



Maitreyee

Briefing of the Human Development and Capability Association
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Dear HDCA Members,

The February 2007 *Maitreyee* discussed the subject of multidimensionality, one of the core characteristics of the capability/human development approach. At the time, we examined the question of ‘how to choose dimensions of poverty/wellbeing?’. Choosing the most relevant dimensions of wellbeing is unfortunately not the only difficulty when using the capability approach to assess states of affairs. Once a relevant dimension is chosen, the measurement question springs to the fore. Agency, security or dignified employment might be dimensions that one has concluded as most relevant to capture the wellbeing of people in one particular context. However, how to assess how people fare in each of these dimensions? There is a plethora of data on literacy, life expectancy, nutrition, infant mortality and other social indicators. But available data might not represent valuable dimensions of wellbeing. How to measure the dimensions of wellbeing for which no international comparable indicators exist?

‘Measuring missing dimensions of wellbeing’ has been the subject of a 3-day international workshop at the University of Oxford last May, corresponding with the launch of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. What are the boundaries of what can be measured? Are there aspects of poverty that cannot be measured? If so what might they be? What do you think about such a line of questions? These were a few of the questions that were debated.

This current issue of *Maitreyee* discusses some of the above questions. Sabina Alkire discusses the rationale for improving current measures on key dimensions of wellbeing and summarizes the papers on ‘missing dimensions’ that were presented at the May workshop in Oxford: employment, empowerment physical safety, ability to go about without shame, subjective and psychological wellbeing (all papers and video lectures can be downloaded from the website: www.ophi.org.uk). A big part of the debate relates to the very relevance of measuring itself. Is the collection of ‘brute data’ to assess states of affairs always desirable? Ravi Kanbur and Paul Shaffer discuss how quantitative and qualitative methods of poverty assessment can be mixed together.

‘In the Practice’ section proposes a methodology for empirical research on multi-dimensional wellbeing that has been pioneered by the ESRC Wellbeing in Developing Countries research group.

We hope that you will find the discussion useful and thought-provoking. If you wish to propose a topic for the next *Maitreyee* in February 2008, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Insights

The Missing Dimensions of Poverty Data¹

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Human Development is the process of expanding the freedoms that people value and have reason to value. This requires, in turn, systematic information on valuable freedoms. The well-known measure of human development, the HDI or Human Development Index, includes income, longevity, and education – yet it is widely agreed that human development extends beyond these domains. Multidimensional poverty analyses identify a number of relevant dimensions and indicators of poverty. However, a lack of sound, internationally comparable data at the individual/household level in key domains creates a critical bottleneck for studies of human development and multidimensional poverty.

The work described here was presented the launch workshop of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), which took place 29-30 May 2007 at the University of Oxford (www.ophi.org.uk) and at the Centre for Human and Economic Development Studies (CHEDS), 3-4 November 2007, University of Beijing. The Oxford workshop, entitled “Missing Dimensions of Poverty Data,” provided the occasion to engage in the first part of a broader research agenda, which seeks to devise a new framework for multidimensional poverty reduction grounded in the capability approach and related ideas.

To spark debate, we identified five areas for which insufficient data exist:

- **Employment**, particularly informal employment, with special attention as to quality;
- **Empowerment**, or agency: the ability to advance goals one values and has reason to value;
- **Physical safety**, focusing on security from violence to property and person, as well as perceived violence;
- **The ability to go about without shame**, to emphasize the importance of dignity, respect and freedom from humiliation;
- **Psychological and subjective wellbeing**, to emphasize meaning, its determinants, and satisfaction.

The first four of these are dimensions of poverty. We do not strictly consider psychological and subjective wellbeing to be a dimension of poverty as there is doubt, which we share, over the extent to which people who are lacking in this dimension might be considered poor, and as to its policy relevance. At the same time, it does appear to be an important aspect meriting future study and thus a ‘missing dimension’ of data.

This article describes the rationale for focusing upon the problem of missing data and specifically upon expanding the range of questions asked in internationally-comparable and nationally-representative surveys – particularly in developing countries where the need is greatest both because of more poverty and less existing data. It then justifies the choice of the five aforementioned dimensions, and briefly introduces each.

Missing Data

If we understand development to be the process of expanding the freedoms that people value and have reason to value (Sen 1990), then a key aspect of assessing these freedoms is to measure them in a manner that is consistent and comparable over time and space. The Human

¹ A longer version of this article will appear in the December issue of the *Oxford Journal of Development Studies*. The background papers used for this article can be found on the publication section of www.ophi.org.uk.

