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Alternative approach to well-being attainment and measurement

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Globalization and Social Well-being

Alternative Approach to Well-being Attainment and Measurement*

Li Xing & Mammo Muchie**

Abstract

The key theoretical incentive of this paper is to seek how Amartyr Sen's contribution on the conceptualization of development is to be taken forward. Sen has brought about an appropriate starting point for further research with his broad alternative development thinking. This paper is part of the on-going endeavors by many scholars in the attempt to contribute to the discussion of social well-being. It has three objectives: 1) to offer a framework of understanding the notion of well-being as essential part of social development; 2) to signify the limits of conventional measures of a well-being attainment and performance; and 3) to propose an alternative interdisciplinary approach to constructing well-being measures. The overall objective is to formulate a conceptual framework and a fresh approach for ranking the different countries in the world not merely on the number of individually reckoned well-being attainments but on the determination of the structural social capacity for sustaining and making such attainments irreversible.

Introduction

Development and underdevelopment

Since its inception in the 1950s and 1960s, the notion of development has been an equivalent term with "progress" and "modernization." Nowadays it has become an analogue of "economic growth". In this sense, development denotes a movement away from something that is considered to be "underdeveloped." Since the word "underdeveloped" was invented in comparison with the development level of the West at the end of World War II,¹ the majority of the world population had suddenly degraded into a status of "underdevelopment." The dichotomy between development and underdevelopment was thus established behind the thinking: to develop is to think oneself as underdeveloped and is to escape from a condition called underdevelopment.

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Since then, all non-Western countries have been more or less in a process to “develop” or to “catch up.” The *Petit Robert* dictionary contains the following text under the general heading of “development”: “Developing country or region, whose economy has not yet reached the level of North America, Western Europe, etc. Euphemism created to replace underdeveloped” (Rist, 1997:8). The basic assumption of development, regardless of its definition, is of a linear teleology vis-à-vis the standard criteria of measurements: economic growth and expansion, wealth accumulation, mass production and consumption. A country is considered “developed” if it can meet these measurements.

These measurements reflect the thinking, which dominates development theories, practices and policies. They have become institutionalized discourses of the powerful global agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF. These discourses, whether economic, political and sociological, are rooted in a basic paradigm - commonly referred to as the modernization paradigm. Seen from this perspective, development is an evolutionary process; and development and underdevelopment are differences between rich and poor nations in terms of visible economic, political, social and cultural gaps. The alleviation of *observable* poverty is seen as the objective of development

Hence, the *notion* of the mainstream ideology of development is entirely based on neoclassical economic theories which suggest that the sole goal of economic activity is to maximize profit and that individual preferences are the most important aspects of humans. It also implies that a modernization process to bridge these gaps by means of imitation through which less developed countries will gradually assume the material living standard of the Western industrialized nations. In light of this implication, development is seen as a universal process as well as a characteristic of human societies rather than a concrete historical process taking place in specific societies during specific periods.

It is generally recognized that the neoclassical economics is derived from Adam Smith, who founded the discipline of economics in his *Wealth of Nations* in which he sketched the theory of general equilibrium characteristics of a market economy – the pursuit of private gain can be socially productive under conditions of free competition. Interestingly enough, Smith was also a professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow University whose publications included *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Besides Smith, many of the celebrated nineteenth-century economists, from Thomas Malthus through John Stuart Mill to Francis Edgeworth and Alfred Marshall, also took moral considerations seriously (Cooper, 2000:163). However, there is however a mismatch between the modern professional economics emphasizing competition, productivity, efficiency, the

free market and moral-ethical frameworks of social justice, collective values as well as human development. In short, it is the separation between economics and ethics, because economics and the market are seen as ethically value-free.

Globalization and well-being

In the past two decades, forceful national and international developments in market-oriented reforms have been sweeping around the world, spreading from the northern to the southern, and from the western to the eastern hemispheres. These movements have changed relations in the national and international political economy between capital-to-labor, capital-to-capital, and capital-to-state, in which transformations are taking place in favor of the capital. Consequently, economic and social relationships in accordance with international norms of productivity, capital returns and competitiveness are redistributing resources from “non-productive” sectors (welfare, health, education, social and cultural activities) to “productive” ones (financial market, trade).

