



# **Wellbeing and Subjectivity in International Development Conference**

## **Book of Abstracts**

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**Abbott, Pamela - University of Aberdeen**

**'Building Wellbeing in a Post-conflict Society: Rwanda.'**

Rwanda is widely recognised as a success story in post-conflict reconstruction, with average GDP growth of eight per cent and poverty reduction of 14 percentage points over the last 10 years and looks on track to achieve most of her MDG targets. Rwanda explicitly set out to create a society that made the good life possible for all Rwandans.

Vision 2020 the government's development blueprint envisages transforming the country to a private sector led middle income country while at the same time reducing poverty, ensuring the health and welfare of the population, equitable access to basic education, gender equality and good governance. An element of the policy has been (re) building social capital and social cohesion through community engagement through mechanisms of dialogue and consensus.

This paper will consider Rwandans' subjective evaluation of their quality of life based on a nation-wide probability survey carried out in 2013, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample. The paper will argue that while people generally see things as getting better, satisfaction with life in general remains low.

**Abeyasekera, Asha - University of Colombo**

**'Marriage, Wellbeing and Contingent Narratives about the 'Self'.'**

'Modernisation' is associated with the significant reconfiguration of marriage norms, family structures, kinship relations, and conceptions of the 'self'. The current scholarship on marriage note that companionate marriage based on affective bonds, emotional intimacy, and sexual pleasure has become the ideal model for marital relations across the world. Contemporary marriage narratives, in underscoring choice, individual preference, and conjugal intimacy, suggest an expansion of individual agency in the domain

of marriage. A larger cultural transformation underlies these changes: the development of the modern individualised self.

This paper examines how Sinhala-Buddhist middle-class families in Sri Lanka have collectively invested in the narrative of choice through which 'a choosing person' is consciously created as a mark of modernity and progress. Like in other parts of South Asia, marriage is fundamental to the construction of well-being and sense of self in Sri Lanka. It is within the institutions of marriage and family that a person experiences relatedness, belonging, and security. Marriage is also culturally constructed as the principal source of personal fulfilment especially for women. Marriage is also critical to achieving social status and is a principal strategy for social mobility in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Through an analysis of life histories this paper shows how narratives about an agentic self, rather than signalling freedom, reveal how people are often burdened with the responsibility of agency. It argues that choice in marriage is culturally sanctioned and publicly commended only when it results in a 'good' marriage. Outside of this structure, narratives of individual agency and self-assertion become culturally censured and, therefore, must be denied through the deployment of different kinds of narratives - those of fate and circumstance. Changing narrative devices about the self suggest that cultural concepts of the person are changing over time. On the one hand, to be modern is to think of personhood in a particular way - as thinking actors and choosing individuals. On the other hand, in cultural contexts in which family and kin ties are critical for people's sense of security and belonging, where accountability to others is as important as one's freedom, the social embedded-ness of the person continues to wield considerable power over individual notions of the person.

In such a context, this paper shows how the fault-lines between the 'choosing person' and the 'relational self' present an ideological dilemma that undermines people's sense of wellbeing.

**Crivello, Gina & Boyden, Jo - Young Lives, University of Oxford  
'Intergenerational narratives of wellbeing and gender: Findings  
from Young Lives.'**

In recent years, there has been a major shift in the way international development approaches gender equality, such that current policy favours a narrow focus on adolescent girls and their unique role in ending poverty for themselves and future generations. It is believed that if girls decide to stay in school longer, marry later, and have fewer children, they will drive global development. Many gender experts fear that the new focus on girls threatens the gains achieved for women's rights and empowerment, and some have questioned whether there is a role for boys and men in these processes. What appears to be missing from these debates is discussion of the effects that this policy shift might be having on intergenerational relations. Within this scenario, we draw on emerging evidence from Young Lives to examine the intergenerational spaces in which wellbeing and subjectivities are negotiated and 'voiced', and how these spaces are being reconfigured within the context of current policies aimed to empower girls.

Young Lives uses survey and qualitative methods to track the life trajectories and wellbeing outcomes of two age-cohorts of children growing up in diverse settings across Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam, over a fifteen-year period. It documents how gendered and generational subjectivities change across childhood and into adolescence -- including for boys -- in terms of their evolving identities, roles and responsibilities within poverty, now and into their imagined futures. A major theme is the relational nature of wellbeing, particularly the way that wellbeing is negotiated within intergenerational relations. Thus, decisions made about girls' (and boys') schooling, work, marriage and parenthood are commonly made in light of the intergenerational contract. This presentation asks whether policies focused on adolescent girls might be introducing new gender and generational expectations within families, possibly resulting in the (un)intentional reconfiguration of the intergenerational contract, and what a 'relational' understanding of child and youth wellbeing might add to our understanding.

