

**EMBODIMENT, GENDER AND WELL-BEING: THE EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC WORKS FOR
DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

The embodied character of poverty, and gendered disadvantage, has not been adequately recognised in development policy debates, and it is argued here, through an application to labour-intensive public works programmes, that a fuller consideration of embodiment is a good way to think about how the kind of work offered in employment schemes may enhance or impair well-being. The promise of public works for poverty reduction, through an embodiment lens, is examined through reviewing the evidence on identities of participants, considering differential returns to work on public works, and the factors mediating how effort intensive work on employment schemes is transformed into personal well-being or transferred to others. Questions emerge around targetting, male gender identities, and the universal appropriateness of social policy approaches based on employment. Poor relief has historically aimed to chasten and train the poor through work, and contemporary domestic social policy in the UK and the US increasingly emphasises access to social support through work. I argue that these are especially inappropriate in contexts of rural poverty in the south where heavy manual work in public works may impair wellbeing of participants, and that research which foregrounds embodiment is necessary to reveal the extent and location of such dangers.

Work is central to current understandings of poverty, and well-being more generally, as well as to prescriptions for poverty reduction¹. While traditionally poverty has been assessed in terms of household income or command over commodities, more recently we have come to assess it at the individual level, and in terms of the capabilities that individuals have (Sen, 1983), not least as a response to the critiques of gender analysts which showed the existence of unequal intra-household ill-being. The capabilities approach suggests the need to trace through the links from an individual's endowments of personal, private, communal and public resources and assets, through the appropriation, production and transfer systems of their society, including intra-household as well as social allocation processes, to their command over commodities, consumption and 'decision-making' which thereby transforms entitlements into bodily well-being. Within the entitlements and capabilities approach it is labour entitlements which are especially crucial to the well-being of the majority of the poor in less developed countries since the poor generally lack other endowments. Social exclusion approaches too emphasise employment-based inclusion for vulnerable or excluded groups. Gender and development (GAD) analysts have however raised a number of issues related to the work and well-being connection (Elson, Kabeer) by identifying ways in which work may not lead to well-being - eg women's work within households is frequently invisible and devalued and long working days of poor women, or what has been termed 'time-famine', can produce perverse effects on their well-being.

The approach taken here is one in which the pathways between work and well-being includes at least three main elements: the *income*-based ways in which having more money allows increased consumption and thereby enhanced well-being, the *socio-cultural* changes through which work can increase social and symbolic capital of workers and thereby enhance well-being, and finally, the transformations in *bodily* condition and capabilities which implicate well-being or illbeing as the consequence of certain kinds of work (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1998). Clearly these elements are not independent of each other, and all three pathways are mediated by factors such as the types of households workers belong to, the intrahousehold exchanges within those households (eg forms of conjugality) and the social relations of work (eg forms of payment and supervision). Poverty reduction approaches operate with an incomplete understanding of the relationships between employment and well-being insofar as they assume that work leads to income which leads to less poverty. What is less considered are two other elements of the pathway from work to well-being and here I argue that particular bodily endowments and achieved bodily condition, influences access to employment, and in turn bodily states are patterned by work experiences in ways which have significant impact on wellbeing. The policy context for this argument is that of labour intensive public works in developing countries which aim at poverty reduction.

Food (or cash) for works (FFW) have been, and are, widely employed for both crisis and chronic poverty alleviation (Dreze, 1990; von Braun et al, 1992) and have acquired particular

significance with the emphasis on labour intensive growth strategy (Gaude and Watzlawick, 1992). They target the poor through wages set low enough to exclude those with better opportunities. The promise of rural public works is summarised by Terhal and Hirway thus 'RPWPs function as an anti-poverty instrument in particular if a) the programmes are labour-intensive (that is, at least 50-60 per cent of the total cost represents wages for unskilled labour), b) they are not too small, and c) wages paid are not very low and are paid regularly. If part of the wages is provided in kind, in the form of foodgrains, this helps to ensure a minimum level of nutrition.' (1998: 271)

Furthermore, they suggest that 'equal wage payment to all the workers tends to weaken the segmentation of the labour market – for example, between male and female labourers' (1998: 272). Here I am not questioning whether rural public works target effectively, but rather problematising effort intensity as a likely corollary of labour intensity, forms of payment and wellbeing, assumptions about nutritional improvements, and expectations around equal pay and the erasure of gender segmentation. Despite the potential for rural public works to reduce poverty, it is clear that they involve time and energy opportunity costs for participants, and redistributive processes in the allocation of benefits and questions have been raised questions about the net benefits of FFW after the food and opportunity costs of participation have been accounted for (Ravallion, Dutt, and Chaudhuri, 1993), and about the intra-household distribution of FFW commodities or incomes (see Brown et al., 1994). There is also evidence of self- and social selection of participation in FFW which can result in the exclusion of some, and their dependence on others for access to commodities made available via these schemes.

Whilst the increasing dependence of the poor on labour markets constitutes a strong argument for an employment focus in poverty reduction strategies (von Braun 1995), the frameworks for thinking about employment and poverty reduction rarely recognise the assumptions and implications of labour-intensive employment strategies for the physical bodily resources of poor people. The absence of even basic studies of the nutritional effects of public works commented on some years ago (Kennedy and Alderman (1987:192) remains. Thus bodily resources do not appear amongst the policy and programme 'concerns' identified by von Braun (1995:8). For von Braun, Teklu and Webb (1991) it is the tradeoff between coverage and wage rates which is of interest and they quote the ILO that 'the most critical policy decision in labour intensive public works is indeed the determination of wage rates' (ILO 1989a). A view of the embodied consequences of work however would also be concerned about forms of payment and the problems of maximising coverage via low wage rates if this runs down body capital. We may agree that 'the question is of choosing the kinds of projects most suited to the labour on offer' (p29) but argue that this should include a gendered assessment of the bodily status of the poor, since an emphasis on work as an embodied process reveals new insights into the manner in which it is connected to well-being.