The question over globalization – whether the increasing levels of international trade, finance, investment and cultural communication have a positive or negative impact on advancing human well-being for the majority of world population – is still under debate. It is our point of departure that development in the era of rapid globalization has not delivered well-being to all nations and peoples. On the opposite, it has actually increased hunger and poverty in most of the Third World countries². The neoliberal discourses of globalization that: 1) economic growth and increased trade achieved through deregulation and privatization automatically increases the wealth of communities and humanity; and 2) increased foreign investment in developing countries promotes their productive capacities and development improving the well-being of the poor, have proved false. On the contrary, globalization has actually increased the well-being of transnational corporations that have perpetuated it (Anderson and Cavanagh, 2000:i).

A published *Special Report*³ from The International Forum on Globalization (IFG) concentrates on the three decades of globalization’s rapid growth and finds that the outcomes for the poor were exactly the opposite of what is claimed by globalization advocates. In fact it concludes that the effects of globalization have contributed to increased poverty, increased inequality between and within nations, increased hunger, increased corporate concentration, decreased social services and decreased power of labor vis-à-vis global corporations. The findings of this report correspond to the conclusions of much research on this issue.

Even the UNDP's *Human Development Report* also admits that, "Human development is the end - economic growth a means. So, the purpose of growth should be to enrich people's lives. But far too often it does not. The recent decades show all too clearly that there is no automatic link between growth and human development" (1996:1). Therefore, it is the time to question the entire discourses of globalization paradigm, to reconceptualize the meaning of development, and to reconstruct well-being measures by putting human and society at the center rather than market and economics. In connection with the studies on the impact of globalization, it is proposed here that such impact must not be narrowly studied on the basis of monetary data. Rather, it should be analyzed and measured from social perspectives as well.

Objectives and methodologies

The key theoretical incentive of this paper is to seek how Amartyr Sen's contribution to the conceptualization of development is to be taken forward. Sen has brought us an appropriate starting point for further research with his broad alternative development thinking. This paper is part of the on-going endeavors of many scholars in the attempt to contribute to the discussion of social well-being. It has three objectives: 1) to offer a framework of understanding the notion of well-being as essential part of social development; 2) to signify the limits of conventional measures of well-being attainment and performance; and 3) to propose an alternative interdisciplinary approach to constructing well-being measures.

Methodologically, what we intend to do is related to a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of theories and applications, i.e. to break down the established way of thinking and practice, and to establish a new worldview and interpretation of the truth and reality in order to find alternative methodological epistemology and policy implications. We are challenging the conventional quantitative and objective measures that are entirely based on the monetary dimensions of well-being, income and consumption. However, what is proposed here is to add the non-monetary elements as well as the subjective dimensions, such as emotion, capacities in maintaining social-cultural-political coherence as important indicators of measuring well-being. Thus, well-being is associated not only to material conditions, but also to *subjective well-being*⁴ in terms of social relations, freedom, security, self-confidence and happiness, etc. It is a bottom-up approach to the understanding of well-being and progress.

The overall objective is to formulate conceptual framework and a fresh approach for ranking the different countries in the world not merely on the basis of the number of individually reckoned well-being attainments but on the determination of the structural social capacity for sustaining and making such

attainments irreversible. It is an attempt to make a contribution to this research area in which the main literature on human development generally starts from individual human well-being as a measure for ranking how well countries are doing. It intends to add the structural variables for well-being /ill-being production/destruction that express the significant systemic features that are not often apparent in development studies literature and journals.

