

# Wellbeing, International Development and Global Poverty: Of Wicked Problems and Messy Concepts

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# Introduction

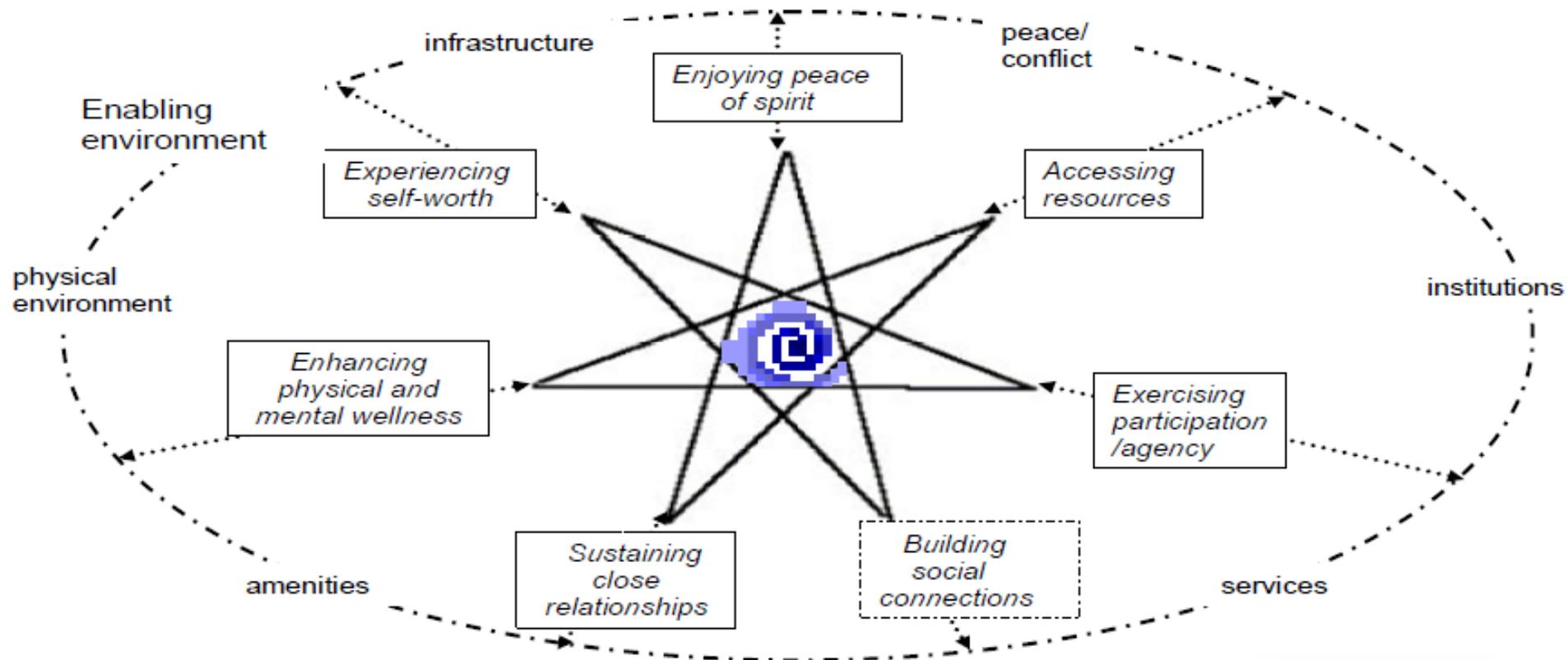
- A way for me to get up to speed on wellbeing and development debates...reducing my ignorance
- Wellbeing and development – not a ‘required’ concept...dictionaries/handbooks of social thought, economics, politics, sociology & DS = 0
- Google it to measure comparative marginality
  - Wellbeing = 15,700,000
  - Well-being = 2,430,000,000
- Health, weight, diet, exercise...NHS, ONS & WeD

# Today

- A set of thoughts about how ‘wellbeing’ relates to contemporary contests about future int’nl development goals/measures. Conceptual and political contests that are increasingly shaped by the media.
- ‘Wellbeing is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue ones goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life’ (WeD 2007)