It is all too easy for those of us for whom work involves no sweat to envisage labour in a disembodied abstract manner, disconnected from the lived, everyday experience of work, and to pay too little attention to the sheer physicality of poor people's work. Ela Bhatt, writing about the work of women in the informal sector, emphasises that such work is very physically demanding, involving long hours in positions harmful to the body. Manual work demands a body in top condition, yet perversely, it is the preserve of those with bodies shaped by poverty. She reports women headloaders complaints of incessant pains in backs and legs, women stitchers suffering sore fingers and burning eyes, wool knitters experience of asthma, the severe backache of stone cutters, feet infections of fisherwomen and the giddiness and illhealth of women agricultural workers exposure to chemicals (1996). (See also Kapur A 1999)

As well as a general tendency to think of labour in disembodied terms there is well founded suspicion of biological determinism haunts gender analysis, and this has worked against an adequate attention to embodiment in analysis of gender divisions of labour. Gender divisions in own-account farming are highly diverse, and differentiated not only by the time inputs into various tasks but also by the effort intensity of tasks (Palmer-Jones and Jackson 1999). Generalisations about the comparative effort intensity of women and men's work are difficult to make, given this variety, but there is considerable evidence that men are often responsible for particularly energy intensive heavy labour (refs ²) and poor working men may have especially low BMIs and consequent vulnerability to morbidity and mortality . Conversely, a study like that of Higgins and Alderman (1997: 590) in Ghana concludes that 'the physical labor performed by Ghanaian women, especially in agriculture, appears to have a significant effect on their nutritional status, as measured by a common anthropometric index'³. Other negative aspects of manual labour such as drudgery (the monotonous and time consuming) may be feminised too, and have embodied features of 'physical and mental strain, fatigue, monotony and hardship' (Varma (1992: p ⁴). Studies of *changing* gender divisions of labour emphasise changes to the length of the working day and the feminisation of agricultural labour (see Palmer-Jones forthcoming) but, whilst concerned about the amount of work women do, they pay little attention to the character and quality of that work or how it may be well-being or ill-being intensive.

Changes to divisions of labour which increase numbers in informal sector activities such as Bhatt describes, or the increases in headloading reported by Madhu Sarin, do seem to indicate a growing effort intensity of women's work, given the absence of labour saving technologies. For example, Sarin points out that men more commonly carry loads with shoulder poles, carts or bicycles (1998), whilst women headload. In the context of deforestation and greater distances to fuel wood sources it is the increasing weight of bundles transported by women as much as the increasing time for travel to forests which is relevant to their well-being (see Jackson, 1998, for a related argument for water collection). Whether the

simultaneous trend to the casualisation of women's work (Bannerjee 1997) might offset the energy intensification processes, since periods in employment are shorter and therefore bodily exploitation interspersed with recovery times is not clear. Such a research question indeed only emerges from a perspective in which effort intensity of work assumes the greater prominence argued for here.

To the extent that existing literature allows, I attempt to indicate how such an embodied approach to work and well-being in the context of public works suggests new research questions and methods. It also leads to a different problematisation of participation. In general non-participation is seen as exclusion of women by men, but there is the possibility that non-participation by women may be partly accounted for by a calculus in which management of the body limits women's interest in effort intensive public works. Engagement by men may conversely be less voluntaristic and less obviously beneficial, in the long term, than assumed.

I begin with a review of participation in public works by gender, age and bodily status, in order to identify who it is doing such work, before considering the gendered patterns of rewards for participation in public works, and finally how these map into wellbeing for women and men.

1. EMBODIMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Who are public works participants? Household level information is more plentiful than that for individuals and suggests that labour constrained households are less likely to participate, including female-headed households (Clay 1998, Webb 1995). Households with more diversified livelihoods with broader income bases also seem to be less likely to participate (Webb 1995) as are those with land holdings (Choudhury 1983, Teklu 1995). Thus whilst successfully self-targetting for some forms of disadvantage (income and land scarcity), others such as labour shortage, which may differentially affect women, continue to differentiate access amongst the poor. Other gendered aspects of access are patterned by the forms of programme administration, for example, the Indian Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) is implemented at District level and information about employment rights is politically mediated. Both these factors disadvantage women in households without men, who tend to be marginal to such politics and knowledge circuits (Joshi 1998).

