and the church/ Mosque, observing traditional practices (e.g. female genital 'cutting'), and 'maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the community'.

Helping each other ('ayuda'), giving advice, and being progressive, was found in all the **Peruvian** sites. Being a hard worker was mentioned in all sites except the remote village of Decanso, possibly because in this relatively barren environment being a hard worker is considered so common as to not be worthy of comment. Being cheerful occurred in all the rural and urban sites, while being professional, responsible, and educated occurred in all the peri-urban and urban sites. The remaining personal characteristics were area specific; in rural areas people valued sharing, not fighting, organising, and making fiestas, while urban respondents focused on not gossiping, and being conformist, quiet, and respectful. Prosperity/ having goods was found in some sites, but not all, however there were no clear differences in their importance between rural and urban sites.

In **Thailand** the most common characteristics of the 'best or most admirable person' were (in order of importance) leadership, having a good mind and behaving well, being dedicated to the public, and being knowledgeable. The most admired figures were religious figures, local rulers, government officials, politicians, and teachers, all of whom were male. Other values mentioned by Thai respondents were helping each other (as in Peru), generosity and unselfishness (central precepts of Buddhism), unity/ 'no dissent', supporting your family (albeit that for some Thai Muslim men this conflicted with religious practice), religious practice, contributing to society, and not being materialistic.

### 3.3: Summary

A qualitative analysis of the data (carried out by researchers at Bath and in-country) suggests that having good family relationships, being economically secure, being educated or knowledgeable, and being respected or worthy of respect are universally important. Respect was mentioned as important in response to all the questions, not only the third, which could have created a tautology by asking people who they admired or respected. An additional finding, no surprise to psychologists and philosophers but seldom reflected in the design of development projects, is that people's conception of a good life is rarely couched in economic terms.

Friendship and sociability (or fun) appears as a source of happy memories, but not as part of living well. Nor are they a universal part of being a model person, since respondents from Thailand and Bangladesh focused on people's moral, spiritual, and leadership qualities. Conversely, religion is part of both living well and being a model person, but not a source of happy memories, with the exception of a devout Muslim in Ethiopia who enjoyed fasting! This suggests that treating happiness as people's 'universal goal' is not always sufficient to capture their motivations. Helping others, preserving social harmony, and participating in community development are only mentioned under being a model person, suggesting that these may be part of people's discourse rather than their everyday reality. Working hard, holding 'progressive' (modern) attitudes or 'getting ahead', and being economically successful are part of being an ideal person in Ethiopia and Peru (especially for people from urban and peri-urban areas, and fundamentalist Protestant minorities), but not Bangladesh and Thailand. Interestingly, being a hard worker is part of the ideal of a good wife in Bangladesh, which raises the question of who people were thinking about when they responded to this question. For example, in Thailand respondents rarely chose people like themselves, focusing instead on more exalted figures like teachers or monks, which were also predominantly male. While having access to infrastructure and services and a nice home may be pre-requisites for a good life (infrastructure and services were only mentioned in Ethiopia), they are not, in themselves, a source of happiness!

When taken as a whole, the data provides empirical support to Doyal and Gough's classification of 'health' and 'autonomy' as basic needs, and 'significant primary relationships', 'basic education', and 'economic security' as intermediate ones (1991). It appears to support Ryan and Deci's (2001) identification of fundamental psychological needs: 'autonomy' ("the experience of volition, ownership and initiative in one's own behaviour"), 'relatedness' ("feelings of belonging and connection"), and 'competence' ("being able to effectively act on, and have an impact within, one's environment") (Ryan & Brown, 2003), although autonomy appears to be primarily experienced within and through interpersonal relationships (see Devine et al, 2006 for a more detailed treatment of this theme). In the final section, I compare the responses to the question on the characteristics of wellbeing with data from the other participatory studies described in section three to see if themes from the earlier studies have emerged or been elaborated further in the WeD data (see Appendix two, tables one to three).