## **Dengler, Solène - Legatum Institute 'Insight on Africa.'**

*Introduction:* The development of alternative indicators that account for a more holistic measurement of societal progress than GDP is essential both for national policies and for the assessment of development projects. In addition to publishing every year the Legatum Prosperity Index™ - the only global measurement of prosperity, a multidimensional measure of welfare based on both income and wellbeing -, the Legatum Institute published this year a special report "Insight on Africa". This report is grounded on the prosperity rankings of 38 African countries in 2012-2013 as well as five years of comparable data for 22 of these countries. The report investigated five key topics across the continent: changing demographics, corruption and business, performance of countries on the Millennium Development Goals, the influence of Asia and safety vs. economic development in Nigeria.

*Methods:* The development of the Prosperity Index was based on the identification of around 200 variables that appeared in the academic literature as having an impact on wealth and wellbeing (measured as life satisfaction). The final 89 variables were then selected according to their global coverage and by using regression analysis to determine those that have a statistically significant relationship with wealth and wellbeing. The variables comprise both objective and subjective data to account for both the quantity and quality of development outcomes. Data for 142 countries is collected every year from thirteen widely recognised global data sources, World Bank, Gallup World Poll, World Health Organisation and Freedom House, amongst others. The variables are divided into eight sub-indices (Economy, Entrepreneurship & Opportunity, Governance, Education, Health, Safety & Security, Personal Freedom, and Social Capital) depending on what aspect of prosperity they influence, and then standardised to a common scale to allow comparability. The sub-indices are weighted with income and wellbeing according to regression analysis, and then added up to create the countries' sub-index scores on which the rankings are based. The overall score in Prosperity is determined by the score average in all eight sub-indices – the sub-indices scores are equally weighted when determining the final Prosperity score.

*Results:* Overall, the report on Africa based on analysis of data from the Prosperity Index concluded that two Africas may well arise in the future: one that is able to take advantage of economic development, and one that might fail to implement political reforms when facing issues that might prevent development such as the youth bulge. Zambia is illustrating well the contrast in progress and the challenges still facing many African countries. Since 2010, the country improved significantly in the Economy, Personal Freedom and Social Capital, while declining in Governance and Safety and Security, which might prevent the country's growth and prosperity in the future. Other key findings include: Botswana leading Africa in terms of Prosperity; Rwanda experiencing a significant rise in Prosperity; an overall good progress on the Millennium Development Goals on Health and Education; and a cause for concern for Mali and Malawi that have fallen considerably in Prosperity since last year. In the future, the Prosperity Index could provide an excellent tool to monitor progress over time within and between countries and potentially to help track post-MDGs progress. The Index has already influenced notably the UK Cabinet for measurements of wellbeing and the US State department for programmes in Africa on entrepreneurship. In this context, the Legatum Institute is considering the development of an Africa Index to account more accurately for the specificities of the continent.

**Gaines Jr., Stanley - Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways, Brunel University**

**Fernandez, Antonia - University of Reading**

**Baerti-Helguero, Andrea - University of Bath**

**‘Economic Status, Inner Wellbeing and Happiness.’**

In the present analyses, we tested the hypothesis that inner wellbeing (White, Gaines, & Jha, 2013) mediates the influence of objective economic circumstances on happiness among individuals in Zambia (n = 347) and India (n = 333). We conducted correlation analyses and hierarchical regression analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986) concerning links among measures of objective economic circumstances, inner wellbeing, and happiness from Time 2 of the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways Project (collected from Zambia in 2012, and collected from India in 2013), followed by tests of significance concerning mediation effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Consistent with hypotheses, in both countries, (1) before taking inner wellbeing into account, objective economic circumstances was positively and significantly related to happiness; whereas (2) after taking inner wellbeing (which proved to be a significant positive predictor of happiness) into account, objective economic circumstances was no longer significant or marginal as a predictor of happiness. Moreover, consistent with hypotheses, the mediating effect of inner wellbeing was significant in both countries. Overall, we found that the impact of objective economic circumstances on happiness was completely mediated by inner wellbeing. Implications for the study of correlates of happiness in developing countries are discussed.