Whilst at the household level women appear to be disadvantaged in access to public works, there is considerable variation in actual participation rates of individuals reported, and I am interested in both situations of high participation by women and low. Clay et al (1998) find evidence of high rates of involvement by women in both the MEGS and Bangladeshi food-for-work programmes, and Dev (1996) shows increasing involvement by women in the MEGS from 41% of all participants in 1979 to 53% in 1987, although by 1990 participation had fallen to 43% (Government of Maharashtra,). Participation by women in public works in rural Niger

and Zimbabwe was 60% (Webb 1995), in rural South Africa 41% (Everatt, pers.comm, 1999), as high as 80% in Peru (Laurie 1997), and in Lesotho 'virtually the entire rural road network in Lesotho has been built mainly by women from the least privileged groups' (Shaw 1995:268). Should we applaud these participation rates as evidence of inclusion and the absence of discrimination? What is the meaning of high proportions of women amongst public works participants? It seems as likely to reflect not successful targeting but poor alternative opportunities for women willing to work (Laurie 1997: 244, Wijga 1983) and Devereux (?) The slight evidence available suggests that employment on EGS is seen as least preferred, last resort, work (Kurulkar 1989). Some studies (Joshi 1998, Ling and Zhongyi 1995) also find considerably lower rates of female participation than those above. Factors affecting local variation in levels of participation by women are found to include the distance of the public works project from women's homes (Joshi 1998) and also the character of the work itself, since some research suggests that tasks locally considered 'men's work' exhibit low levels of participation by women (Ling and Zhongyi 1995). These are all reasons potentially grounded in embodied preferences, for less walking time, and for kinds of work consistent with norms that should perhaps not be completely dismissed as patriarchal impositions. That gendered discourses of acceptable work influence participation seems indisputable, but whether these amount to gendered exclusions from desirable employment, or effective preferences of women, is not as clear. For South Africa, Everatt (1999) suggests that they are exclusions. He remarks on the extent of unpaid heavy labour routinely undertaken by women, but when the work becomes paid, as on public works schemes, similar tasks are said by men to be 'too hard' for women, who characteristically are found in the physically easier but worse paid tasks. But how far this is exclusion, or alternatively a lack of interest by women in public works employment (or in the heavier tasks within such employment) because of either their 'body projects', or preferable opportunities (for example, that falling participation by women in MEGS could be connected to narrowing of gender wage gaps) is not clear.

Discourses of gender and strength can be used towards a variety of ends, and are by no means consistently deployed. Laurie (199 :9) holds that in general, 'being considered physically weak' is one of the weapons of the weak, yet in the circumstances of public works in Peru 'gendered strength-based stereotypes acted as barriers preventing women from gaining access to better paid 'men's jobs'' (199 : 25). A discourse useful in some contexts may be a distinct disadvantage in others. But an important question about the desires of women – underneath their discursive engagements – remains. What perceived interests drive their manipulation of, or resistance to, discursive currents? Care of the body is likely to be one such interest.

Embodiment matters because it affects how one regards targeting. Devereux (1998: 12)⁵ says that heavy and time consuming work screens out the relatively wealthy but that 'the problem from a gender perspective is that it is more likely to screen out more poor women

than poor men' because of time constraints. However, if this differential 'screening' is based on body management by women rather than time shortage, then this screening out of women may be desirable and not a problem. Much turns on whether the absence of women is because they are barred from the work or because they are not interested in it. Women interviewed by Acharya and Panwalkar (1988) felt that reservation of higher paid jobs such as stone breaking for men was unjustified, which does not mean that they wanted to do it, [check?] but at the same time the authors note that 'repeated health breakdowns were observed among women workers due to low nutrition standards and neglect of common ailments. This finding questions the wisdom of prescribing hard manual work to alleviate poverty amongst very poor households' (1988:6)

Several questions arise here: Is public works labour harder for women than men? Is it 'too hard' for women? Are women excluded, are better paid tasks reserved for men, or are women more effort-averse than men in their preferences for particular types of work? That women would be justified in a preference for lighter work seems clear, since the balance of evidence suggests that the lesser upper body strength and muscle mass as well as the lower stature of women means that the same heavy physical labour task requires more effort from women than men (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1999?). However, whether or not public works are indeed more physically demanding of women than other similar heavy labour is not easy to answer satisfactorily since for even an identical task, such as headloading, the experience of effort depends on the ability to pace work, and take breaks, as well as the social relations of the workplace allowing sharing and cooperation. How far participation rates of women reflect exclusions by men or choices by women is an important but neglected question, and depends on research that contextualises public works activity in relation to livelihoods rather than in isolation, since much hinges on the alternatives available, as well as attention to subjectivities - which are not satisfactorily approached through survey instruments.

To turn now to age of participants. A consideration of work-wellbeing linkages demands a life course perspective, as participation by different age groups is likely to have significantly differentiated consequences for well-being. Information on ages of public works participants is not readily available, but Chowdhury (1983:) found that those most likely to participate in the Bangladesh FFW are aged 25-39 (51%), and almost all were in the 16-54 range. Several writers find that participation increases with age within the working age bracket (Ling and Zhongyi 1995, Teklu 1995), which may be related to the decline in work opportunities with ageing, and to selective outmigration by younger people. At the other end of the age scale, the use of child labour may be quite high on some projects (Webb 1995 for Niger), but interestingly the bulk of women public works participants are not of child-bearing age (Webb 1995). Most frequent participants are eldest adolescents (10-17) in female headed households, followed by older women (over 41) from households with few young children. These findings qualify the commonly expressed concern that women's participation in public

works comes at the expense of child care, but also raise the issue of the wisdom of promoting heavy labour amongst older post-childbearing women with even lower levels of body capital than younger women. Webb(1995) remarks on the slow pace of work by elderly women in Niger (1995: 187), and Acharya and Panwalkar (1988) report older women wanting a separate wage to take into account their age, implying the explicit recognition of the additional burden of heavy work for elderly bodies.