Development Indicator, for instance, has long been recognized as an incomplete measure. Sen (2004) writes:

“The ‘Human Development Index’...has been remarkably successful in serving as a measure of development, rivaling the gross national product (GNP). Based on three components, viz. indicators of basic education, longevity and income per head, it is not exclusively focused on economic opulence (as the GNP is), and it certainly has served to broaden empirical attention in assessing the process of development. However it is a very limited indicator of development.”

In a recent empirical exploration of this point, Ranis et al. (2006) showed that the HDI is poorly correlated with a range of important dimensions of life: mental wellbeing, empowerment, political freedom, social and community relations, inequality, work conditions, leisure, political and economic stability, and the environment. On the basis of this work, they concluded that “extending the concept and measurement of Human Development to a broader set of dimensions seriously affects the way one should measure and assess country performance” (p. 349) but comment on the dearth of data for this purpose.

There are at least five reasons why an initiative to identify and advocate a small set of indicators for important but non-standard dimensions of human development may be both useful and feasible.

First, more such data exist than in any previous generation; indicators are generated by household surveys and community-based surveys, as well as censuses and demographic and social surveys. Thus a wealth of experience with non-standard indicators can inform the selection of technically accurate and cross-culturally comparable indicators.

Second, a number of initiatives are already exploring how to measure capabilities and functionings in these five areas, and how to structure national and regional assessments. This initiative to shortlist key ‘missing’ indicators of human development for international data collection has drawn upon and endeavoured to support such initiatives.

Third, these dimensions may be important triggers of human development in other dimensions (and oversight of them may also block or slow poverty reduction in other spaces). Each of these dimensions seems to be causally interconnected with other aspects of poverty in complex ways.

Fourth, and as will be argued below, the missing dimensions are arguably intrinsically important – hence their selection.

Finally, multidimensional poverty measures can illuminate certain issues better, for example targeting, and distribution of acute poverty, if data are aggregated first across dimensions, and secondly across individuals. For the HDI, data are aggregated across all individuals for each domain. However a distinct advantage emerges if the data are all available from the same survey, or from surveys that can be matched at the individual level. Identifying the nature and depth of poverties that individuals and households face is of significant policy relevance. As the matching of surveys is both ethically and logistically difficult, particularly in developing countries, we focus on light modules that could be added to existing survey instruments.

Data Sources

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Campaign has clearly identified and advocated international data collection and reporting on 49 indicators. Such data considerably enrich analyses of human development, and this advance is rightly celebrated. Nonetheless, it remains the case that in certain fundamental areas of human development, internationally comparable indicators at the individual and household levels are missing. For the MDG indicators, as critical as they are, do not encompass all fundamental dimensions of human development nor, for that matter, of human security or human rights. The United Nations *Millennium Declaration*, passed by the General Assembly in 2000, gave rise to the MDGs.

However, the same document also recognized other aspects of human life to be fundamentally important, such as protection from violence. Deepa Narayan and others' study of the *Voices of the Poor* found that in addition to safety, the poor also valued dimensions such as dignity, 'freedom of choice and action', 'peace of mind' and 'social relations', including being able to care for others. Sen has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of valuable freedoms, and of people as active agents – which is often discussed under the title empowerment. Moreover, he also discusses people's ability to go about without shame, a dimension that emerges somewhat in current literature on social exclusion and inclusion. Many other authors advance similar observations regarding critically important dimensions for which scant data are available.

This data constraint deeply affects researchers' ability to probe human development empirically. Accordingly a focus on seeking to generate missing data can be considered as an investment in the ability to undertake sound multidimensional poverty research in the future.

Among the various data collection instruments currently geared at collecting the relevant data, four well-known surveys already are drawn upon by countries to collect check and report data on multidimensional poverty and the MDGs: the World Bank Living Standards and Measurement Survey (LSMS), the World Bank Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ); the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Demographic and Health Survey (DHS); and the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). In all these surveys, the dimensions we propose are largely absent – though some countries have adopted particular questions relating to some dimensions.

Grounds for indicator selection

This initiative is presently concentrating on one method of data collection: individual and household surveys (hereafter, termed household surveys) that are internationally comparable and nationally representative. These surveys have many strengths that justify this emphasis: the depth and breadth of coverage; the possibility of comparing data on the proposed dimensions with data that are already collected, particularly data relevant to the MDGs; and the ability to feed directly into policy-relevant research. Household surveys can be used to generate various types of data – quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective. Here we are open to exploring their use for collecting all these types of information as they bear upon the missing dimensions. This method nonetheless contains limitations: by design, household surveys overlook other important levels of analysis – for example, intrahousehold and community factors, as well as institutional and national/global issues. While household surveys are at the forefront of this particular research agenda, clearly they are but one relevant level of information.