From Amartya Sen to new ideas on development and well-being measurement

Development as freedom

As an Indian economist, Sen's award was widely appreciated after a series of prizes given to American economists, whose works were more focused on narrow issues, such as the financial markets. The essence of Sen's unconventional writings (1985, 1999a), especially his *Development as Freedom* (1999b), combines moral philosophy with development economics. These two issues are traditionally seen as separate ones by professional economists. Sen's concept of development incorporates economic, social and political considerations to enhance the freedoms that people enjoy, i.e. an individual's ability to choose to lead the life he/she wants and to freely interact with the world (Sen, 1999: 74). As he points out that:

What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people's freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice, and in the making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities.
(Sen, 1999: 5)

Based on Sen's comprehension, development entails the expansion of five essential substantive human freedoms: political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. It is not only the promotion of each freedom but also the interlinks between them that is the core of development (Sen, 1999: 40). Individual freedom from Sen's perspective is a social commitment, meaning that the exercise of such freedom is inseparably connected with social, economic and political institutions. Different kinds of freedom interrelate with one another and freedom of one type can greatly promote freedom of other types. For example, substantial freedoms are not guarantees of happiness, good health and social security which need to be supported by instrumental freedoms, such as economic opportunity to use resources, political choices about laws, social questions about arrangement of health care, transparency guarantees and the security of a social safety net.

Sen is among other things advocating *freedom* as the key to an ethical understanding of development and as the overarching norm of development. It includes the eradication of starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality. It also takes account of freedom that is associated with being literate and numerate and with enjoying political participation in decision-making process. Freedom, according to Sen, should not be regarded either as a means to achieve economic development or as an objective that can be compromised or upgraded/degraded in the name of promoting economic wealth.

Democracy and economic development

Another conceptual contribution of Amartya Sen concerns the notion of democracy. Many may not necessarily agree with him on his arguments (1999c) about the relationship between democracy and development, but his concept of democracy as well as his idea on the functions and the universal value of democracy is of great inspiration. Unlike conventional liberal understanding of democracy, the universal value of democracy, according to Sen, must not be identified with the principle of majority rule. Democracy is an inherent part of his “development as freedom” concept. There are three essential aspects which democracy can enriches people’s lives:

First, political freedom is a part of human freedom in general, and exercising civil and political rights is a crucial part of good lives of individuals as social beings. Political and social participation has *intrinsic value* for human life and well-being.democracy has an important *instrumental value* in enhancing the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including claims of economic needs)... democracy has *constructive importance*, in addition to its intrinsic value for the lives of the citizens and its instrumental importance in political decisions. (Sen, 1999c: 10)

Hence, democracy is defined her in terms of 1) *political freedoms* (political participation, civil rights, free speech and elections; 2) *social-cultural opportunities* (education, cultural value and health care); 3) *economic needs and participation* (trade and production). Based on this understanding, democracy is seen as being able to play a constructive role in promoting economic development and to generate personal well-being as well as public resources for social well-being.

Rethinking the conventional well-being measures

Thus, Sen is conceptual by challenging what is normatively taken for granted in the comprehension of economic development and especially in the

understanding of development measurement. In our view, as well as many other scholars, the flaws of most conventional monetary measures - economic data such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), Purchase Power Parity (PPP) are numerous: 1) they fail to give a real picture when used for across-country comparisons due to the wide differences from country to country in terms of exchange rate anomalies, differentials in tariff and tax rates, as well as subsidies to consumption goods; 2) these data put an emphasis on the market value of economic production, that is the rate at which resources are converted to commodities and consumption together with other paid services and activities. For example, the expansion of military budgets, expenditures on prisons, wars and crime including prevention expenditures, as well as environmental costs (the destroying of forests and the toxic dumpsites) seem to make GNP and GDP data impressive; 3) they do not take account of tradable goods and services that do not enter the market, for example, self-sufficiency, female contribution to households, elders unpaid tutoring of youth, care for the sick and elderly, voluntary work of civic societies, etc, and other social aspects, such as family and community coherence, emotional well-being, social stability.