## **Gardner, Katy - London School of Economics**

### **'The Path to Happiness? Motion, Emotion and Transnational Migration in Britain and Sylhet.'**

Does migration make people more, or less, happy? Whilst most migrants move in order to improve their lives, academic research as well as popular cultural representations present a picture of sorrow, separation and ambivalence or what Ahmed calls 'the melancholic migrant' (Ahmed, 2010: 121-159). Within Sylhet, Bangladesh and its transnational fields in Britain these contradictions are palpable. Whilst movement to foreign countries (bidesh) is passionately desired the stories and experiences of those who have moved abroad are often resonant with loss and disenchantment. That the majority of migrants have been successful in achieving a better life for themselves and their families appears obvious. Their large houses, well fed bodies and consumer goods are surely testimony to the local dictum that if one wishes to progress, migration is the only way forward. And yet in my research into Sylheti transnational communities in Britain and Bangladesh the stories of those who have succeeded are filled with loss and conflict.

One way to understand these contradictions is to think of migration as a happiness project. Whether or not the project leads to actual happiness is beside the point; what matters is that it is based around a plan of movement between places and an imagining of those places in which one will bring more happiness than the other. I am not making assumptions about what migration's promised happiness involves, though prosperity, economic opportunities, security and improved social status are likely to feature. In order to illustrate these processes I recount the stories of two men, both of who have pursued migration as a path towards what Sara Ahmed has dubbed 'the promise of happiness'. Both embody well known characters within the anthropology of migration. The first, Ahmed, is cast in the first act of his story as an excited would be migrant but ends up as an 'unhappy husband' (Charsley, 2005). The second, Mr Hossain, starts off as an adventurer but ends up as a disillusioned elder, whose belief in the 'myth of return' has led to disappointment (Anwar, 1978). Through consideration of their stories, I hope that we might learn not only of the inevitable discontents involved in being human (cf Jackson, 2011) or indeed the deep tensions and contradictions that transnational migration brings, but also how what Sara Ahmed has termed 'the promise of happiness' helps to order peoples' relationships to places and their movements across the world.

**Greco, Giulia - London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene**  
**‘Assessing Women’s Wellbeing in Rural Malawi: A Capabilities Index.’**

There is growing interest in using Sen’s Capability Approach for assessing wellbeing (Stiglitz 2009). A crucial normative argument of Sen’s work is that individual advantage should not be seen as opulence or utility, and should not be assessed using people’s preferences or desires, but primarily in terms of the freedoms that people have to pursue the kind of life they have reason to value (Sen 1985).

Social policies should aim to expand people’s capabilities, and a policy is considered successful if it leads to an expansion of people’s capability set. In order to assess and monitor progress in society, there is a need for developing multidimensional measures of wellbeing based on a broader evaluative space.

The multidimensional nature of wellbeing increases the complexity of policy evaluation and raises a number of methodological challenges that need to be considered when constructing a composite wellbeing measure: (1) selection of dimensions; (2) aggregation of dimensions into one single measure; (3) validation of the measure.

The main aim of this paper is to describe the first step in the development of a wellbeing measure based on Sen’s Capability Approach: the selection of the wellbeing dimensions. A series of focus groups was held in order to identify and value locally relevant dimensions of wellbeing on a sample of women in Mchinji District, Malawi.

It emerged that women’s wellbeing is not only shaped by the realisation of material basic needs such as being sufficiently nourished and adequately sheltered, but is also highly dependent on complex feelings, relations and social norms. Women in rural Malawi described their wellbeing as formed by different components that can be grouped into six dimensions: physical strength, mental wellbeing, household wellbeing, community wellbeing or social capital, economic security and happiness.

These dimensions are then assessed with a large scale survey and aggregated using four different methods. An index is constructed and used for the evaluation of social policies.

## **Jha, Shreya - Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways, University of Bath 'Of Photographs and Papaya: Researching Wellbeing and Motifs of Gift Exchange.'**

Research takes place in a social context, the result of which is mediated by the relationship between the researcher and the people they are interviewing. This relationship, like all others, is the product of specific social milieus. But what precisely affects this relationship, how is it formed and how do all the people involved view it? I will attempt to unravel some answers through this paper.