The following criteria were used to choose suitable indicators for inclusion in individual or household surveys. First, the indicators needed to be *internationally comparable*. This is particularly important as there is a dearth of information available on comparative indicators of our 'missing dimensions'. Second, the indicators seek to assess not only the instrumental but also the *intrinsic* aspects of the dimensions we propose. Third, it was essential to select indicators that would be able to identify *changes* in our dimensions over time. Fourth, and crucially, the choice of the indicators draws on *experience with particular indicators* to date, i.e., how frequently these indicators have been previously fielded and found to be 'adequate' measures for research purposes.² The perception-based indicators have been less frequently used in nationally-representative surveys but have been subject to psychometric testing for reliability and validity; however, these indicators ought to be further scrutinized, particularly in the context of poorer countries.

² Each author considered the major survey instruments referred to above as well as regional 'Barometer' surveys, European surveys (ESS, SILC, etc.) and specialized surveys on topics such as crime and victimization.

Missing Dimensions

Having pointed to the need for additional data and to the proposed collection method, we selected specific dimensions that are valued by poor people and have policy relevance. Next, there is a need to move to tangible indicators and questions that represent the key elements of each dimension. The end result of this process was to devise a list of five to eight indicators for each category that could comprise a 'light' module that could be appended to conventional survey instruments by enumerators trained in a standard manner. Each dimension is discussed in turn.³

Employment

Employment is certainly not a new dimension of wellbeing, but it is sometimes forgotten in human development and poverty reduction policies or, at least, not considered in sufficient depth. Employment is the main source of income for most families in the world. Having a good and decent job is generally associated with being out of poverty, however poverty is defined. Additionally, employment can give a sense of self-respect and fulfillment. There is hence no question as to the importance of employment as a fundamental aspect of individual wellbeing. However, existing employment data generally focuses on formal employment, thereby overlooking the kinds of employment open to poor people. Lugo (2007) proposes five indicators of employment to help answer these questions, at a global level. Four of these relate to the *quality* of employment. These comprise informal employment; income from self-employment; occupational safety and health; and under- and over-employment. The final indicator relates to *quantity*; it seeks to determine the level of discouraged unemployment – i.e., people who would like to be working but have stopped looking for a job.

Empowerment

Agency has been defined as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Sen 1985, p. 206) and more simply, as “someone who acts and brings about change” (Sen 1999, p. 19). The opposite of a person with agency is someone who is coerced, oppressed or passive. Agency and its expansion (empowerment) recurs as a variable that is of intrinsic and instrumental importance to impoverished communities. Building on a growing body of empirical research, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) propose a ‘short list’ of indicators aimed at capturing the individual and collective facets of agency. In brief, they use *decision-making* questions to identify perceptions of control, who makes decisions about different areas of household life and whether the respondent could if he or she chose. To measure the extent to which people feel themselves to be coerced, and/or acting on their own initiative, the article proposes, uniquely, *autonomy* measures from psychology that have been tested across cultures and recently in poor communities. Other questions explore the extent to which individuals feel empowered to bring about change at both the individual and communal levels.

Physical safety

One of the greatest impediments to human security in the post-Cold War era is not war fought by the armed forces of nation states, but violence perpetrated by individuals, groups and state actors within countries. Violence undoes the development gains achieved in areas such as education, health, employment, income generation and infrastructure provision. Further, it impedes human freedom to live safely and security, and can sustain poverty traps in many communities. However, violence is not inevitable to human interaction. Most multi-ethnic,

multi-religious and poor peoples live in peace. There is a need for reliable and comparable data of violence against both person and property to greater inform our understanding of these concepts. Diprose (2007) proposes a series of questions to measure violence derived from both conflict and crime – two categories that are not normally combined in survey instruments. In particular, the article seeks to identify the incidence and frequency of both general crime and conflict-related violence against person and property; and perceptions of threat(s) to security and safety, both now and in the future.

The ability to go about without shame

Shame and humiliation are essential to our understanding of poverty yet internationally comparable data on these dimensions are missing. Based on existing indicators from related fields, Zavaleta (2007) proposes eight indicators to measure specific aspects of shame and humiliation. Indicators for measuring shame have been selected from the HIV/AIDS-related stigma literature, from literature on discrimination, and from instruments used in psychology. The first indicator relates to the *shame of being associated with poverty*, or the *stigma of poverty*. The second indicator relates to *shame proneness*, a more innate characteristic. Shame proneness is particularly relevant because it affects social relationships, self-respect and “the ability to go about without shame”, which are all aspects of capability poverty. Indicators of humiliation refer to that experienced in response to external events and to the internal experience of humiliation. These indicators refer particularly to *respectful treatment*, *unfair treatment* and *discrimination*.