Although higher economic growth or more increase in income is a significant component of development and is important in measuring development and technological level, it is neither the only part nor the essential part. For instance, good health, adequate education, greater longevity, the ability to influence the political decisions or the freedom to choose alternatives cannot be adequately reflected by these data. This is because these data are too narrow to the extent that they are unable to shed light on the existence of some basic human needs and the real condition of individuals in a country. Here are some examples:

1. *Monetary indicators have little or no correlation with actual benefits to the well-being of the poor or the marginalized groups.* The United States, the so-called “the largest liberal democracy” with the highest GNP/GDP per capita, is witnessing the rise of economic inequalities among the population due to the monopoly of capital and concentration of wealth. 500 giant enterprises accounted for 92 per cent of all income in 1994. During the 1980s, according to UNICEF’s *The State of the World’s Children* 1994, an additional four million children fell into poverty although the wealth generated by the country’s economy expanded by one-fifth. According to *The State of America’s Children’s Yearbook* 1994, the percentage of child poverty affected 22 percentage of all children by 1992, and infant mortality rates for black children increased more than double those for white children (Watkins, 1995: 4-5). In the United Kingdom the number of people who live on less than half the average

income reached 12 million, more than double the number in 1979 (Watkins, 1995: 4-5). So, even in many developed countries within the North with high GDP and GNP per capita, the distribution of income and wealth is extremely uneven causing some people live in misery.

2. *Monetary indicators tend to have a wrong focus.* The minimum economic well-being standard set by the World Bank is a-dollar-a-day, which implies the dividing line between basic well-being and poverty. By the Bank's calculation based on this standard, 23% of the world population (1.2 billion people) live in poverty. However, the flaw of such a measure is that it is such a generalization that it fails to reflect the price differences among developing countries in the purchasing of goods and services. The focus of this measure also creates a misperception that an individual's well-being depends on his/her own resources and abilities or on the external "assistance". It ignores the constraints of a person's environment that are imposed on him/her by nature or by policy or by the capitalist world system. For example, it could be far better for people in underdeveloped countries to live in an environment free of war and malaria than to have a-dollar-a-day living standard.
3. *High income cannot fully explain well-being status.* Afro-American males have a lower life expectancy than males in China and parts of India, although their average real income is far higher. It was the mass-based health care system (the three-tiered system⁵), implemented by China under Mao, rather than increased income that had helped to increase the nation's longevity and overall demographic improvement (Li, 1999 and 2002). World Bank *Development Report* (1981) stated that China's economic structure and national income per person were similar to that of other low-income countries, but the physical quality of life of majority of the Chinese people was strikingly better than in most other low-income countries. Chinese life expectancy which increased from 36 years in 1950 to 64 years in 1979 was claimed by the World Bank to be outstandingly high for a country with China's per capita income level.

Therefore, the mainstream monetary measures of well-being attainment cannot be seen as representative indicators, and they can even appear to be absurd in the case of a serious economic crisis in which GDP data can still increase even though the well-being of the majority of the population and communities decreases. Hence, they need to be added, refined or reconstructed by taking into consideration other critical elements.

Reconceptualization of well-being and its measurement

To feel depressed, cheated, bitter, desperate, vulnerable, frightened, angry... to feel devalued, useless, helpless, uncared for, hopeless,

isolated, anxious, and a failure; these feelings can dominate people's whole experience of life, coloring their experience of everything else.

(Wilkinson, 1997: 215)

Social well-being

In our proposed alternative conceptualization of well-being, it is important to differentiate social well-being from both individual well-being and the aggregate of individual well-beings. Social well-being refers to the ability of a society to generate and sustain (including the degree of depth, culture, norm and commonsense) the society's system-scale attainments. It includes the capacity of the institutional structures in place and the quality of the provisions of four types of well-beings entitlements (described below) to all the citizens starting from the least advantaged (Rawls, 1971):

- 1) basic well-being (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, the goods for self-respect)
- 2) additive well-being (e.g., health, education, identity expression, culture)
- 3) freedom from subtractive and divisive well-being (e.g. environmental degradation, violence, crime, coercion, deception, genocide, ethnic-cleansing, lynching, slavery, psychological torture, forced displacement and migration, rape and abuse)
- 4) multiplicative well-being (e.g., ease of mobility, degree of comfort, ease and participation in creative and public life, spiritual fulfillment, confidence and growing self-respect and psychic health)

