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Wellbeing and Poverty in Marginalised Communities: Zambia and India compared

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Introduction

- The ubiquity of wellbeing
 - UN resolution on Gross National Happiness (April)
 - 4th OECD World Forum in Delhi (October) ‘beyond GDP’
 - Individual/community level drivers of change
- Seems new, but comes out of a broad-based movement to extend:
 - from economic to other aspects of life
 - from ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom up’ perspectives
- Links also with ‘science of happiness’ in positive psychology
- Critical/sceptical voices, especially about the politics of a focus on wellbeing:
 - A new set of clothes to dress up business as usual?
 - From state to individual responsibility?
 - From changing how things are to changing how you feel?



Aims of this seminar

- To introduce the research we are doing and its approach to wellbeing
- To present some of our findings so far (Zambia, August-October 2010; India, February-May 2011)
- To reflect on what these might mean as regards the politics of wellbeing
- *Not* to generalise from these sites to all India or Zambia – very particular and non-typical locations



Defining Wellbeing

- Contested terms: wellbeing, happiness, quality of life
- No universally agreed definitions, but consensus:
- Happiness subjective – two perspectives:
 - (more abiding) fulfilment or contentment
 - (more fleeting) positive feelings and emotions ('affect')
- Quality of life may use objective or subjective indicators – objective often predominate
- Wellbeing straddles 'feeling good' subjectively with 'doing well' objectively
- Important to complement subjective and objective; quantitative and qualitative





The Wellbeing Pathways project

Ambition:

- to develop a model of wellbeing that is grounded in the South - (more like) how people there think and talk and feel and act
- to explore the relationships between poverty and wellbeing – both quantitatively (survey) and qualitatively (interviews)

Research:

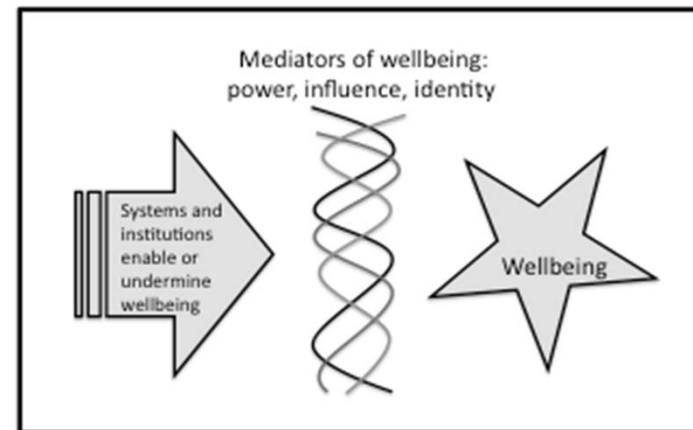
- in marginalised rural communities, Zambia and India
- two rounds of fieldwork of 3-4 months in each country
- In each location and each round 350 respondents: 150 couples (husbands and wives separately) and 50 women heading households

Our Approach

Starting points:

- ‘Wellbeing is experienced when people have what they need for life to be good’
- Both objective and subjective data
- Not just bottom up:
grounded in theory and
research experience
- What *constitutes*
what *enables*
what *mediates*
wellbeing

Diagram 1: The PADHI Approach to Wellbeing





What constitutes Wellbeing?

- Seven domains
- Wider context that enables or constrains wellbeing
- Model refined through a mixed method approach: *what* we should ask about and *how* to ask it) derived through:
 - consultation with NGOs and other local people
 - intensive qualitative field testing
 - ongoing reflection within local teams
 - statistically tested and revised





Researching Wellbeing

- Three part survey:
 - Demographics, health, education, social status
 - Inner wellbeing
 - Economics and access to services
- Conversational style – including discussion (notes)
- Qualitative interviews
- Group meetings

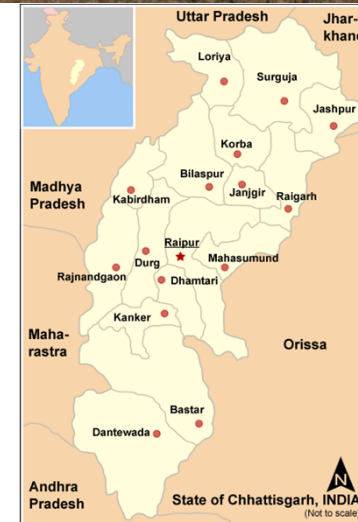




A Learning Journey

- Lots of learning about how to ask – unfamiliar topics approached in unfamiliar ways
- Reflection on cultures of expression – and cultures in wellbeing instruments!
- Factor analysis did not work for Zambia round 1 research – so no statements at domain level possible for Zambia at this point
- Revised survey brought positive results from factor analysis for India – so able to report on domain as well as item level findings