Psychological and subjective wellbeing

The final aspect we consider pertains to psychological and subjective states of wellbeing, which have clear intrinsic and instrumental value. They are a key component of the other dimensions we propose, as well as an end result of their attainment. Moreover, they stand to contribute a richer perspective to our understanding of human experience and values, and particularly the importance of its non-material components. Samman (2007) advocates a two-pronged approach to psychological wellbeing based on 1) perceptions of *meaning in life*, defined by the respondent based on his/her own unique potential; and 2) the ability to strive towards excellence in fulfilling this idea. To develop these concepts, she draws on Michael Steger’s Meaning in Life questionnaire, and on Ed Deci and Rich Ryan’s measures of the psychological needs associated with goal identification and pursuit, which in turn predict ‘optimal functioning’. These needs are autonomy, competence and relatedness. To capture *subjective wellbeing*, she proposes the separate measurement of life satisfaction and happiness, and that the satisfaction measure consider life overall and several distinct domains that are argued to be important – namely, material wellbeing (food, income, housing); health, work, physical safety, relations with friends and family, education, one’s neighbourhood, the ability to actively help others, and wellbeing from spiritual/religious/philosophical beliefs.

Next steps

The papers described in the December issue of *Oxford Development Studies* propose numerous indicators and questionnaires to represent the dimensions, all of which have been subject to extensive debate and improvement during the workshops and subsequently. However they represent only the first stage in the process, which will go on to include critical examination and testing of these indicators and questions, research as to their value added and contribution, and advocacy of their inclusion in various data collection instruments. It is hoped that this work will make a salient contribution not merely to *measure* poverty, but to create a framework for research and policy that will lead to lasting poverty reduction.

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Epistemology, Normative Theory and Poverty Analysis: Implications for Q-Squared in Practice⁴

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In recent years, increasing attention has focused on using mixed qualitative and quantitative (Q-Squared) methods in the analysis of poverty. This recent rediscovery of mixed methods in poverty analysis is a welcome development with large potential payoffs in terms of understanding and explaining poverty. In our view, the benefits of mixing are not in doubt. It does seem however, that the tensions involved in so doing have not received adequate attention.

The aim of this article is to address this gap in the 'Q-Squared' literature. It argues that there are important differences between approaches to poverty which operate at the levels of epistemology and normative theory. These differences have implications for the numerical transformation of data, the selection of validity criteria, the conception/dimension of poverty adopted and interpersonal comparisons of well-being.

Building on results of the first Q-Squared Conference in 2002 at Cornell University, an initial attempt to unpack the qualitative/quantitative distinction was proposed in Kanbur (2003). This typology included the following five dimensions of difference:

1. Type of Information on Population: Non-Numerical to Numerical.
2. Type of Population Coverage: Specific to General.
3. Type of Population Involvement: Active to Passive.
4. Type of Inference Methodology: Inductive to Deductive.
5. Type of Disciplinary Framework: Broad Social Sciences to Neo-classical Economics.

⁴ This is a shortened version of the paper 'Epistemology, Normative Theory and Poverty Analysis: Implications for Q-Squared in Practice', *Q-Squared Working Paper* 2, October 2005 and *World Development*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2007. It was condensed by Manu V. Mathai.

While this typology helps by clarifying terminology and spelling out exactly what is being distinguished it also raises issues concerning both the distinctions themselves as well as their derivation from foundational categories. For instance, the numerical/non-numerical distinction also brings out important differences in the numerical transformation process between types of data and further, as discussed below, the distinction between data-types that is likely related to epistemological differences between traditions of inquiry in the social sciences. Or consider the active/passive distinction derived from a standard distinction in the philosophy of social science between ‘critical’ and ‘other’ traditions of inquiry. It brings to the fore debates surrounding critical traditions of social science which maintain that emancipation, enlightenment or empowerment is a central feature of the research exercise (Fay, 1987) such as over the alleged empowering import of different approaches to poverty, in particular the ‘participatory poverty approach’.

Differences in epistemological approach to poverty research underlie a standard distinction in the philosophy of social science between empiricism, hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics (Braybrooke, 1987; Fay, 1975). Empiricism is a research approach predicated on an observation-based model for determining the truth or validity of knowledge claims. Hermeneutics is generally defined as the interpretative understanding of intersubjective meanings. We define the critical hermeneutic tradition as one predicated on a discourse-based model for establishing the truth or validity of knowledge claims which assigns a special role to ‘intersubjective meanings’.

We argue that there are important links between empiricism and the consumption poverty approach, the ‘gold standard’ in applied poverty analysis in the developing world (e.g. Ravallion, 1994). This approach is an amalgam of two variants of utility theory, revealed preference theory and money metric utility, and nutrition science. Important linkages are also found between the critical hermeneutic tradition, as defined above, and those approaches to poverty which rely heavily on dialogic techniques, such as focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and life histories to come to an understanding of poverty. Such epistemological differences between empiricism and critical hermeneutics influence what counts as ‘units of knowledge’ and criteria for ‘truth’ or ‘validity’ in poverty research.

