

## **Rethinking Development and Well-Being and a Search for New Indicators**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mere economic growth is not development. Development and human development normally defined is not well-being. Well-being should include quality of life, subjective well-being and happiness. There is a huge scope for redefining development in terms of well-being, human development, sustainability and happiness. Alternative approaches, criteria and indicators are being suggested as measures of all round development, well-being and progress. Yet there are unresolved issues related to the need for an alternative, integrated, and composite framework and measures which provide for minimum cross-cultural consensus. Even when goals and values can be defined the search for indicators can be elusive and yet one measures what one values and values what can be measured

**Introduction:**

Indicators of development like gross national product and other purely economic criteria are increasingly seen as insufficient. The need for higher GNP leads to productive systems and consumption patterns that are not in harmony with the carrying capacity of the environment and our planet. GNP does not measure the fair and equal distribution, unpaid labour, social sector indicators like employment, health and education. By emphasizing only economic value the prevailing paradigm transforms skills into lacks, man and women into commodities and labour, tradition into burden, wisdom into ignorance and autonomy into dependence.(1)

The proposal for Action of the first UN development decade (1960-70) suggested that development is growth plus change in all aspects including social, cultural, qualitative and quantitative. The key concept must be improved quality of people's life.(2) In 1974 the

‘Declaration of Cocoyoc’ emphasized the development of man not of things and stressed the need for diversity and for following different roads to development to achieve goals like self-reliance.(3) Similarly the call for “Another Development” in 1975 focused on human-centered development. UNESCO emphasized a total multi-relational process that includes all aspects of the life of a collectivity, of its relationship with the outside world and of its own consciousness.(4) The Brundtland Commission has more recently prescribed sustainable development for our common future. However it is feared that sustainability may have been co-opted as a catchword in mainstream hermeneutics to sustain economic development rather than a process to support the flourishing of natural and social diversity.

After decolonization the western model of modernization was proposed for poor countries. Then came Basic Needs approach followed by participatory development and the culture and development approach. Sustainable development is still a major theoretical outlook. There is also a debate between neo-liberal economic development and globalization which is being challenged by the centre-left Third Way, post-capitalism and by Another World is Possible of the anti neo-liberal World Social Forum. There is also a lively discussion about Post Development which advocates culturally diverse and local solutions which value traditions as opposed to the centralized bureaucratic and western centric ideology of development. Recently more emphasis is being laid on well-being and happiness as more valuable societal goals

Arturo Escobar shows how the ‘Third World’ is in a sense an invention of a Western discourse of development defined by its lack of material abundance rather than by what these ‘poor’ societies might have or value as measures of well-being. Poverty became solely a matter of inadequate income, the solution to which was also one dimensional growth. “Development in most parts continues to be a top down, ethnocentric, technocratic and one which treats people and cultures as abstract concepts and statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress’”.(5)

Theoretical Approaches:

Some of the major approaches to measure well-being are limited. The first one focuses on opulence and consumption of more and more goods and acquisitions. It does not lead to a good quality of life because it ignores good relationships, social and ethical values and a sustainable relationship with the environment. The second approach lays stress on fulfillment of desire, pleasure and the utilitarian ethic of greatest happiness of the greatest number. By emphasizing

the majority viewpoint it ignores justice for deprived minorities, tribal, lower castes, migrants and those displaced by big dams or big development projects. The third approach concerned purely with subjective feelings of well-being is problematic because poor people's subjective feeling of well-being is problematic because their subjective perception can be restricted to such an extent that they either do not recognize or are unable to articulate their basic need for food, education and shelter.

The liberal philosophy associated with John Rawls proposes that people's standards of living should be judged by certain objective factors like basic liberties and opportunities and social basis for self respect. Economic or social conditions do not justify the violation of individual rights. But Amartya Sen believes that Rawls does not take into account the inequalities and disadvantages in a diverse society and the need to improve social conditions and structures in favour of the deprived. Similarly Martha Nussbaum emphasizes enabling social and economic conditions to give teeth to human rights.