Finally, if we are interested in the effects of different embodied states on the ability of people to participate in public works programmes it is relevant to enquire about the body capital of participants at the outset of their involvement. Some reports indicate that the young, fit and strong are preferentially recruited (eg Wijga 1983). Dev (1996, 1995 p136 which ref) using ICRISAT village level data shows that height (a proxy for nutrition) plays an important role in determining participation in the EGS for both males and females and cites evidence for the better nourished status of participants. Deolalikar and Gaiha (1993) find that height is a significant determinant of participation, and Teklu (1995) notes that, for Botswana and Tanzania, participation rates increase as physical strength and height increase. Thus it would appear that since stature is correlated with better nutrition and strength it is likely that those with greater body capital self-select into such schemes. Webb and Kumar criticise some Ethiopian schemes for imposing physical fitness criteria for selection of participants and thereby excluding the elderly and the emaciated (1995:208), but I think it is arguable that other forms of safety nets are preferable to effort intensive work for such people.

However, more frequently the less fit and strong are said to be employed on such programmes as the more able find better work elsewhere, and Webb (199) argues that for Niger and Zimbabwe individuals with low BMIs typically have the greatest need for public works employment as they are less likely to be able to compete for better work elsewhere. In a similar vein, Clay et al (1998) explain the high participation rates of women on MEGS and on food-for-work in Bangladesh with reference to the availability of better paid work for men. Furthermore, Hirway and Terhal (1994) find that women involved in MEGS had poorer health which affected their ability to do work which was not particularly demanding and indicates that amongst women it is the less bodily able who get involved with such work.

‘Many people, *particularly women*, had to cope with poor health conditions which prevented them from performing enough work to earn an adequate income. Persistent and chronic health problems severely hampered the earning capacity of the poor, even when the work itself was not difficult or heavy’ (Terhal and Hirway 1998:280, my emphasis)

Thus we possibly have two broad categories of participants – those with relatively high body capital (in terms of BMI, stature and upper body strength), and those, including most women, many of them comparatively old, with relatively low body capital who have difficulty finding better wage employment⁶. This review of what is known about who participates in public

works employment reveals both variation and also some possible regularities which deserve focussed research. Self-targetting may be operating in ways which exclude not only the non-poor, but fractions of the male poor who are small or weak, and yet it may not be excluding some of those for whom the desirability of heavy labour is questionable, such as older women. Exactly who is screened out will vary with context, but simply aiming to target in ways which exclude the monetary non-poor is too limited an approach. We have argued here for the need to understand the differences between exclusion, choice and compulsion in interpreting the meaning of data on participation, and therefore the need for research which engages with the subjectivities and agency of workers, as a means to check how likely public works are to produce well-being improvements.

2. EMBODIMENT AND RETURNS TO WORK

An assumption of a disembodied approach to public works employment is that since payment is in kind or cash that well-being will automatically improve. But not necessarily. Kurulkar (1989) observes that the Nutrition Advisory Committee of the Indian Research Fund recommends 3000 calories per day for agricultural labourers doing hard manual work, but calorie intakes in two village studies found a daily deficit of >1000 calories (but not clear whether MEGS workers only?). In such circumstances labourers will lose weight unless these wages are subsidised with other income, and indeed Wijga (1983: 30) cites Kenyan evidence of male road workers losing weight at work. The adequacy of wages also depends on household size and type. Adams (1998: 83) finds for FFW in Bangladesh that the daily wage intended to meet the need of an average rural family was not enough to meet minimum calorie needs where there is only one worker in an actual average household of 5.8.

The impact of the calorie deficit will clearly vary with not only the presence of other income but also the duration of periods of public works employment – where only a few days are undertaken the deficit may be compensated for during rest days. But in both circumstances the wisdom of setting payment rates so low that they have to be cross-subsidised by either rest or other employment is questionable. Information on the duration of works in the MEGS suggests that 60% of participants work for 3-6 months and 30% for 12 months or more (Gambhire 1989:). Long periods of employment may be seen as beneficial for poverty reduction where embodiment is ignored, but where it is taken into account, the question of the particularly perverse effects on bodily assets of low pay over long durations emerges, since cross-subsidisation becomes less viable. Similarly where heavy labour is combined within a diverse (but possibly less secure) livelihood portfolio including less intensive labour, negative effects may be less than in more secure single occupation livelihoods. In other words there is a possible tradeoff between maintaining body assets and achieving livelihood security.

What gender differentials in returns to public works employment exist, how are these connected to embodiment, and what significance do they have for achievement of well-being by women and men workers? In general, but not always⁷, women receive lower levels of pay for their labour on public works and male-female wage differentials are seen as based on physical differences in ability to carry out the heaviest tasks (eg Herring and Edwards 1983). For example, in China, men are paid more because of their greater strength (Ling and Zhongyi 1995 88-9). Herring and Edwards 1983:583 say that wages for women are less than the minimum but higher than their usual wages.

Pay differentials are usually grounded in task segregation. The separation of work along gender lines and then the differential valuation of the work done by men and women is a feature of many divisions of labour, but one that tends to be seen as either perfectly reasonable by those who accept discourses of productivity as self-evident, or as the workings of a patriarchal devaluation of the value of women's work. What is distinctive about the approach taken here is that divisions of labour are seen as more complex outcome of a combination of embodied capacities, individual agency, and gender cultures which, amongst other things, label, value and prescribe the social ideals for the working lives inhabited by men and women.