Units of Knowledge

Brute data have played a critically important role in both empiricism and the consumption approach to poverty as the bedrock of knowledge and arbiter of validity claims. This evolution is largely underwritten by the early twentieth century acceptance of the logical positivist position that *public*, inter-subjective knowledge claims cannot be based on *private* sensations. The inter-subjective observability that characterizes brute data, meets the calls for subject-invariance of properties or qualities of objects. As a result, a major preoccupation of the consumption approach to poverty has been to base its core elements on intersubjectively observable data. Nutrition science aimed to set a minimal level of basic human needs in an intersubjectively observable way; revealed preference theory was expressly intended to make preferences intersubjectively observable, whereas money metric utility sought to facilitate intersubjectively observable comparisons of welfare. In other words, much of poverty analysis is conducted in intersubjectively observable fashion. Thus in the consumption poverty approach, the wellbeing metric itself, utility, is transformed into an intersubjectively observable datum, revealed preference, to which an ‘empirical’ scale, money is applied.

In the critical hermeneutic tradition, the core unit of knowledge shifts from brute data to ‘intersubjective *meanings*’. We define intersubjective meanings as the core categories, beliefs and values which give sense to social phenomena and meaning to social action. This concept of intersubjective meanings is central to the fundamental claim of hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics that social phenomena are ‘intrinsically meaningful’. Phenomena such

as poverty are constituted, in part, by the intersubjective meanings given to them and interpreted by social actors, including researchers. Accordingly, explaining the social world is to undertake a 'double hermeneutic' analysis, i.e. to interpret a world which is pre-interpreted by social agents (Giddens, 1976, p. 162). Failure to do so imposes severe restrictions on social inquiry: 'we interpret all other societies in the categories of our own' (Taylor 1985, p. 42). In the 'participatory poverty approach', well-being rankings are often used to generate numbers of the poor, which are sometimes compared across sites. But unlike intersubjectively observable 'brute data', the constructed well-being metric is not subject-invariant.

These epistemological differences relating to the privileged unit of knowledge, brute data vs. intersubjective meanings, have consequences for the properties of numbers generated in the numerical transformation process, subject-invariant or not, with implications for policy-related applications, i.e. making consistent interpersonal comparisons.

Validity Criteria

The second difference between empiricism and critical hermeneutics concerns truth and validity criteria. Again, largely ensuing from the rejection of sense-data by logical positivists, the truth or validity of statements is closely related to intersubjective observability. Thus, determination of the validity of theoretical statements became a process of establishing their correspondence to intersubjectively observable, subject-invariant, physical data. While the particular correspondence criteria or rules of choice – 'strict verifiability', 'confirmability' and 'falsifiability' – have been the subject of considerable debate over the years (Caldwell, 1984) they all converge in that brute data are the referents to which testing is applied. And in practice this importance accorded to brute data has played a critical role in establishing validity in the consumption poverty approach.

On the other hand, the critical hermeneutic tradition generally rejects this central role of intersubjective observability in establishing validity. The main reason is that narrative information generated by dialogic processes plays a much more central role in the analysis. For instance, an attempt to formulate validity criteria within critical hermeneutics, propounded by Jürgen Habermas, relies on a consensus theory of truth that rests on the premise that truth is the property of a statement which has been argumentatively, or discursively, validated (Habermas, 1991).

The key point for our purposes is that the coexistence of different validity criteria ends up raising tensions for Q-Squared-type work as illustrated in a number of the referee reports for the 'Q-Squared in Practice' symposium, and responses by the contributors. Much of the controversy hinged on the validity of narrative information generated in focus groups and semi-structured interviews concerning one's own poverty condition and/or that of others. For instance, in a comment on work addressing food security situation of households within a given area, the referee maintains that, 'there is no good evidence that they [the key informants] are either objective, knowledgeable or capable of making the appropriate judgments and assessments'. The authors counter that the above view 'challenges 30 years of work on participation. Do you really want us to go back to basics on this?!' Beneath such conflicting perspectives lie debates about the relative merits of inter-subjective observability and discourse-based validity criteria. Reconciling these viewpoints entails philosophical not technical analysis.

Normative Theory

From the epistemological influences on poverty research, we turn to influences from normative theory. The Q-Squared project cannot avoid this as poverty is value-laden in a direct and immediate way. As such, questions arise about the underpinnings of different conceptions of poverty and/or the processes of determining their constituent elements. The

consumption and participatory approaches to poverty draw on different traditions of normative theory to arrive at their objects of value, i.e. the conceptions of poverty which they use. There is a historical link between consumption poverty and what is known as naturalist normative theory. And, there are parallels between the participatory poverty approach and discursive normative theory, also known as the 'discourse ethics'.