I spent 15 months researching wellbeing in two rural communities, one each in India and Zambia, through the course of the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways project. Drawing on this experience, I reflect on relationships between my co-researchers, some people whom I interviewed, and myself. I draw particular attention to my conceptualisation of these relationships as professional ones as also to my awareness of the power dynamics therein and the ways in which I chose to address these. In contrast, many people whom I interviewed even while recognising what I was doing as 'work' may have viewed the relationships between us as social. This was highlighted when during the course of the research in India, my colleagues and I started photographing people whom we had interviewed as a way of thanking them. This activity sometimes turned into a social event with people gathering to watch the 'performance' of people posing and of us taking photographs. Many people whom we photographed, in turn, insisted on thanking for our patience in waiting for them to gather their families and working in the heat by bringing us gifts of fruit, tea or sweetened water. I reflect on my resistance to accepting these gifts due to my 'professionalism' and my view that the people were far worse off than me, and how this might have paradoxically underscored the power dynamic rather than smooth it over.

**Loera-Gonzalez, Juan - Universidad Catolica of Chile**

**'Wellbeing from an Indigenous Perspective: A Framework Proposal.'**

This paper wishes to discuss how an alternative development discourse among indigenous people and ethnic minorities can be documented and analyzed by a framework that aims to shed light into inter-ethnic power relations. With a critical reading of mainstream development thinking, it focuses on the case of the Raramuri indigenous people of Northern Mexico and their political relations with dominant sectors of society. This is important as most studies use a universalizing approach to conceptualize development neglecting to consider conflicting local understandings of wellbeing.

The framework is composed by three main pillars. The first is to document through detailed ethnographic evidence local understandings of wellbeing for the Raramuri people which emerge in contexts of ethno-political oppression. The second is to uncover underlying power relations in the form of land conflicts and institutional arrangements hindering wellbeing and reproducing ethnically differentiated vulnerabilities. The third pillar is to analyze resulting mechanisms of resistance employed in order to control practices and customs that promotes ethnic distinction. These three pillars provide a novel framework to explore the formation and contestation of asymmetrical economic and political relations at the local level.

Using this framework, this paper finds that the Raramuri like other minority groups living in the margins of nation-states and global markets are constrained to act strategically to face political and socio-economic exclusion fluctuating between the tension of having the right to live differently and the need to be part of the larger society.

## **Mills, China & Samuel, Kim - Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)**

### **‘It’s what kills people’s spirits’: Poverty, shame and social isolation.’**

Many people living in poverty name social connectedness within communities as being both intrinsically and instrumentally important for survival and wellbeing. Yet many people also talk about how shame and social isolation - as some of the impossible choices posed by poverty - can erode these connections, and ‘kills people’s spirits’ (as one participant explained to us in the research to be discussed in this paper). Yet despite being key aspects of people’s lived experiences of poverty, there is little international data on shame or social isolation, making them ‘missing dimensions’ within poverty analysis.

Embedded within the increasing focus on psychosocial dimensions of poverty, this paper will weave together recent and ongoing qualitative research into social isolation (both in connection to shame and as a dimension of its own), with proposed attempts to measure social isolation in order to generate internationally comparable data. It will further explore how the complexities raised in the qualitative work undertaken (for example, what people told us about how concepts such as reciprocity and trust function within contexts of poverty) point to the need, and yet pose challenges for, the measurement of social isolation internationally. It will also outline why any attempts at measurement should include both objective and subjective indicators. Thus, the research discussed in this paper raises some important questions, for example; what is social isolation? How might it be measured? Is it, and how is it, experienced in diverse contexts, and how does it effect people’s wellbeing? What are the connections between poverty, social isolation, and shame? And what are the implications of this work for policy?

**Rodriguez, Iokiñe - Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC)**  
**‘Community historical reconstruction and cultural identity building as a local pathway for sustainable development.’**

Although increasing attention is being paid to indigenous rights and knowledge in defining development priorities in their traditional homelands, there is a paucity of discussion about how processes of cultural change and shifting local identities put indigenous peoples’ in an unequal footing when entering into such processes of negotiation with external actors. This paper will discuss how the Pemon-Taurepan from Kumarakapay, an indigenous community from Canaima National Park and World Heritage Site in south eastern Venezuela, after feeling increasingly disoriented and concerned about their sense of loss of cultural identity, in 1999 took the lead initiating a variety of processes of community-wide critical reflection on their history and processes of cultural change as part of the definition of the community’s Life Plan (Plan de Vida) in order to clarify their views of a desired future and strengthen their capacity to engage in dialogue and negotiations with other actors about the present and future management of their territories. This triggered a variety of processes of cultural reassertion, including the publication of a community authored book about the oral history of the Pemon from Kumarakapay, and also had a knock-on-effect on how the Pemon more broadly now wish to define conservation and development agendas with external actors in their lands. This experience suggests that endogenous reflections about cultural change and identity building processes should be more widely supported when attempting to overcome power inequalities in negotiating visions of development in indigenous peoples’ territories.