On the MEGS payment rates vary by task, with the more physically demanding work, breaking rocks and irrigation projects, being better paid and undertaken only by men (Acharya and Panwalkar, in Ravallion 1991). Hirway and Terhal (1994) also found in their Gujarat case study that men undertook the more lucrative tasks. Whether these tasks actually are more physically demanding than those undertaken by women, such as headloading, is difficult to say in the absence of research and is the subject of dispute. It has been argued to be lighter work than it appears as a result of the special gait adopted by headloaders, whilst anecdotal evidence (eg Chatterjee and Roy 1994) however describes how male forest guards are unable to lift the headloads dropped by women apprehended 'stealing' firewood. Why researchers should be particularly exercised to explain away heavy work by women clearly invites consideration, but so too does the evidence about forest guards who may have caste, class and status identities which devalue manual labour and thereby affect their willingness to lift heavy loads. In Laurie's study (1997) of a public works scheme in Peru she observes that strength arguments are used to justify task allocations, despite uncertainty about how much heavier men's tasks actually were. Everatt for South Africa makes a similar observation, that in public works they are 'pushed into physically easier tasks'. If one assumes that there is no basis to the strength argument it therefore appears that the gender division of labour is simply a means to exclude women from better paid employment.

But the question worth considering here is whether, if we take it for the moment that men's tasks are may indeed generally demand more peaks of intensive energy output and upper body strength, men necessarily reap only benefits from this arrangement? The capability of

some men for heavy labour derives from both bodily advantages such as stature, and from training and conditioning of the body from early years. Capacity for heavy manual labour is not a biological given but a body project requiring care and commitment. Further, seeing manual labour as unskilled is mistaken; knowing how to use the body to best effect is an important skill achieved only with experience and attention, as may be the case for women headloaders too. If building body capital deserves recognition, so to does the speed with which this may be expended in heavy work which potentially damages immune systems, exposes to occupational injury and challenges energy balance, and thereby leaves men burned out and facing health threats at relatively early ages. A related question is whether it is the case that women are necessarily excluded from heavy work or is it possible that some may prefer lower paid but less health threatening tasks? Such a preference of course may exist within a context in which the prevailing gender order, and the special responsibilities of women as carers of children, may not allow them to play fast and loose with their bodily assets, and thus may itself speak of 'subordination'. Preferences simultaneously express both individual agency and social norms. It would be mistaken to assume that a gender ideology which devalues women's work cannot, in unintended ways, be harnessed to a successful body project with beneficial outcomes for particular women.

Task differentiation by gender allows payment differentiation by gender. Output based remuneration systems such as piece work are defended by Miller (1992:85) because 'in many of the projects studied they have resulted in increased take-home pay, coupled with both higher productivity and greater job satisfaction', but at what bodily cost to poor women and men? Since piece rates are common in public works employment and differentiated by task, women can earn less for two reasons; even when piece rates are not differentiated they may accomplish less in a day than men because their size and strength disadvantage them, and gender differentiated tasks and rates of pay reward can further widen the gap between rewards to women and men. Piece rates can appear to be fair since they are based ostensibly on effort expenditure, but they do not allow for the fact that a given achievement (say 5 square yards of earth dug) requires more effort from a person who is smaller, has less upper body strength and less body conditioning experience. Piece rates disadvantage both most women on the basis of strength and conditioning, and vulnerable working men on the basis of low BMIs, which are often lower than women's of the same social groups (Webb 199:194 ..., check Wijga, Kynch and McGuire 1994, Gillespie and McNeill 1992, Harriss 1990). With a life course perspective we would also argue that even the tall and strong amongst men may well suffer ill-being as a consequence of self-exploitation, eg working from 7am to 6pm (Chowdhury 1983), in effort intensive work, and the rapid running down of body capital, which piece rates encourage. Laurie's study (1997: 244) finds that piecework encourages self-exploitation, whilst with daily rates 'laziness', or what might better be seen as work pacing, becomes an option. Ongoing research in Maharashtra though also indicates that piece work

may be preferred to highly supervised daily rates since pacing may be more feasible in the former, even though returns will thereby be lower (Waite, 2002, forthcoming).

Understanding the ways in which methods of payment effect body capital also requires consideration of the behaviours and incentive patterns for supervisors and intermediaries. Choudhury estimated underpayments of 10-34% (1983:129) on a range of FFW projects in Bangladesh, and argued that workers worked longer and more productively than suggested by the official estimates of earthworks completed. Workers are more productive than assumed by officials because in reality gangs are smaller and the work undertaken for fewer days than shown on the muster rolls, where fictitious workers and gangs appear. This leads to an overestimate of 20-32% of numbers of workdays created. Insofar as supervisors and intermediaries are taking a proportion of the wages due to workers, corruption seems to lead to more work for the pay received in the Bangladesh case. But if leakage to supervisors comes from the invention of fictional individuals and work gangs on muster rolls then are actually existing workers necessarily suffering as much underpayment as might be imagined?

Herring and Edwards argue for corruption having contradictory effects in India. Whilst the wages for tasks are so complex as to prevent workers from knowing what they are due and lead to systematic underpayment a 'partially countervailing dynamic' often emerges. 'Since the projects do not normally involve an expenditure cut-off, the interests of EGS labourers and those supervising the work (and thus in control of graft) are united in extending the duration of the project. Consequently, on many projects, payments are *de facto* at a fixed daily wage rather than determined by piece rates' (1983:581). The complicated formulae allow for higher payment to dig rock rather than soft soil, and if soft soil is claimed to be rock the additional funds may be either retained by the supervisor or shared with the workers who are paid for doing less than the scheduled amount of work. The pace of work becomes very slow in the context of corruption. Both labourers and supervisors wish to extend the duration of the project (to maximise wages and graft), and budgets are openended, so although returns may be made in terms of piece rates these are fictional. Daily rates are actually paid and no pressure to complete is exerted, and although workers are may be underpaid they gain longer periods of work. 'The result is a scene so painful to the urban middle and upper classes in Maharashtra: one individual working and perhaps 30 labourers sleeping and chatting.'(1983:581). This study indicates that EGS work is therefore *less* onerous, in practice, than other agricultural labour.