Naturalist normative theory attempts to ground evaluative claims in empirical fact. The main approach to do this is the so called 'brute data grounding', which aims to derive the object of moral or prudential value from sensory experience or observation. The main historical figure in the development of naturalist normative theory is David Hume. There is a clear historical link between Hume and the consumption poverty approach, which runs through Jeremy Bentham and some of the founders of utility theory (see Shaffer, 2002). Hume attempted to derive the object of moral value (virtue) from sensory experience and Bentham followed Hume in grounding his core evaluative standard, the principle of utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle, in human sentiment. Both sought to construct normative theory without recourse to non-empirical entities. Modern utility theory drops the mental state of happiness or pleasure in favour of the observable state of preference fulfilment. Revealed preference theory rendered preferences intersubjectively observable and money metric utility *allegedly* restored interpersonal comparability to utility following its earlier rejection as unscientific (Robbins, 1962, pp. 138-9). As discussed in the previous section, the brute data grounding is quite integral to the consumption poverty approach.

Discursive normative theory finds its grounding in discourse, i.e., an actual discussion among participants in dialog. It rejects the 'monological' identification of particular objects of value such as happiness or preference fulfilment, and lays out a procedural metanorm about how normative disputes are to be adjudicated without specifying the contents of any ensuing agreements. While there is no direct historical link, discursive normative theory has parallels with aspects of the participatory approach to poverty where an actual dialogue is required to determine the dimensions of poverty in which viewpoints are subject to critical review by participants. Further, there has been increasing recognition of the elusiveness of 'true' participation given asymmetries of power, knowledge, ability, etc. among participants (Mosse, 1994). As a result, a number of techniques have been developed to facilitate greater participation.

What is the relevance for Q-Squared? The reliance on different traditions of normative theory poses tensions for the Q-Squared initiative because different approaches to poverty are likely to favour different dimensions of poverty. One example is Shaffer's (1998) study from the Republic of Guinea. According to the 'brute data' approach women are not more likely than men to be consumption poor or to suffer greater consumption poverty. Indeed, women fare better than men on a number of consumption based poverty comparisons. PPA data from the village of Kamatiguia in Upper Guinea, however, suggest that women as a group are worse off than men as a group. In group discussions, a substantial majority of men and women maintained that women were 'worse off' than men, and a larger majority held that in a second life they would prefer to be born male than female. Further, in well-being ranking exercises, groups of both men and women separately ranked all but two married village women below all male household heads in terms of their own criteria of well-/ill-being. According to participants this finding has to do with two dimensions of deprivation that disproportionately affect women, and are not well captured in consumption poverty: excessive work load and restricted decision-making authority.

The tension that arises for Q-Squared type analyses is that as more and more dimensions of poverty arise, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine their relative importance for policy-related purposes, such as targeting or resource allocation. While there are statistical techniques to perform multidimensional poverty analysis, such as factorial

analysis, statistical valuation is different from the normative valuation which underlies well-being rankings.

Normative theory matters for Q-Squared poverty analysis because different theoretical traditions tend to favour different conceptions or dimensions of poverty. While there are ways to deal with this, all involve tradeoffs between retaining the comprehensiveness and richness of people's perceptions of well-being on the one hand and meeting the requirements of standardization to make consistent interpersonal comparisons of well-being, on the other. The tensions are at root philosophical and not amenable to an easy technical fix.

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In the Practice

Methodology for empirical research on wellbeing: A proposal from the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group

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The ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) has carried out extensive empirical research into the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in four developing countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand). The conception of wellbeing in which the WeD group has evolved is one that is concerned with human flourishing and the societal conditions within which that can take place. It addresses the issue of how we might live well together in society and it is concerned with development as good change. The conceptual reviews undertaken and the findings of the empirical research have prompted the group to adopt the following concise and practical definition of wellbeing:

Wellbeing is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one is able to enjoy a satisfactory quality of life.

The emphasis here is upon a life lived well and wellbeing outcomes that are continuously generated through conscious and sub-conscious participation in social, economic, political and cultural processes. It is a hybrid definition of wellbeing that is different from many of the other ways in which the term wellbeing is currently used in academic and policy discourse. It is neither objective nor subjective, but seeks to combine elements of both and transcend them by recognizing the role of social construction in each. This definition means that any attempt to assess or find indicators of wellbeing or to understand the processes that generate (or inhibit) it must take account of three dimensions of social being: the material, the relational and the mental (where this involves both cognition and affect).