## 4: COMPARISON WITH OTHER PARTICIPATORY STUDIES ON UNDERSTANDINGS OF POVERTY AND/OR WELLBEING (see Appendix two, tables two and three)

The responses to the question on people living well from the individual WeD countries were initially compared with participatory studies done in similar areas (e.g. Peru and rural Mexico, Bangladesh and India, see Appendix two, table two), however, this tended to highlight local differences and there appeared to be little consensus. For example, affirming cultural identities was important in Mexico but not in Peru, possibly because they were not valued in peri-urban or urban areas, or perceived to be under threat in rural ones. Using larger scale or aggregated studies (see Appendix two, table three), for example Brock's review of participatory research on emic criteria for poverty, illbeing, or vulnerability (1999), gave a clearer sense of the general themes and the degree of overlap. Brock's focus on social and experiential aspects of poverty such as fear, shame, and lack of acceptance from others dovetails with WeD's findings, as does her emphasis on the importance of avoiding relationships of dependency, which was important for older men and women in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, although there were many points of connection, some key themes from the WeD data such as the importance of social relationships and religious practice were either under-specified or ignored. For example, the studies from UNDP and DFID didn't mention the importance of respect and acceptance from others, nor did they explore freedom of choice and agency. 'Social wellbeing' was under-specified in the final framework of the *Consultations with the Poor* study (which referred to 'good family and community relationships' and responsibilities towards your children, but didn't look specifically at relationships with parents, extended family, or partner), and wasn't mentioned at all in the UNDP and DFID studies. No studies reflected the time and effort people invest in their relationships by trying to preserve social harmony, or maintain and develop their community (for example, refraining from gossip or quarrelling, helping and supporting other community members, and taking a leadership or advisory role). Religious observance and spirituality was mentioned in *Consultations with the Poor*, but not in any of the other studies, although it appeared to be central to the lives of many of the WeD respondents from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Thailand. Themes that emerged particularly strongly from the WeD research include the importance of friendship and sociability (for example, celebrating religious holidays and attending fiestas), behaving well

(for example, being honest and cheerful), feeling happy[7] and satisfied, and being proud of your achievements (or those of your family), or simply of your skill in daily activities such as farming.

This comparison suggests that there are a number of things that are important to people which are not covered in mainstream studies, even those using participatory methods (see White 1996, Cooke and Kothari 2001, and Brock and McGee 2002 for explanations of why this might be so). This data needs be available to policy makers and planners so they can better understand people's goals and aspirations, the resources available to them particular environments, and the inevitable trade-offs they make between different elements of a good life (for example, the effect of widespread migration on family relationships in Thailand).

## 5: CONCLUSION

So, why study wellbeing? Unlike traditional goals of development such as national economic stability, the process by which wellbeing is achieved is inseparable from the outcome. It is a dynamic and holistic concept that incorporates the material, relational, and cognitive/ affective dimensions of people's lives. This includes the creation of meaning and forming of standards, which are not individual processes. The openness of the concept enables the understanding of people's lives in their own terms. For example, rather than rush to measurement, the WeD research first asked people what wellbeing meant to them, here and now. The emphasis on 'being' implies support for research providing a socially and culturally embedded view of people's lives. It offers a discursive space for more ethnographic investigations, which have historically been sidelined in development studies. Wellbeing also throws up questions rather than answers, for example, what do people value? What do they aspire to? How do they remain resilient when reality falls short of their aspirations?

If we focus the wellbeing lens on poverty, a number of things become apparent. Firstly, people may not experience themselves as poor, and their labelling may come from a form of 'focusing illusion' where the researcher only sees their most visible difference (see Schkade and Kahneman (1998) who looked at the way non-disabled people responded to people with paraplegia). For example, Biswas-Diener and Diener compared the satisfaction of people in Calcutta who are homeless, living in the slums, or working in the sex trade, with the urban middle classes, and found the only

[7] Happiness was mentioned in *Consultations with the Poor.*

aspect of life the latter group was more satisfied with was their income (2001).

Where people characterise themselves as poor, it may be for different reasons than the researcher might imagine (for example, the isolated Armenian pensioners in the *Consultations with the Poor* study). It also doesn't mean that they then see their lives in terms of lack or deprivation, or are happy to be represented in this way. To rephrase Kahneman, who was originally talking about people with paraplegia, another group whose QoL has been misrepresented by 'experts':

> Everyone is surprised by how happy [the poor] can be. The reason is that they are not [poor] full time. They do other things. They enjoy their meals, their friends. They read the news. It has to do with the allocation of attention
>
> (Kahneman, 2005)

Studying wellbeing rather than poverty enables researchers to explore what poor people have and are able to do, rather than focusing on their deficits, and in this it builds on work in the sustainable livelihoods and resource profiles tradition (for example, Lawson et al, 2000). This should produce more credible and respectful representations of people's lives to inform development policy and practice, hopefully leading to development that creates the conditions for people to experience wellbeing, rather than undermining their existing strategies.