The medium matters too. Piece rates paid in kind are sometimes found to be less subject to corruption (Herring and Edwards 1983:590) but sometimes they allow more leakage than cash payments would because the complexity of the calculations prevents workers knowing exactly what they are entitled to (Dorosh and Haggblades 1997: 2103). In Bangladesh wages are supposed to be paid in kind for the amount of work done, but 'generally cash payments

are made on a daily basis rather than for the amount of work done. In some places it was said that daily allowances were given which will later be adjusted for the amount of earthwork done' (Choudhury 1983:125). Thus the medium of payment, mode of payment, extent and methods of corruption will all mediate the extent to which heavy manual labour might be damaging to bodily well-being, and the scope for resistance and subversion.

An embodiment perspective also allows consideration of the particular experiences of women workers in relation to sexual exploitation. The MEGS is valued by women for the relative freedom from sexual harassment at work it offers. Female agricultural labourers in India are frequently raped, and there are

'subtle forms of coercion such as denying gleaning rights or market wages to those who refuse sexual favours...[w]omen value EGS work not only for the reduced physical strain of work, but because it affords a net reduction in the frequency of rape or coerced sexual activity' (Herring and Edwards 1993:583).

A 30 village study (Edwards) found that work for women is excused for sexual favours, whilst for men "deals can be made with supervisors to avoid heavy work' (Herring and Edwards 1993:589). Thus corruption operates in particularly embodied ways for women – whilst men can buy their way to easier work, women have to fuck their way to a lighter load.

3. EFFORT INTENSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND GENDERED WELLBEING

What factors mediate the extent to which public works employment produces wellbeing for women and men? Here I look at three factors likely to be significant, whatever the context, to whether well-being is enhanced by effort intensive work, and at their gendered character.

Livelihood portfolios and intrahousehold relations:

Studies of public works show how necessary it is to evaluate the benefits of particular forms of work within a broader context of livelihood portfolios, since single occupation livelihoods are unusual amongst the poor, and Choudhury (1983) finds that the incidence of multiple occupations is very high amongst public works participants. Webb and Kumar (1995:213), for Ethiopia, found that 50-75% participants cultivate their farms after working on the FFW and whilst complete landlessness may be more common in south Asia, and the seasonality of rainfed agriculture based livelihoods less extreme, they should not be assumed to be less diverse. Even where single occupations exist, the necessary work involved in domestic reproduction, which enables all wage employment and enterprise, has to be considered. For public works participation to enhance wellbeing depends on how it knits together into the fabric of diverse and seasonal livelihoods, and with embodiment in mind, how public works labour mitigates or accentuates the bodily effects of the livelihood as a whole.

The integration of public works employment with other livelihood activity reveals gendered patterns. Time allocation studies in a Maharashtra village showed that participation by men appeared to displace unemployment for men, and leisure/domestic time for women (sadly collapsed into a single category) which suggests that the opportunity cost of participation is lower for men than women. Household men also spend more time on own-farm work when women of their households join the MEGS, which is suggested to be actually men taking over some of women's farm labour, (labelled 'domestic work'), when they join the MEGS (Datt and Ravallion 1992:20). It is only women's participation which involves compensatory shifts into domestic labour by young girls of such households (see also Laurie 1997), and possibly of men into elements of women's farm labour, thereby reducing the overall workload of women. The Indian study found less evidence of male public employment affecting women's time allocation, unlike in a Chinese study where Ling and Zhonghi (1995: 92) in which in 45% of participator households women increased their working time in farming as a consequence of men joining public works projects. These effects are important as it cannot be assumed that participation by one gender has no effects on the other, and it is conceivable that direct participation by women may allow more substitution and reduced workloads, or that male project participation increases women's workloads. In these two scenarios both reductions in domestic worktime for women participators, and for wives of participators compensating for male absences in farm work, may mean replacing light to moderately energetic work with heavy labour, and an overall intensification of effort.

As well as shifting labour inputs of different household members to the range of livelihood activities, there may be changes to patterns of food allocation which are entailed by participation in public works. Improvement in calorie and protein intake for households with one or more participating member has been reported for food-for-works in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al 1995, Akesh 1993), and mitigation of seasonal fluctuations in household consumption is reported by Webb and Kumar (1995), Subbarao (1992) and Walker and Ryan (1990), although not found by Hussain and Akash (1993). Of interest here though are the intra-household distributions of improvements which are less clear in the literature but very important from both a gender perspective and in order to understand how far the energy required for the heavy manual labour of such work is compensated for by increased consumption *of those individuals*, since it cannot be assumed that those working harder necessarily are allocated more calories within the household. Indeed, the findings of Higgins and Alderman (1997?: 590) that the extent of physical labour performed by Ghanaian women has a negative impact on their BMI suggests that calorie compensations do not occur, and other researchers find that men's energy intensive activity is only partly but not fully compensated for by additional consumption (ref).