Following recent writings from different disciplines¹ we believe that the research affirms the possibility of identifying universal human needs, the denial of which generates harm in all circumstances. These needs include health, autonomy, security, competence and relatedness, the satisfaction of which at a basic level enhances wellbeing everywhere. These needs go beyond the usual material or basic components to include psychological and relational needs. Many in turn require a set of intermediate need satisfiers, such as food, health care, secure livelihoods etc, which have material foundations or are located in, or pursued through social relationships. Significantly, also the WeD definition recognises the need for meaning since it is this that makes social life possible.

People's goals inform the actions they pursue to achieve them, but the goals and the actions are in large part be shaped by the material, social and cultural contexts in which people are embedded, from their family through community, nation-state to the increasingly interconnected global society. Thus we cannot study the wellbeing of persons divorced from their social contexts. However, while actions usually take place within local frames of meaning, this does not mean that people cannot act outside these frames. The different forms of relationship within which people are embedded offer opportunities for choice (however constrained) between different goals and of different identities. Thus the pursuit of meaningful action – action consistent with one's values and goals – is ever-present.

The third dimension of our notion of wellbeing addresses issues of happiness or good feeling (positive affect) and recognises that this is in general a good thing, and hedonic psychology² tells us much about its causes and its effects. It also shows that happiness is more than the absence of misery. However, we know that hedonic happiness is affected by aspirations and adaptive preferences, so is not always a reliable guide to the broader idea of subjective wellbeing. Therefore the definition recognises a cognitive aspect of subjective wellbeing, interpreted as satisfaction with the achievement of personally important goals in one's life.

The WeD Methodology

In order to carry out empirical studies using this notion of wellbeing the group devised a comprehensive research methodology, rejecting all single measures or single method approaches. The WeD methodology consists of six inter-related research components for measuring and exploring wellbeing. The six research elements are described in some detail in the Toolbox section of the WeD website and are:³

1. Community Profiling

¹ For example L.Doyal and I.Gough *A Theory of Human Need* (London: MacMillan, 1991); R.Ryan and E.Deci 'On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being', *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol.52 (2001).

² D. Kahneman, E. Diener and N. Schwartz (eds), *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (Russel Sage Foundation, 1999).

³ See <http://www.welldev.org.uk/research/methods-toobox/toolbox>

2. The Resources and Needs Questionnaire (RANQ)
3. Quality of Life (WeDQoL)
4. Income and Expenditure Survey and Diaries (I&E)
5. Process research
6. Structures and regimes

Conceptually these six interrelated methods can be grouped in three pairs dealing with outcomes, structures and processes. Following the definition the three main types of outcome that we gathered data on were the needs that had been met, the resources that people and households had available to them in their efforts to achieve their desired goals and the level of satisfaction or Quality of Life that people were able to achieve. The *RANQ* and the *WeDQoL* deal with outcomes and involved both objective and subjective traditions of study. Structures are addressed by the *Community Profiles* and the *Structures and Regimes* work. The *Community Profiles* deal with near dimensions of social, economic, political and cultural structures, while the *Structures and Regimes* work deals with wider scale phenomena. Finally, processes are dealt with by the *Income Expenditure* work and the *Process Research*. The former explores the ways in which resources are translated into incomes and expenditures over a year, and the latter deals in more detail with how different persons and households, in different community contexts engage in processes that are key to their wellbeing. The methods were used in a sequence which allowed the accumulation of understanding about the people, communities and nation-states included in the study, and also sought to build trust between the field researchers and the people of the specific communities in which detailed and extended fieldwork took place. The empirical work took place over a period of between 15 months and two years.

Broadly speaking the sequence of the methods follows the order of the list above. After the communities for study had been selected, *Community Profiling* allowed the research to be introduced to the community and then the generation of broad brush profiles of the communities and their people. The approach to community profiles varied to some extent across the four countries but the reports they generated all provided information on basic community demographics and an introductory description of the social, economic, political, and cultural structures evident in the communities studied.

The introductory phase of study was followed by the grounding, piloting and application of the *Resources and Needs Questionnaire* (the *RANQ*). The design of this household survey was guided by two of the bodies of thinking that had underpinned the proposal for the WeD research: the theory of human need advanced by Doyal and Gough and the resource profiles approach employed by a number of researchers at Bath.⁴

The *RANQ* was developed through multi-disciplinary discussion and in iteration with all of the country teams. Its production entailed compromises on, for example, what items were included, the length of enquiry, and the form of the questions, but the process was guided by the intention of achieving a degree of cognitive and linguistic equivalence across all four countries such that the results from it could be analysed for each country in its own right, and also across the four countries. In this way the instrument sought to be both sensitive to 'local' realities, but also amenable for 'universal' analysis. The findings of the *RANQ* then became a foundational point of reference for subsequent work.