The Sites





Many differences – but also similarities

- ‘Remote’ locations, ethnic minority communities
- Environment major issue (forests and animals)
- Rain-fed, low or no technology agriculture
- Land rights a critical political struggle
- Religion – active arena for personal change
- Alcohol
- Little savings/assets – none for 64% Sarguja and 53% Chiawa
- Limited access to credit: no loans previous year for 63% in Sarguja and 79% in Chiawa. Amongst loans taken, 65% from family and friends in Chiawa. In Sarguja, 33% family/friends and 48% money lender.



Major Differences by Gender

- Mostly nuclear households
- Limited education – especially for respondents: Sarguja 72% either no education or only write own names; Chiawa 15%. Both places much more schooling for respondents' children – but still boys predominate at higher levels
- Gender-based violence common in both sites
- Many more women living without husbands in Zambia, and many more children living away from own parents (usually with kin)
- Adverse sex ratio children in Sarguja: 92 daughters per 100 sons – contradicting high overall state levels.
- Chiawa main employment safari lodges 25% of men, 1% women
- Sarguja employment more equal by gender, but women at low grades

Sarguja: an equalising state?

Position held	Married men	Married women	Single women	TOTAL
Social/Community:				
Traditional healer (dewar, ojha, guniya)	11			11
Religious leader (procharik, baigah)	12			12
Village elder (seyan)	20	1		21
Village headman (patel)	2	1		3
Social/Community Total:	45	2		47
Formal Employment:				
CBO leader	6		1	7
Mitanin, Anganwadi assistant etc.		10		10
Anganwadi worker, ANM	1	5		6
Teacher	1			1
Formal Employment Total:	8	15	1	24
Formal Political:				
Panchayat/gram committee/ ward member	9	10	1	20
Sarpanch	2	1		3
Formal Political Total:	11	11	1	23
Other	9	4		13
TOTAL	73	32	2	107