In order to overcome the limitations of the major approaches to well-being Amartya Sen has advocated the capability approach because it builds human capacities to be able to choose and fulfill valuable goals in terms of both subjective and objective factors and values. Capability approach has the merit of offering a multidimensional analysis including participatory strategies, agency and autonomy of individuals and distributional assessment of individuals well-being.(6) A Capability and Sustainable Center has been set up at St. Edmunds College in Cambridge University. This center along with ILO, UNDP and other UN bodies is carrying out research in Latin America and Africa to develop relevant indicators.

The merits or some would say demerits of the capability approach is that it remains a very broad approach which can then be applied and adapted in different cultural contexts. This approach can be faulted for being vague in its content and sometimes indistinguishable from educational skills. It does not specify what is a good capability. Yet it is to be preferred over Martha Nussbaum's very concrete list or indicators of human development because these Neo-Aristotelian indicators with their stress on individual rights, individual space and autonomy reflect a Western bias, while claiming to be universal.

The countries of Scandinavia (although having problems of loneliness, suicide and drug addiction) have consistently achieved very high ranking in terms of human development and well-being. Denmark is perhaps the most equal society. Norway is on top of the gender equity

scale. Scandinavia enjoys very high level of trust and peace in their societies. Why they score high is not only because they are homogenous societies with no history recent wars and with a high standard of income but because they have charted a third way trying to overcome the ills of both capitalism and socialism. Redistribution preceded or was accompanied by economic growth in Scandinavia. Conscious policies of social welfare, equity and care for the environment were pursued instead of only free market mechanism. They are more caring and compassionate societies even though recently policies have been undergoing change.

There is a increasing need to value concepts like dignity, self esteem, trust, compassion and respect for nature and all life and measure the standards of individuals and societies by applying these what many consider to be the most cherished values. Dignity as it is called in traditional culture and self esteem as advocated by psychologists is too important to be ignored. Compassion and trust are celebrated both in Buddhism and in humanist and positive psychology. They deserve to be developed into indicators. At oxford university the idea of capability and self dignity index is being explored.

Sustainability needs to be redefined as respect for the natural world as a human value in itself and not just as instrumental. Secondly sustainability needs to be understood not as leaving a good environment for future generations but as leading a lifestyle where the ecological footprint does not exceed the desirable limit right here and now. The ways of consumption should be consistent with the need for cutting back on pollution so that global warming can be contained within manageable limits while there is still time. The ecological and carbon footprint indicator has to be widely accepted by policy makers. Similarly the Earth Charter has developed good guidelines and standards for ethical and ecological living

It is widely accepted that first minimum basic social and economic needs have to be met before subjective well-being can be developed. Others like some Buddhists believe that subjective happiness exists relatively independently of social and economic factors and it is more important how people react internally to the outer reality.

There now exists a widespread disillusionment with the enlightenment idea of progress at two levels: First in theory the emergence of postmodern relativism has blurred the distinction between good and bad values and between progress and regression. Secondly in practice the social reality is struggling with environmental degradation, social disintegration, unemployment, inequalities, anomie, depression loneliness which have shaken confidence in a positive future.

However looking at the world as a whole in the long term, life expectancy, wealth and education levels, have shown a consistent positive evolution. This has been borne out by the Human Development Index, Physical Quality of Life Index and the International Index of social Progress. Although it is unevenly spread, we can also find some progress in the spread of democracy, human rights and gender equality.

Search for New Indicators:

The human development approach is concerned with enlarging choices by building capabilities and the abilities to function better. The three requisites for enlarging choices are knowledge, a decent standard of income and a long and healthy life. The elements of human development are productivity, sustainability, equality and empowerment. The Human Development Index (HDI) developed by UNDP is a composite standard of three fundamental indicators: (1) life expectancy, (2) education measured by combined estimate of adult literacy and average years of schooling, (3) economic standard of living in terms of purchasing power after adjusting for the local cost of living. These three indicators are given equal weight. The sexual, social and regional bias of a society are better reflected on the gender and income disparity adjusted index.