Wijga (1983) reviewed a diverse range of public works and concluded that the assumption that because food-for-works involve food payments that they must thereby have a positive

effect on participants nutritional status cannot be supported. Data on individuals rather than households is scarce, but Webb's (1995:194) research in Niger shows both men and women of high-participant households had significantly (at 1% level) lower BMIs than those of low-participant households. There was also a significant difference (at the 5% level) in BMIs of individual workers compared to non-workers in the same households: the average BMI of a worker in a high-participating household was 18.4 compared to 19.3 for those not participating in the project. The difference was even greater for low-participating households where the average BMI of a participating worker was 17.9 compared to 20.2 for non workers. Thus it may be the most food insecure individuals who participate, that the work impairs their nutritional status, or that participators allocate calories to others in their households. (1995:194). We have considered the questions of nutritional status at the outset of participation, and of whether the work itself impairs nutritional status, but what do we know about the kinds of intrahousehold transfers which may be taking place?

The picture on intrahousehold transfers is complex and unfortunately relies largely on survey data which is not well suited for understanding how individuals share resources within the household. Most research has been addressed to the issue of how participation by adults, especially women, impacts on the nutritional status of children. Webb (1995)⁸ found that in Niger, children of high-participant households were more malnourished than those of low-participant households, especially in rural areas. Differences are highly significant in terms of weight-for-height (stunting) for both boys and girls, but in weight-for-age (wasting) the differences were highly significant for boys but not girls. Thus children in households with a high level of participation possibly lose out if scarce calories have to be diverted to men engaged in energy intensive work (even though they do not fully compensate), and this negative effect may be more marked for boys than girls. A very different scenario emerges from Hossain and Akash's (1993:44) Bangladesh study which found that child nutrition improved overall in villages with FFW projects compared to control villages, and they report anthropometric evidence for an equalising trend in project sites for differences in nutritional status between boys and girls. The nutritional status of girls in younger age groups improved more than boys in project compared to control villages. The particular benefits to girls are welcome insofar as they close absolute gender gaps in nutritional status of girls and boys, but the differentials may also signal the need to bear in mind the vulnerability of boys in relation to stunting and wasting. The gender relations underpinning the different intrahousehold allocation processes, and the consequently different well-being outcomes, in the Niger and Bangladesh studies deserve qualitative research investigation.

Gender identities of public works participants seem to be significant in the pattern of intrahousehold transfers. An analysis of Webb's data for Niger showed that the impact of participation on child nutrition was very dependent on the gender of the participator. Brown et al, (1994) found that increasing the share of employment for women in public works had

positive impacts on child nutrition and on calorie availability, whilst male participation had no impact on child nutrition and was associated with a reduction in household per capita calorie availability. Women appear to use resources under their command differently to men – whether this is seen as altruism or a particular preference for investing in the bodily wellbeing of children. They caution against concluding that an increasing involvement of women in public works is necessarily desirable, since not enough is known about impacts of participation on women's own bodily status.

Symbolic capital and self-worth:

Body capital might be converted into symbolic capital through the cultural approval accruing to particular forms of work, and being perceived as a contributor to household income may produce such an effect (Sen). The perceived role of provider is frequently associated with men as husbands and fathers, so the involvement of women in public works employment may affect the standing of both a participating woman and her spouse in different ways. A new or enhanced role for women as income earners may enhance the symbolic capital of women, where hard work and income contribution by women is valued, but it could conversely damage symbolic capital where dependence and/or the domestic confinement of women is valued. For men, it is likely that publicly working wives implicitly challenge their effectiveness as providers (Vera-Sanso)

Rather different are the effects which are mediated by the changes to self-image through employment, which may not always be simply the benefits accruing due to social conformity. Self-perceptions of worth, which are important in power relations and outcomes of 'bargaining' processes, can be grounded in oppositional strengths and a confidence in ability to challenge norms. In particular, work which challenges gender divisions of labour may offer such potential. Laurie's Peru case study (1997) shows how women participants in a public works programme developed stronger notions of self-worth, greater influence in intrahousehold affairs and destabilised prevailing constructions of femininity. The importance of self-perceptions of worth are not simply individual achievements however, for in the Peru case women learned how to undertake paving work and how to use pickaxes in ways which also ultimately undermined the stated basis of employers' preferences for male labourers (19:30).

Symbolic capital is a rather culturally static notion which requires an equivalent attention to subjectivities and agency to see how the content of what is culturally approved shifts over time through the experiences and resistances of individual women and men, and how symbolic capital accrues in complex ways since norms are multiple, overlapping and sometimes contradictory and offer a rich field for discursive manipulation. Do men benefit in similar ways? Possibly not in relation to their gender identities, where valorisation of men's

work in relation to women's work is generally high anyway, and such employment may be also be considered 'last resort' work and an admission of failure to find better employment. But in relation to wage bargaining there is some evidence that public works can put upward pressure on agricultural wages (Gaiha 1997) due to not only the labour market tightening but also the greater awareness of employment rights in wage bargaining.

An interesting example is the study of a Zambian public works programme (Simwinji 1998) where women's income did not necessarily enhance their influence as it was seen as a threat to male authority and a challenge to men as breadwinners. Men felt that women would 'grow feathers' and become disrespectful if allowed to spend the money they earned, and many women then gave the money they earned to their husbands, and conflict between spouses lead to a number of separations and divorce. Women working on the road works gained some symbolic capital, and were envied and respected by others for this employment, but suffered relationship conflicts at the same time.