Basic well-being covers the indispensable physical conditions, such as expected longevity, adequate nourishment, shelter and absence of morbidity possible, in the context of an ecologically sound environment which retains its integrity even as people continue to draw the means for their physical functionings from it. Freedom from subtractive and divisive well-being is attained via the political and social functionings which make possible ease and degree of living by the population with a sense of security especially with freedom from the invasive actions by the state, organized crime networks and other agents of well-being subtraction and division. It implies the absence of restriction on the agency of freedom for the population to participate in public life as well as on the population's immunity from violence, deliberate deception, and discrimination on the ground of belief, religion, ethnicity, culture, race, gender, age or sexual orientation. Above all it implies a convivial environment for living from subtractive intrusions, which damage psychological well-being and increase society's threshold of psychological distress. Individuals, groups and whole populations should be able to live without shame about their position in society and for having any self-defined identity so long as such identity creates no

particular negative externality on the freedom to others. It also implies harmonizing human well-being development with the reduction of harm to the environment such as the atmosphere, lithosphere/geosphere, biosphere, and the hydrosphere.

Additive and multiplicative well-being are derivative and higher order achievements often made possible by a given population's collective intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic qualities institutionalized as a prevailing commonsense and value for a given society. Such non- primary attainments manifest through having knowledge, resources and confidence to handle problems of life and living. They imply intellectual fulfillment through contribution to human knowledge. They suggest aesthetic fulfillment through the expression of creative faculties, and spiritual fulfillment measured by the success of a population's psychological health. The latter is enhanced through the participation of a population using the free time attained by societies for well-being development in order to further and expand leisure, recreation and the higher pursuits of life.

Social well-being achievement can be defined as the foundation for continuous social innovation and learning for the preservation and deepening of the four well-being components and their workings as well as the degree to which these have been embedded in a country's histories, institutions, values, norms, interests, morals, politics and intellectual life. A country where the above well-being functionings have become part of the societal commonsense, routine, norm, moral sense and culture, with a conscious and well-informed population ready to resist any encroachment towards subtractive tendencies, can be said to have built a credible basis for social well-being attainments as well as for further enhancement. Thus social well-being suggests the existence of a sufficiently habituated and embedded political, moral and intellectual public culture to resist attempts to subvert/ erode covertly and overtly such well-defined well-being attainments. It implies a shared belief and coherence amongst all competing and/ or cooperating actors on the need to preserve, maintain and sustain institutional arrangements and policy direction to continue deepening and refining these achievements with further learning and innovation.

In line with other progressive and critical approaches

The way we approach to social well-being shares similar thinking with the way ecological economics approaches *sustainability*. Neoclassical expansionists treats the economy as “an independent, self-regulating and self-sustaining system whose productivity and growth are not seriously constrained by the environment”, and they believe that “humankind has achieved mastery over relevant parts of the natural world and through technology will be able to compensate for the depletion of any important natural resources” (Rees, 1999:

28-29). By contrast, ecological economists sees the economy not in isolation but “as an inextricably integrated, completely contained, and wholly dependent subsystem of the ecosphere,” and the economy is thus seen as a highly ordered, dynamic system maintained by available energy imported from the ecosphere (Rees, 1999: 30). Seen from this perspective, industrial metabolism (the Western mode of production transforming nature into goods and service) becomes an extension of biological metabolism (returning waste to nature). In line with this type of thinking, a society’s sustainable development is conceptualized as:



Another similarity can be seen from the new methodological epistemology being applied in the area of *health studies*. Health can also be defined in non-medical terms as “being confident and positive and able to cope with the ups and downs of life” (Stewart-Brown, 1998: 1608). It can also be associated with social dimensions – social health. It is now widely accepted that illness in terms of mental and psychological problems cannot be expressed fully by descriptions of medical disease such as size of infection, tumor load, and forced expiratory volume. According to many medical scientists, in studying health problems “Psychosocial factors such as pain, apprehension, restricted mobility and other functional impairments, difficulty fulfilling personal and family responsibilities, financial burden, and diminished cognition must also be encompassed” (Muldoon, et al.1998: 542). This area of research termed “health related quality of life” has become an integral variable of outcome in clinical research as a result of understanding the various effects that illnesses and treatments have on patients’ daily life and life satisfaction (Muldoon, et al.1998: 542). In terms of social health measurement, indicators can include infant mortality, child abuse, suicide, drug abuse, drop-out rates, divorce, family violence, etc.