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# APPENDIX 1: WeD DATA[8]

[8] The data in the tables has been compiled from the respective country reports (e.g. Jongudarm and Camfield 2005, Choudhury 2005), supplemented by extensive re-analysis of translations of the original interviews, which are held centrally in an Access database. They represent the most common responses, determined by qualitative (Bangladesh and Ethiopia) and quantitative analyses (Thailand identified twenty six aspects of quality of life and analysed their frequencies in Excel, while Peru used SPSS to carry out a descriptive factor analysis). For ease of comparison, they have been grouped into the categories of Family and Community relationships (also friendship, sociability, good character/ behaviour, preserves social harmony, helping/ supporting each other, participating in community development), Economic security/ material wellbeing, Education, Health (physical and mental), Freedom from responsibility, independence, Achievements, Respect, Access to infrastructure and services, Home, and Religion, which appeared in the original country reports.

Table 1: When were you happiest?
WeD Primary Data, Phase 1 QoL Research

| **Bangladesh** | **Ethiopia** | **Peru** | **Thailand** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Family relationships*** | | | |
| Close relationship with spouse<br>Family relationships<br>Cared for by parents | Own marriage/ relationship with spouse<br>Birth of children<br>Relationships with natal family<br>Celebrating the holidays<br>Childhood, cared for by others (women) | Being in a couple (not necessarily married)<br>Family<br>Birth of children<br>Family | Lover<br>Family relations |
| ***Economic security/ material wellbeing*** | | | |
| Economic stability/ need satisfaction | Material sufficiency<br>Assets (livestock, fertile land)<br>Good harvest | Overcoming scarcity | Assets<br>Good price for produce |
| ***Education*** | | | |
| Studying (not working) | Education | 'Solteria': Exploring and developing 'life skills' | Education |
| ***Health (physical and mental)*** | | | |
| | Health<br>Peace of mind | Rest and recuperation | Health |
| ***Friendship, sociability*** | | | |
| Friendships | Relationships with friends<br>Celebrating the holidays | Fiestas | Good friends |
| ***Freedom from responsibility, independence*** | | | |
| Freedom (no worries or responsibilities), e.g. early marriage<br>Independence, e.g. while student | Independence | Exploration | Independence |

| **Bangladesh** | **Ethiopia** | **Peru** | **Thailand** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Achievements*** | | | |
| Achievements of self or family members | Achievements of self | | Job |
| ***Other*** | | | |
| | National security<br>Farming (as an activity)<br>Religion | | |

**Table 2: What are the characteristics of a man/woman who lives well?**
WeD Primary Data, Phase 1 QoL Research

| Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Peru | Thailand |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Family relationships*** | | | |
| Good relationships with children<br>Children's wellbeing<br>Independence (*realised through family relationships*) | Support from natal family<br>Children's future | Family<br>Being in a couple | Family relationships |
| ***Economic security/ Material wellbeing*** | | | |
| Personal wealth and income<br>Inheriting wealth<br>Household income<br>Business activities/ buying land<br>Job | Economic stability/ need satisfaction (esp. food)<br>Oxen<br>Livestock<br>Modern agricultural equipment<br>Land | Livestock and farming as 'means of sustenance' (rural)<br>Land<br>Job as 'means of sustenance' (urban) | Income<br>Assets<br>Job |
| ***Education*** | | | |
| Education (self and children) | Education (self and children) | | |
| ***Health (physical and mental)*** | | | |
| Health (self and children) | Health | | Health |
| ***Respected*** | | | |
| Respect | Respect | | Good appearance |
| ***Access to infrastructure, services*** | | | |
| | Improved local infrastructure and transportation<br>Govt. and NGO services | | |
| ***Home*** | | | |
| | Good house | House<br>Electricity and water<br>Furniture and appliances | Living conditions |

| **Bangladesh** | **Ethiopia** | **Peru** | **Thailand** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Religion*** | | | |
| Religion | Religion | | Religion |