Social capital and mobilisation:

Beyond personal transformations the potential for changing perceptions of collective interests and mobilising political action has been recognised (Dev 1996, Herring and Edwards 1983). Public works often consist of working environments in which relatively large (compared to most rural labour situations) numbers of poor people can interact, outside of the stifling patronage of village labour relations, and relatively free of the mystifications of more complex and longer term labour relations of employers and workers. The MEGS has therefore fostered mobilisation around workers rights (Dev 1996), although Joshi (1998) argues that rather than directly enabling the poor to mobilise the MEGS has provided a rallying point for NGOs to organise labour and articulate demands such as for housing and childcare facilities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the embodied character of gendered wellbeing is useful for a number of reasons. It raises questions for policy relevant conceptual and methodological development and it also leads to a possible re-emphasis in development practice. The ways in which labour-intensive development is also effort intensive in contexts of rural economies with basic technologies, and the significance of this for poor people with significant nutritional vulnerabilities, should give pause to those at the sharp end of development policies and programmes. The importance of labour saving technologies to reduce the burden of work for women and men acquires fresh impetus from the argument that heavy manual work and drudgery may not produce well-being if it runs down body assets, and does not transform them into other kinds of 'capitals'. More specific policy implications for employment guarantee schemes are that they need to consider a number of issues of appropriate targetting. If participants are drawn from the most nutritionally challenged what implications does this have for forms and levels of

payment, and health considerations at worksites? Should some of the poor be offered other forms of safety net provision? Are we obsessed with workbased approaches to welfare (in UK domestic social policy and internationally) which have perverse effects for those such as the elderly and less able bodied. Research is still needed to show how far heavy manual work on employment schemes damages nutritional status of participants and how this is gender disaggregated, and as a precautionary measure forms of payment should be considered that are less likely to encourage self-exploitation. Gender issues around public works employment are also less usefully seen as simply increasing numbers of women participants, but should rather be concerned to facilitate access for those women who want it, and ensure that tasks, pay and conditions do not encourage self-exploitation by either women or men. The implications of the gender identities of poor working men need also to be considered as potentially creating vulnerabilities for men and boys. Employment on public works need to be understood in a broader livelihood context, where its impact on poverty reduction is nested within a portfolio of occupations, and on intrahousehold relations which re-distribute the effort and rewards accruing to individuals in their individual working lives.

Broader conceptual and methodological rethinking is also implied here. The architect of the MEGS, VS Page, was most concerned to reform the work culture from what was seen as a non-working culture to a working one, and the wage structure designed to 'instill the values of hard work, regular discipline, and productivity-linked payment amongst the rural labourers'. (Herring and Edwards 1983: 587). Whether or not this has occurred, and it seems doubtful, the notion of the lazy poor, in particular lazy men, and the need for policy interventions to inculcate hard work seems anachronistic and wrong given the evidence for the both the degree of effort intensity of rural livelihoods and the low levels of bodily capacity signalled by patterns of BMIs. Social policy needs to move beyond the old and remarkably entrenched idea that the poor are to be disciplined, trained and made to work harder.

Labour needs to be understood in more concretised and embodied ways, and with stronger emic research emphases in order to offset the unacknowledged assumptions of the non-manual worldviews of most development professionals, and to allow greater analytical attention to agency rather than allocation in interpreting employment patterns. More qualitative research is also desirable to move forward with questions not only of agency but also of intrahousehold transfers and substitutions, livelihood interactions, the transformations of body capital to other capitals, and the ways in which body management by the vulnerable poor might be supported rather than undermined by development interventions.

ENDNOTES

¹ I would like to acknowledge the considerable inputs of my co-researchers Louise Waite and Richard Palmer-Jones to this paper and the financial support for the research from DFID.

² Data on work intensity is hard to come by. Therefore the following is of interest in a report on WFP Joint Forest Management projects in Orissa and Bihar (George Aelion, 7.7.1999)

Sex wise Type of Work:

	Orissa		Bihar	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Sedentary	3.3%	24.1%	6.3%	6.8%
Moderate	10.0%	37.9%	9.3%	59.1%
Heavy	86.7%	37.9%	84.4%	34.1%

Sedentary: eg household activities, livestock feeding

Moderate: eg collection of forest products, livestock washing

Heavy: eg agriculture, tilling, water collection and firewood cutting

³ This data reanalysed by Richard Palmer-Jones however indicates that a similar finding holds for men (personal communication), which raises the question of why data on women alone were analysed in this way.

⁴ Varma (1992) in a Haryana study of drudgery (defined as 'physical and mental strain, fatigue, monotony and hardship' (p?) found that the average workload of women (defined as average work days) was lower than men's amongst the low socio-economic status group, but higher in middle and high groups).

⁵ This paper is rather contradictory – it argues that women are screened for public works participation and suggests ways to overcome this, then later suggests that women should not be targetted as public works participants.

⁶ Of course men and women face different labour market etc and the body condition of workers may be less significant than other factors for women ...gender divs of lab)

⁷ In Bangladesh male wage rates for road building are 47kg wheat per 1000cubic feet of earthwork, compared to 65kg for women (Ahmed etc at 1995: 54), and see Hossain and Akesh 1993

⁸ Webb's cross-sectional data is unable to distinguish those who had low BMIs at the outset of the projects from those that became low as a consequence of participation, but since his Zimbabwean high participator households conducted only up to 30 days per year of such work it would seem likely that what we see there is selection of people with low initial BMIs. In Niger high participators conducted up to 210 days work a year, and thus low BMIs are perhaps more likely to be related to the nature of the work.