Reconstruction of well-being attainment and measurement

The concept of social well-being focuses on bringing an understanding of a population’s quality of life status by putting a premium on the quality of social relationships and inter-citizen interactions based on five interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors:

- a) the attainment of the four well-being components and the functioning they impart to citizens starting from the least advantaged in society;

- b) the establishment of such attainments as part of the society's commonsense, routines, values, tradition, culture and norm;
- c) social arrangements anchored in a morally interrogated, politically and intellectually reflexive pedigree, which remain sufficiently robust to withstand any attempt to reverse these attainments;
- d) the existence of a recognizable degree of coherence and ethical worth of the institutional arrangements and the competing actors in society to anchor well-being development on a sustainable trajectory and commitment;
- e) the existence of a shared belief, myth or metaphysics to enhance and consolidate such social well-being attainments with continuous social innovation, democratic dialogue, knowledge and learning.

In effect, social well-being measures the capacity of a society's institutional arrangements for resisting invasive activities which subtract human well-being. It is not the number of years people live, but the quality of life including their psychological well-being that the concept tries to capture and measure. Social well-being attainment thus refers to the ideas, social practices, culture, and attitudes achieved by a given society in expanding and multiplying well-being freedom, well-being agency, well-being functioning and well-being capability not only at the individual level in the Sen's sense, but also at the societal/social level in the sense of achieving a bottom line for social well-being achievement anchored in the social structure of a given society.

If development impacts in decreasing the effectiveness of the determinants of social well-being attainments and the given society tolerates and even more incorporates the new reconfiguration to re-tailor its institutional arrangements, such a society can be said to have a weak social well-being common sense. Conversely, if development's impact on the determinants of well-being attainments does not lead to such subtractions, the society may be referred to have a reasonable social well-being attainment.

Social well-being attainment depends largely on the strength of a society's shared norms and the coherence of its political societies (e.g. political parties), civil society (traditional and professional associations) and economic society (all the business and industrial establishments). Two principles need to emerge as a shared belief for institutions and agents to manifest coherence: a) they learn not to do to others what they do not desire or find appropriate to be done to themselves, and b) their thinking, feeling, speaking and doing are not contradictory or incoherent making possible undesirable moves to use rhetoric, semantics and public relations to organize deception, manipulation, myths and lies to subtract the populations' possible well-being attainments.

Since the 1990s, the UNDP has been measuring individual well-being attainments with the human development index (HDI) assigning scores to population in countries by taking factors such as life expectancy, literacy and individual income's purchasing power parity (PPP) levels, and physical quality of life index (PQLI) to measure the well-being of a population by combining infant mortality, life expectancy and literacy. This move by the UNDP coincided with the rapid expansion of globalization. The concept of social well-being, which we use here, takes a step further by making the coherence of a society's social arrangements and the actors in generating the conducive space for functionings, capabilities and freedoms as the independent variable, and individual functionings, capabilities and freedoms as the outcome or dependent variable.

Thus, what is pertinent for analyses is the strength and weakness of the institutional arrangement for well-being attainment, the degree of coherence of the actors and agencies in promoting such well-being and the capacity of the culture, values, morals, tradition and prevailing commonsense habituated over historical time to resist internal and external policy reversals and retreats in relation to well-being development. We have thus inverted the parameters to be measured from the individual to the societal and social.