**Table 3: What are the characteristics of a man/woman who is an ideal person/respected by all?**
WeD Primary Data, Phase 1 QoL Research

| Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Peru | Thailand |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Family relationships*** | | | |
| | Supports/ supported by family<br>'Family oriented' | Responsible | Supporting your family |
| ***Economic security/ Material wellbeing*** | | | |
| | Material sufficiency, independence | Prosperity-goods | |
| ***Progressive, hardworking*** | | | |
| | Progressive, 'modern'<br>Disciplined, hard working | Being progressive<br>Professional<br>Hard work | |
| ***Education, knowledge*** | | | |
| Educated | Educated/ knowledgeable | Educated | Knowledgeable<br>Having a good mind |
| ***Friendship, sociability*** | | | |
| | Sociable, hospitable | Making fiestas | |
| ***Respect*** | | | |
| Respectful | Respected, respectful<br>Good appearance<br>Practices conspicuous consumption | Respectful | |
| ***Good character/ behaviour*** | | | |
| Well behaved and courteous<br>Good character<br>Honest | Good character<br>Behaves ethically<br>Practices moderation, temperance<br>Happy, satisfied | Cheerful | Behaving well |
| ***Religion*** | | | |
| Religious | Religious | | Religious practice<br>Not being materialistic |

| Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Peru | Thailand |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Preserves social harmony*** | | | |
| | Peaceful, harmonious<br>Observes traditional cultural forms | Quiet<br>Not fighting<br>Doesn’t gossip<br>Being conformist | Unity/ ‘no dissent’ |
| ***Helping/ supporting each other*** | | | |
| Benevolent and altruistic | Altruistic, community members supporting each other | Helping each other<br>Sharing | Helping each other<br>Generosity and unselfishness |
| ***Participating in community development*** | | | |
| Giving good advice | Advice giver, communicator | Giving advice<br>Organising | Dedicated to the public<br>Contributing to society<br>Leadership |

## APPENDIX 2

**Table 1: Comparison of the characteristics of wellbeing, illbeing, and poverty found by participatory studies in developing countries**

| **Moore, Choudhury and Singh 1998**<br><br>How Can We Know What They Want? Understanding Local Perceptions of Poverty and Ill-Being in Asia | **Moore, Choudhury and Singh 1998**<br><br>How Can We Know What They Want? Understanding Local Perceptions of Poverty and Ill-Being in Asia | **Mukherjee 1997**<br><br>Informational Rents and Property Rights in Land | **Consultations with the Poor 2000**<br><br>Can Anyone Hear Us? and Crying out for change | **Brock 1999**<br><br>'It's not only wealth that matters, it's peace of mind too". A review of participatory work on poverty and illbeing | **Clark 2000**<br><br>Visions of Development | **Garcia and Way 2003**<br><br>Winning Spaces: Participatory Methodologies in Rural Processes in Mexico |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S. Asia (rural and urban) | Review of DFID and UNDP studies from 1996 and 97 (rural and urban) | Uttar Pradesh, India (rural) | Review of PPAs from 50 LDCs, original data from 23 LDCs (rural and urban) | Review of participatory studies; 12 LDCs (rural and urban) | Murraysburg and Wallacedene, S Africa (rural and urban) | Mexico (rural) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Infrastructure and services*** | | | | | | |
| Access to public services<br>Physical security outside home | | Basic infrastructure and services | | Clean environment<br>Basic infrastructure and services<br>Neighbourhood violence | | |
| ***Home*** | | | | | | |
| Physical security inside home | Secure access to housing *(urban)* | | | Quality of home<br>Domestic violence | Secure and good quality housing | Housing |
| ***Economic security/ material wellbeing*** | | | | | | |
| Economic/ livelihood security | Land/ assets<br>Diverse sources of income<br>Type of job *(urban)*<br>Food sufficiency<br>Household structure *(e.g. adult male labour)* | Regular employment<br>Land | *Material wellbeing: having enough*<br>(food, assets, work) | Access to employment<br>Work and working conditions<br>Money and assets<br>Land<br>Access to natural resources<br>Food security<br>Resilience in response to seasonality and 'shocks' | 'Good' jobs<br>Access to income | Jobs<br>Income |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Education and health (physical and mental)*** | | | | | | |
| | Education | | *Bodily wellbeing*: *being and appearing well* (health, appearances, physical environment)<br>*Psychological wellbeing* (peace of mind, happiness, harmony, including a spiritual life and religious observance) | Health<br>Peace of mind | Education to enhance future prospects<br>Health<br>Happiness | Health |
| ***Family relationships, community relationships*** | | | | | | |
| | | Community unity | *Social wellbeing* (being able to care for, bring up, marry and settle children, peace, harmony, good relations in the family/ community) | Community relationships | Good family | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Respect*** | | | | | | |
| Status; respect and self-respect<br>Protecting rights; avoiding inequality/ discrimination | | | *Social wellbeing* (self-respect and dignity) | Respect and acceptance from others | | Self esteem<br>Reaffirmation of cultural identities<br>Gender relations |
| ***Freedom from responsibility, independence*** | | | | | | |
| | | | *Freedom of choice and action* | Having choices<br>Not being in relationships of dependency<br>Feeling able to act and have some control over the outcome | | |
| | | | *Security* (civil peace, a physically safe and secure environment, personal physical security, lawfulness and access to justice, security in old age, confidence in the future) | Violence within and outside the household<br>Peace of mind (e.g. feeling secure) | | |