The *WeD Quality of Life* work was carried out in three phases. The first phase was a period of exploratory study where a range of methods and approaches were used to explore what people in the communities said mattered to them for their quality of life. Phase two involved reflection on these findings across the four countries and the formulation of a single instrument – the *WeDQoL* – to be applied to a sample of people across all communities, in all

⁴ I. Gough, A. McGregor and L. Camfield, 'Wellbeing in Developing Countries: Conceptual Foundations of the WeD Programme', *WeD Working Paper* 19, September 2006.

four countries. This second phase produced a provisional definition of Quality of Life. Closely following the WHO definition of Quality of Life, the WeD researchers adopted the working definition that:

(Quality of Life is) the outcome of the gap between people's goals and perceived resources, in the context of their environment, culture, values, and experiences.

The third phase involved the grounding, piloting and application of the WeDQoL. Following the definition above, the WeD-QoL is a suite of questions which is interview-administered and which explore different dimensions of a person's perceived quality of life. It includes scales on: Goals, Goal Achievement, Perceived Resource Availability, and Values; as well as adaptations of two internationally validated scales, the SWLS (Satisfaction With Life Scale) and the PANAS (Positive & Negative Affect Scale).

The research on *Income and Expenditure* involved the preparation of instruments to produce data on the income and expenditure patterns of the household as a whole and of the persons within it. Two different forms of instrument were used in this element of the research: a survey was applied at three points across a year in Bangladesh and Peru; while in Ethiopia and Thailand diaries were used on a monthly basis over a full year. Each instrument was designed to capture information on the extent of seasonal variations on income and expenditure over one year. They each captured data on the different categories of incomes (self-employment, wage income, and in kind), expenditures (production costs, food and non-food items), credit and saving behaviour. The survey also included supplementary questions exploring subjective indicators as global happiness and life domain satisfaction.

Process Research refers to the element of WeD fieldwork that involved in-depth work with a smaller sample of people and households. The aim of the process research element was to understand some of the key processes and relationships that different persons and households engage with to achieve wellbeing outcomes. This element used a range of different research methods (including qualitative work and ethnographic case studies) with a sub-sample of people and households, as well as a re-analysis of the existing WeD data to discern the types of processes that are important in formulating wellbeing goals and strategies.

The *process research* involved two distinct approaches. The 'thematic' approach involved the selection of a set of prominent 'wellbeing' issues that had been identified by ongoing work as significant for the communities studied. A sample of different people and households were then interviewed on their process experiences in relation to these themes. Bangladesh, Peru and Thailand used the 'thematic' approach to explore the following themes: Bangladesh: income expenditure and debt; politics and community institutions; marriage and family relations; and crises (health and floods); Peru: social identity; migration; collective action; and consumption; and Thailand: health; collective action; and livelihoods and migration.

The 'core case' approach which was employed in Ethiopia involved diary work and repeated interviews with selected core sample of people and households, over an extended period of time. The Ethiopian team used this approach to explore a wide range of themes affecting wellbeing.

The purpose of the 'thematic' and 'core case' approaches was the same: to illuminate a number of key relationships that these people and households engaged in as they sought to achieve their desired states of wellbeing. Where possible, case studies were developed to overlap with people and households covered by other research components (especially the RANQ) so as to permit cross-analysis.

The final research element, which has come to be called *Structures and Regimes*, was what we initially called 'big structures' work. It deals with those wider, regional, national and

global elements of social, economic, political and cultural structures that members of the group regarded as essential for our understanding of the specific community based wellbeing outcomes and processes that we were seeking to understand. It was undertaken in recognition that micro or community based studies can have a propensity to lose sight of the bigger picture. In an effort to systematise this work across the four countries, the group decided to adopt and adapt the welfare regimes framework that members of the group had previously been working with.⁵

Adapting the regimes approach serves to relate the wellbeing outcomes and processes observed in particular communities to nation-state systems and features (and to some extent to aspects of global, regional and some sub-national features). It seeks to locate the research sites within national and global structures of power, exchange and information. It also highlights how actors within the research sites mediate between the households and outside organizations, including government, business and civil society. The data for this component was mainly secondary and included both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase, data collection was focused on collecting identical indicators across all four countries. The second phase involved shaping this data and supplementing it to conform to the guidelines of the regimes work. Secondary data was supplemented by qualitative data from other WeD research, particularly the community profiles and the process research to connect the national level structures with community level realities.

Because all of the instruments employed are derived from the same conceptual framework, and also largely use the RANQ sample as a point of reference, they can be analysed in relation to each other. The data generated by them has been lodged in an integrated database to facilitate this analysis.

⁵ See Ian Gough *et al.*, *Insecurity and welfare regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America: Social policy in development contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).