Social well-being should thus be understood as system-wide societal achievement not just as aggregate individual well-being measured by discrete factors such as life expectancy, morbidity and per capita income adjusted to PPP (purchase power parity). It is within the systemic social process rather than merely counting the discrete attainments of education, health and nutrition by the individual, which distinguishes social well-being from other well-being. It is also the quality of well-being and living as much as any measures of longevity, knowledge and health that matter. That is, social well-being affirms that the well-being of a given society cannot be exhausted merely by reckoning mathematically the levels of discrete well-being functionings of the individuals constituting it. That is, it cannot be established merely by individual well-being aggregation. Social well-being focuses on how society's functionings work to make the individuals in it function well as the organizing principle. Social well-being is thus more than the sum of the aggregates exhibiting an emergent novel property of system-wide scope.

Measuring social well-being attainment does not exclusively rely on these data because: a) GNP and per capita as an indicator is limited; b) human development index (and/or associated measures) fails far short of capturing the habituated commonsense the society has built up for social well-being measures; and c)

physical quality of life index is not enough. Though the UNDP improvement on measures of per capita income is a progressive step, intellectual thought and policy ought to concentrate in developing the conceptual framework on social well-being attainment as the core of social development to progress further society's moral, intellectual, cultural and political performance and success.

Alternative well-being measurement in the era of globalization

When relating our proposed well-being thinking and measurement to globalization's impact on economic growth, inequalities of incomes, poverty reduction and human ill-being destruction and the creation of human well-being, the objective is to clarify how the on-going globalization is dealing with the diversity of social issues. Since Sen has opened a door to philosophical approach to economics and development, we intend to come up with a concrete thinking on alternative well-being measurements.

The impact of globalization on well-being attainment

We shall elaborate the central thesis of globalization by extracting it from the available voluminous literature and correlating the impact of globalization on the determinants or means of well-being achievement (e.g., basic, additive, multiplicative well-being, and including freedom from subtractive, fracturing and divisive impacts on well-being), with the threshold of social well-being actually attained from the countries selected for comparative evaluation. With this new conceptual device of social well-being attainment, it is possible that the materially richest country such as the USA may come low in overall social well-being attainment rating, while some poorer countries' social well-being can be higher than expected.

What is perhaps most significant about the globalization thesis is, for better or worse, the re-fashioning of some of the key political and economic determinants of well-being development. It is therefore important to extract the way in which globalization has re-worked the means of social well-being attainment. In brief, since the 1980s, there has been a remarkable convergence of economic change with social transformation affecting virtually all regions of the world. Common features, which express these changes, have been the following: over-emphasis on market liberalization, privatization, de-regulation, reduction in government expenditure on social services, and state retreat from economic activities. The state's role in economic and social engineering is being questioned contrary to the Keynesian celebration of the state as the chief determinant of welfare provision and the architect of the post-war social-democratic consensus. With globalization, liberal ideas penetrate into the restructuring of state, economy and society. The market has been selected as the chief mechanism to make adjustments and restructuring of society, economy and the state. Globalization became the sort of code-name chosen to describe and express the processes and

changes in economy, state and society as spearheaded by liberalization, privatization, de-regulation and cutbacks on public spending and service provisions.

Taken together, the above can be seen as the drivers for globalization. While these are easy to identify, globalization itself is very difficult to theorize either in the field of international relations and/or development studies. It is a highly contested concept. Conceptual difference in defining globalization is partly due to the differing normative assumption and the polarization of views on the potential and likely consequence from the process itself. Some have argued that globalization increases global welfare. Others emphasize the mal-distribution aspect of this welfare. There is thus no agreed consensus as to the meaning of globalization.

In what way is the on-going globalization different from interdependence and transnationalization, which have been used to capture the tendency of the global political-economic dynamic? Both interdependence and transnationalization made the nation-state and the transnational economic interest groups as leading actors in international relations. The former describes “the reciprocal effects among countries or actors in different countries” (Keohane and Nye, 1997, p.8), while the latter refers to the decreased influence of state and the increase of primarily economic actors across boundaries. As the UNRISD points out,

“Global restructuring continues to accelerate, driven by and lockstep with global financial flows - over 90 per cent of which are speculative... These new forces of globalization have already undermined national sovereignty - not only in domestic macro economic management of fiscal and monetary policy, but also in loss of social policy options in health, education, safety nets, employment, environment and even the values and culture of citizens” (1995:27).