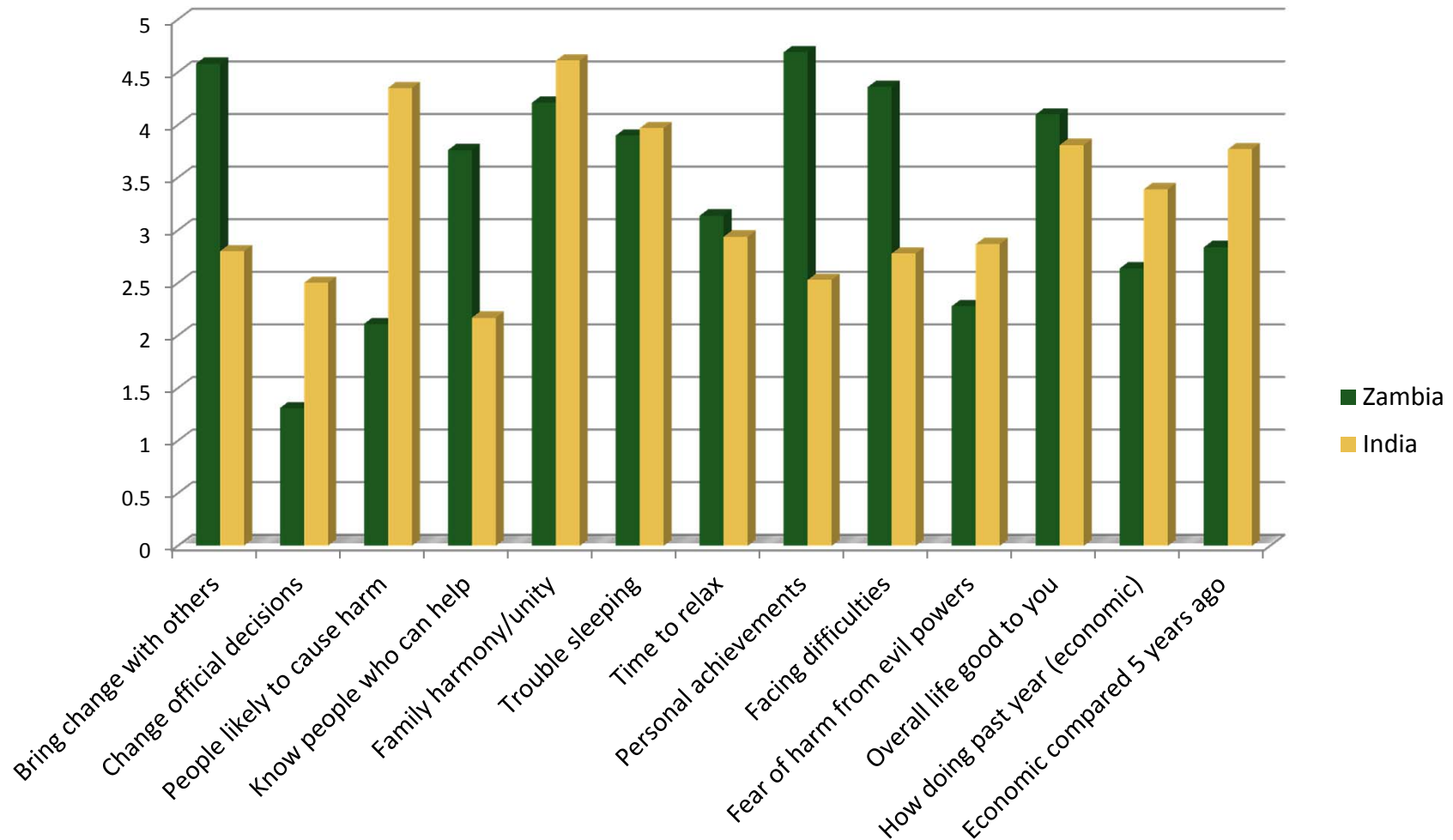


Hunger and the State

- Chiawa 44% had to go hungry some point in previous year
- Single women most: 13% hungry 10-12 months, only 2% men and 4% married women
- Sarguja 95% no hunger – major change of recent years: ‘Now we are getting rice from the government and so we are able to live our lives’
- Major source of optimism and security
- Sarguja state sponsored roads, welfare and employment programmes, good access though some late payment
- Chiawa very limited provision and expectations



Zambia and India: mean scores on comparable wellbeing items





What makes a difference to subjective assessments?

Review Questions	Economic Status		Gender/ Marital Status	
	Zambia	India	Zambia	India
How doing past year (economic)	√	√	√	x
Compared to 5 years ago	√	√	√	√
How Happy	-	√	-	√



What makes a difference to inner wellbeing domain scores (India only)

Domain	Economic Status	Gender/ Marital Status
Economic	√	
Agency/Participation	√	√
Social Connections	√	√
Close Relationships	√	
Health	√	√
Self-worth	√	
Values and Meaning	√	√



Conclusions: What enables Wellbeing?

1. Very poor and marginalised communities with significant similarities in two countries
2. Major difference in generalised sense of improvement in Sarguja – especially focused on elimination of hunger through PDS rice
3. This in turn linked to very different relations of governance: state – citizen in Sarguja; chieftainess to subject in Chiawa
4. State in Chhattisgarh very evident - positive change importantly sustained through political mobilisation from below to support people in monitoring implementation and claiming their entitlements:
 - *Politics and policies are critical enablers of wellbeing, it cannot be understood at individual level only*



Conclusions: What constitutes Wellbeing?

- Factor analysis (not presented here) supports both seven domain model and single factor inner wellbeing index
- But single index tells us very little - seven domains gives much more scope to explore variability between respondents and contexts which is key impetus behind wellbeing agenda



Conclusions: What mediates wellbeing?

1. People's objective economic status has by far the greatest effect as mediator of wellbeing, especially in Sarguja
2. It has strong predictive power across subjective reflections on economic wellbeing and happiness and inner wellbeing domains
3. Gender/marital status is also a significant predictor of domains in India and items across the domains in India and Zambia. This is correlated with the economic factor but also acts independently from it
4. This finding confirms other studies of economic status and subjective wellbeing, which find there is a strong association between these for people living in poverty
5. It again affirms the importance of considering objective along with subjective data and of addressing structural differences of wealth and gender, rather than locating explanation at the individual level



Some limitations.....

- Draft report of initial analysis
- Attempt to be sensitive to local context
- But this methodological approach carries a strong 'disciplining' effect requiring people to fit their lives into our categories
- Such surveys must be complemented by qualitative research to explore depth and richness of local understandings of wellbeing, and the challenges these may bring to metropolitan constructions



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