Human Development Index is considered limited because it considers only six indicators to make comparison easy. HDI and GDP per capita is arbitrarily adjusted to limit its impact in the index. Not enough attention is paid to historical trends. Aspects of subjective well-being, democratic freedoms, sustainability have not been included in the index although their significance is accepted. A few years ago an attempt was made to include political freedoms in the index, which proved very controversial and had to be given up.

The Country Futures Indicator developed by Hazel Henderson(7) is a more comprehensive approach, which also claims to be cross-cultural. These indicators provide criteria on the basis of which governments and institutions can be made more accountable in terms of social, democratic and environmental audit. Some of the novel indicators are (1) income distribution, (2) informal and household sector production, (3) deduction of social and environmental costs, (4) community based accounting, (5) military\civilian budget ratio. Some of the complementary indicators of progress include (1) education, (2) health, (3) nutrition, (4) basic services, (5) shelter, (6) political participation and democratic progress, (7) status of minorities, women etc.

The Redefining Progress project in the USA has developed Genuine Progress Indicators which

take into account quality and distribution of economic growth.(8) It particularly considers the value of housework, care for children and elderly, voluntary work, free time or family and community activities etc. These activities can be viewed as good for the economy and well-being although no money changes hands. Genuine Progress Indicators Canada have developed Democracy Index consisting of 22 components focusing presently on Nova Scotia. Their proposed projects include ecological footprint, common assets, climate justice coalition and environmental tax reform.

The UN Research in Social Development and UNESCO has proposed the following cultural indicators:

1. Cultural Freedom Index includes freedom of thought belief and expression.
2. Creative Empowerment Index includes encouragement to innovative expression.
3. Cultural Dialogue Index includes opportunities to mutually benefit communication among people of different cultures.

The Human Development Report 2004.(9) focuses on cultural Liberty in our diverse world both as an instrument as well as a goal of development 8. Cultural liberty helps people to choose one of the most cherished values like identity and meaning in life. If the world has to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and eradicate poverty it must build culturally inclusive and diverse societies. The report maintains that there is no contradiction between a multicultural society and goals of development and democracy.

A Welfare Index has been evolved for Scandinavian countries, which combines the three aspects of having, loving and being. The index includes (1) income, (2) quality of housing, (3) political support, (4) social relations, (5) health, (6) education, (7) being irreplaceable, (8) doing interesting things, (9) life satisfaction. The WHO Quality of Life indicators include physical environment, home environment, financial resources, social support, safety, information, and transportation. The inner quality consists of physical health, mental health, work capacity, learning capacity, energy, absence or presence of pain and depression, satisfaction with self, and satisfaction with life.

The Canadian Council for Social Development describes quality of life in terms of (1) being, which include (a) physical health, (b) psychological (thoughts and feelings), (c) spiritual (beliefs and values), (2) belonging (a) physical (living place), (b) social (people around), (c) community resources, (3) becoming (a) practical (daily things to do), (b) leisure (for fun and enjoyment), (c)

growth (coping with change). The WIDER Institute in Finland advocates a simple approach, which consists of outer qualities, which are living in a good environment and being of worth for the world, and inner qualities, which are being able to cope with life and enjoying life.

#### Subjective Well-Being and Happiness:

It is being realized that for true well-being and quality of life, external social and economic development should lead to or be accompanied by internal satisfaction, and happiness or subjective well-being. Both Aristotle in the Western tradition and Dalai Lama today in the East, agree that happiness is so important because it is an end in itself and we pursue other goals because they can lead us to happiness.