# Wellbeing in 2011

Figure 3: An integrated model of personal wellbeing



(Source: White, 2009, p15. WeD Working Paper 09/50)

# The intuitive appeal of wellbeing

- Intuitively, one could expect the concept of wellbeing to have traction in policy/practice
- It's positive - about the 'good life' not what's bad
- Myself, my kids...my sister's 'best interest'
- Conversations with low income/poor people over 40 years – integrated 'strategies' for reduced vulnerability and personal/children's wellbeing...not having contacts, relationship breakdown, feeling under-valued or despised

# Why is wellbeing a marginal concept for international development 1 ?

- It's not been (cannot be?) used as a 'results' measuring device (for policymakers)
- It does not sum up 'what's happening' in a single number
- It's not \$1.25-a-day poverty or happiness scores...both of which are highly imperfect but provide an illusion of control and predictability!

# Why is wellbeing a marginal concept for international development 2 ?

- It's not managed to establish itself as a normative framework for understanding that supports broader goal-setting processes
- Capabilities, converted into human development - supported by HDI and with an intellectual icon (Sen) dominates...MDGs and post-2015
- Human rights is the 'other' framework that is in play

# Why is wellbeing a marginal concept for international development 3 ?

- International political economy of knowledge creation: rich world agenda of Millennium needed poverty/deprivation - saving lives, feeding the hungry, reversing HIV/AIDS... 'us' not 'them' of foreign aid programming.
- Aid agencies/OECD pursued the IDGs and settled for the MDGs
- Human development was available for conversion into multidimensional poverty reduction – MDGs 'human development meets results-based management'

# Dimensions of Development: Wellbeing Contrasted with Global Poverty/Development Frameworks

<i>Dimensions</i>	Wellbeing	\$1.25 a day	MPI	UN MDGs	UN HLP	SDGs
Access to Resources	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Participation or Agency	✓	✗	✗	✓ (Gender)	✓ (Gender)	✓ (HR for all)
Social Connections	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Close Relationships	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Physical and Mental Wellbeing	✓	✗	✓ (Physical)	✓ (Physical)	✓ (Physical)	✓ <sup>1</sup>
Self-Worth	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Peace of Spirit	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Environmental Sustainability	–	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓✓
Education	–	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other	–	✗	–	Global partnership	Good governance, Employment	Global governance transformation, employment, biome sustainability

<sup>1</sup> Health and Wellbeing at all ages

# From \$1.25 a day to MPI

- From a wellbeing perspective the MPI is only a very partial advance in conceptual breadth compared to income poverty.
- Does this reflect the limits to such measures or is the multidimensional measurement still up for grabs internationally?

# Wellbeing, MDGs, HLP and SDGs

- A mix of contrasts reflecting the micro (bottom up) starting point of wellbeing and the macro (top down) focus of the MDGs and post-2015 development agenda
- Participation, social connections, close relationships, mental wellbeing, self-worth and peace of spirit not included in post-2015
- Wellbeing 'fails', at least explicitly, to cover environmental sustainability, education and global governance (international social relations)

# Are these contrasts a surprise?

- No – the global focus of MDGs and post-2015 agenda (HLP and SDGs) contrasted with the micro focus of wellbeing explain much of the difference
- ...alongside the IPE of global goal setting
- So, where does that leave wellbeing...has it any comparative advantage?

# Conclusion – future applications for the concept of wellbeing

I see potential advantages in pursuing wellbeing as a concept for international development

1. For projects/programmes - permits citizen participation in fine-grained approaches for local development – MDGs, HLP and SDGs useless!
2. Opening up space for ‘embedded’ civil society – professionalism of post-2015 and SDGs cf MDGs
3. To contribute conceptual counterbalances to the ‘science’ of poverty reduction – the benefits of diversity of views over ‘optimality’

# Conclusion

4. It could be focussed on national goal setting and progress monitoring – the post-2015 agenda may not (will not) create a good framework for national goal-setting.
5. Helping the post 2015 agenda avoid the MDG problem of national goal imposition: wellbeing as the conceptual starting point for national deliberations (as in UK) on post-2015?