**Rowlands, Jo - Oxfam**  
**‘Well-being and real life: exploring politics, practice and perspective.’**

From a practitioner perspective, this paper explores two aspects of well-being & subjectivity: how do they intersect with power? And with that in mind, what perspectives are useful for thinking about how ideas of well-being are used in practice, and how might they interconnect?

**Verma, Shweta - Delhi University**

## **‘Understanding Patterns of Resilience: Recognizing Multiple Pathways to Wellbeing.’**

Focus on health and wellbeing has contributed to the shift from ‘disease’ model to resilience and strengths based model of understanding individuals and communities. It is being acknowledged that health is more than absence of illness, everyone facing risks or stress need not become ‘dysfunctional’ or ‘ill’, wellbeing is not just about economic resources, and resilience is more than recovery or bouncing back. In various definitions of resilience, the focus has always been on ‘people’s successful growth rather than breakdown’ (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009, p.6). However, we need to accept that there is no single universally applicable answer to the following questions - what is ‘successful growth’? What is healthy adaptation and who defines it as ‘healthy’? Understanding resilience involves understanding processes of ‘navigation’ and ‘negotiation’ that are instrumental in moving people towards psychological, social, cultural and physical resources and opportunities associated with health and wellbeing (Ungar M., 2008, 2012). Availability and accessibility of such opportunities, resources, and experiences (that influence well being) is impacted not only by the socio-economic and political scenario, but also by the meanings attached to these opportunities, resources, and experiences. These meanings also influence which resources or opportunities are valued and hence accessed or which coping strategies are used by individuals when in need (Ungar, 2012).

Drawing from the concepts of inner well-being (White, Gaines Jr, & Jha, 2013) and resilience, I believe that if resilience is a process, then inner wellbeing could be associated with it in two ways. One, inner wellbeing could be considered as an outcome of this process. And second, inner wellbeing could be one of the factors that contribute to the process of resilience.

**White, Sarah, C. - Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways, University of Bath  
'Safaris, Soya or Subsistence? The Politics of Wellbeing, Conservation  
and Development in Chiawa, Zambia.'**

The challenge of reconciling competing demands for national economic growth, wildlife conservation and the wellbeing of local communities is widely recognised. In Chiawa, Zambia 2013 this challenge is particularly acute, as a new highway and bridge promise to reverse the area's historical marginality, promoting it as a premier site for safari tourism and agri-business. High profile conflicts over land rights, however, indicate local people's fears that this will accelerate dispossession, with profits accruing to outsiders and the community seeing little if any benefit.

This paper presents research on wellbeing and poverty in Chiawa which provides a novel perspective on these issues. Survey research into objective conditions and subjective perceptions combined with in-depth life history interviews provide direct insight into local people's experience of livelihoods in struggle. Quantitative indicators of subjective dimensions of wellbeing testify to people's sense of insecurity and powerlessness. However, the community understanding of wellbeing and its strong ethic of care and reciprocity constitutes an important resource for building a positive and inclusive future.

# Posters

Ali, Mansoor - Practical Action:

**Are we ready to assess wellbeing impact? Reflections from Practical Action.**

Copestake, James - University of Bath:

**Assessing Rural Transformations.**

Davies, Gabby - University of Bath:

**Wellbeing in Cambodia.**

Jones, Harriet - CAFOD:

**Batteries Methodology.**

Kent, Ivan - HelpAge International:

**Livelihoods and Wellbeing for Older People**

Muzareba, Abureza Mohammad - University of Sheffield:

**E-learning for Empowerment and Wellbeing of those in Poverty in Bangladesh**

Ramirez, Viviana - University of Bath:

**The quality of relationships and the impact of interventions on wellbeing: Lessons from the Oportunidades social programme in Mexico.**

Stevens, Liza & Williams, George - Traidcraft:

**Measuring flourishing.**



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[www.wellbeingpathways.org](http://www.wellbeingpathways.org)

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