Some years ago the King of Bhutan suggested the idea of Gross National Happiness. It is a interesting idea without any measurable indicators but represents a general aspiration towards environmental conservation, culture promotion, equitable growth, community living and emotional well-being. Instead of the term gross which is a aggregated measure that ignores the issue of equity and distribution a better term would be simply national happiness index. Secondly more spiritual and psychological goals and indicators need to be developed. Yet the idea of GNH is very significant because it is transforming the discourse of development and well-being and helping in redefining priorities

Objections that the pursuit of happiness ignores the need for justice, eradication of poverty and social and ecological responsibility have to be taken account of. Experts agree that up to a certain level improvement in economic standards leads to increase in happiness which supports basic needs first for the poor as a precondition for happiness. Also allowing ordinary people to define and rate their happiness levels is a positive grass roots exercise in defining well-being which has been too long left to experts and is a top down approach. Problems persist about finding cross-cultural and meaningful measures which do not reduce happiness to hedonistic individualism or American pop psychology which lays too much stress on the romantic power of positive affirmations

The economist Richard Layard argues in his book “Happiness: Lesson From a New Science”, that public policy should be devoted to increasing happiness rather than wealth or success. Similarly Paul Martin in his book “Making Happy People” proposes how we can bring up our children to be happy because happiness is arguably the most important thing in life. However

Natasha Walker reviewing recent books on happiness in the Guardian, suggests that we can increase the sum total of happiness not as an end in itself but as a side effect of other pursuits like justice, freedom and love.(10)

Towards a More Integrated and Holistic Alternative Framework:

Well-being is a broader inclusive concept as compared to development which tends to be equated with economic and narrow social indicators and happiness which only considers desires ,pleasures and subjective fulfillment of personal needs sometimes not related to larger concerns and values

The difficulty of agreeing on a common integrated ethical and cross-cultural perspective and developing measurable indicators should not lead us to become cynics or postmodernists. The hope remains that agreement on some minimum core values and standards is not only necessary for our common humanity facing common globalised problems of environment ,peace and interdependent development, but also possible provided the agreement is democratically and cross-culturally arrived at without denying cultural plurality and diversity. Focus should be on minimum core cross-cultural values and measures on which more or less universal agreement is possible and the framework should be flexible and open enough so it can be adapted and expanded and allows local and culturally diverse needs and values

Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains interesting but mainly emphasizes personal needs and not so much societal and ecological needs . It is also very hierarchical. Ken Wilbur has more recently developed a significant holistic integrated spiral hologram of evolving human consciousness and progress but sometimes it tends to be over-generalised and transcendental.

In conclusion some initial proposals for further discussion and elaboration regarding another framework can be suggested in terms of Reinforcing Levels of Well-being Pursuits

1 At the first level comes basic human needs of food, clothing, shelter and security.2 Second is the need for good health and health care. 3 The need for security of livelihood followed at a higher stage by the pursuit of fulfilling work 4 Need for a good physical and natural environment. 5 The well-being pursuit of sex, intimacy which at the higher stage leads to emotional support.6 The pursuit of loving relationships, social engagement and supportive social network.7 The pursuit of dignity, freedom justice ,equity, rights, democracy and compassion for



the deprived.<sup>8</sup> Internal peace and harmony between internal and external peace. <sup>9</sup> The pursuit for sustaining the natural environment which sustains us and appreciating and wondering at its beauty, power and its interdependence with all living beings <sup>10</sup> Then comes the need for developing and integrating different dimensions of awareness such as cognitive emotional ,social and finally spiritual or moral which also provides the integrating principle. Through this awareness to feel a sense of union and interdependence with all.<sup>11</sup> The pursuit of fulfillment of positive human potential and self actualization including spiritual transcendence for those thus inclined. Human potential can also be achieved by connecting to one's true self or moving from lower self which is egoistic, consuming more and more desires, only self interested ,full of negative emotions ,towards the higher self which is compassionate, loving, kind, having a broader perspective and pursuing goodness and wisdom.<sup>12</sup> Finally through all these overlapping levels the pursuit of developing a world outlook with larger meaning or meanings and insights where pursuit of knowledge leads to wisdom through reflection.

Particularly the last six levels are overlapping and mutually reinforcing and the priorities can be reformulated, according to personal, cultural and societal choice. While elaborating further, inner well-being pursuits can be distinguished from outer and individual from social-ecological. If the list appears too cumbersome certain levels can be abstracted and clubbed together or less significant ones can be deleted .These pursuits can be seen as guiding cross-cultural values and principles for which if possible suitable a composite index or measures with proper weightage in the local context may be worth attempting

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