n.b. Clark 2000 also mentioned ‘religion’

**Table 2: Comparison of WeD data with data from participatory studies in more than one developing country**
WeD Primary Data, Phase 1 QoL Research

| **WeD** | **Moore, Choudhury and Singh 1998** | **Consultations with the Poor 2000** (see footnote 5) | **Brock 1999** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *4 LDCs, rural and urban sites* | *Review of DFID and UNDP studies* | *Over 50 LDCs, rural and urban sites* | *Review of participatory studies in 12 LDCs, rural and urban sites* |
| ***Infrastructure and services*** | | | |
| Basic infrastructure Govt. and NGO services | | *Security* (civil peace, a physically safe and secure environment, personal physical security, lawfulness and access to justice, security in old age, confidence in the future) | Clean environment<br>Basic infrastructure and services<br>Community relationships<br>Neighbourhood violence |
| ***Home*** | | | |
| Good house (e.g. water and electricity, furniture) | Secure access to housing *(urban)* | | Quality of home Domestic violence |
| ***Economic security/ Material wellbeing*** | | | |
| Economic stability/ need satisfaction through livestock and farming and/ or business activities and employment<br>Land and other assets | Land/ assets<br>Diverse sources of income<br>Type of job *(urban)*<br>Food sufficiency<br>Household structure *(e.g. adult male labour)* | *Material wellbeing: having enough*<br>(food, assets, work) | Access to employment<br>Work and working conditions<br>Money and assets<br>Land<br>Access to natural resources<br>Food security |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Resilience in response to seasonality and 'shocks' |
| ***Education and Health (physical and mental)*** | | | |
| Health (self and children)<br>Education (self and children) | Education | *Bodily wellbeing*: *being and appearing well* (health, appearances, physical environment)<br>*Psychological wellbeing* (peace of mind, happiness, harmony, including a spiritual life and religious observance) | Health<br>Peace of mind |
| ***Respect*** | | | |
| Respect<br>Good appearance | | | Respect and acceptance from others |
| ***Freedom from responsibility, independence*** | | | |
| Independence (specific periods and relationships) | | *Freedom of choice and action* | Having choices; not being in relationships of dependency<br>Feeling able to act and have some control over the outcome |
| ***Family relationships, community relationships*** | | | |
| Relationships within the household and extended family<br>Having a partner<br>Children's physical, socio-economic and moral wellbeing | | *Social wellbeing* (being able to care for, bring up, marry and settle children, peace, harmony, good relations in the family/ community) | |

**Table 3: Components of a good life identified by WeD Respondents which were omitted from previous Participatory Studies**
WeD Primary Data, Phase 1 QoL Research

| *Friendship, sociability* |
|---|
| Relationships with friends<br>Celebrating the holidays/ Fiestas<br>Being sociable, hospitable |
| *Good character/ behaviour* |
| Well behaved and courteous<br>Good character<br>Ethical, honest<br>Practices moderation, temperance<br>Cheerful<br>Happy, satisfied |
| *Preserves social harmony* |
| Peaceful, harmonious<br>Observes traditional cultural forms<br>Doesn't fight or gossip<br>Unity/ 'no dissent' |
| *Helping/ supporting each other* |
| Community members supporting/ helping each other<br>Generosity and unselfishness, sharing<br>Benevolence and altruism |
| *Participating in community development* |
| Advice giver, communicator<br>Organiser, leader<br>Contributes to society, dedicated to the public |
| *Achievements* |
| Achievements of self or family members (e.g. getting a job) |
| *Other* |
| National security<br>Farming (as an activity) |

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WeD 02 'Research on Well-Being: Some Advice from Jeremy Bentham' by David Collard (May 2003)
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