Globalization can be conceptualized in many ways. In practice it has taken the form of global restructuring in the industrialized countries, shock therapy in Russia and Eastern and Central Europe, and structural adjustment in the less developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. That is to say, globalization has manifested itself in different forms in various regions of the world: in the mature industrialized world globalization has brought about economic restructuring, de-regulation, privatization, weakening of labor unions and cut backs on welfare provisions and public expenditure. The main feature has been to weaken the state provision and protection of welfare rights and entitlements thus directly impacting on the quality of life of the population.

In the developing world globalization takes the form of structural adjustment to discipline the state and de-centralization through market and social liberalization in civil society. "... the major beneficiaries of adjustment have tended to be small groups of individuals with access to foreign exchange... we are witnessing peculiar types of social polarization and fragmentation, both of which are detrimental to the social and political order..." (UNRISD, 1995:4) In the former Soviet-bloc countries and what are now known as transitional economies, globalization has imposed a "shock therapy" excision of their economics and social system. According to a commentator "the ex-socialist countries have exchanged security for freedom and totalitarianism for crime" (UNRISD, 1995:5).

It is important to ask what implications the empirical existence of globalization as an idea, practice, rhetoric/discourse and policy has on the quality of life of the populations of the countries where globalization inspired policy measures have been carried out either in the form of restructuring, shock therapy and structural adjustment. What does globalization imply for the quality of life improvement and achievement of the population in countries, which have undergone some globalization inspired policy measure? How does it frame policy approaches or styles towards quality of life gains and more generally social well-being achievement?

Neoliberal globalization has been associated with the retreat of the state from the economy, the sharp polarization between winners and losers and the dwindling interest in solidarity, as well as the privatization of the development project in the South itself. There seems to be a yearning for a strong state that admits its involvement in the economy, the return of solidarity to regulate the supposed disparity between the losers and gainers from globalization, and the de-privatization of the development project in the South by a credible return of state partnership with non-state actors and even its steering of the free market. The latter approach may reverse the on-going globalization towards well-being achievement. Alternatives such as sustainable globalization have been offered to harmonize globalization with social well-being attainment and solidarity (Muchie, 2000).

Measures of well-being attainment

Reviewing the existing literature, an empirical analyses of data since the 1990s from varied sources reflects the interests, desire for influence and aspirations of the various stakeholders by paying due attention to how the data is generated and who generated it and for what specific audience and purposes. Though the "new globalization" began around the early 1980s, the true test of the "liberalization, privatization and stabilization" policies associated with the "new

globalization” can best be evaluated a decade after the policies have been put in place.

An alternative approach to well-being attainment, as we suggest, is to introduce a new structural variable related to systemic performance as an independent variable. That variable is what we have proposed *social well-being* indicators. Social well-being, as we have previously explained, covers aspects over time in a broad range of social phenomena and social arrangements relating to individual, family, community and society. Social well-being indicators should include community capacity, self-determination, cultural sustainability, societal and human relations, social mobility, participation and belonging, fair distribution of wealth and resources, crisis-bearing capacity, etc.

This variable will measure the attainment or lack of it related to globalization's impact in undermining or bolstering systemic structures that provide services to alleviate poverty, reduce inequalities and remove the conditions of ill-being production. Social well-being is the base for individual well-being. They are not mutually exclusive. A weak social structure incrementally may show numbers of people whose individual well-being becomes improved, but such improvement is reversible and may not be sustainable. For example, the challenge facing China today is that its integration with global capitalism is simultaneously creating a dual processes: on the one hand, its economic data in the last two decades are impressive regarding market growth, GDP and GNP per capital income, global export share and the rise of import; on the other hand, inequalities and marginalization among the population and between regions are becoming alarming. This will test China's capacity in being able to maintain a certain degree of political coherence, family and social relations as well as basic cultural heritages. This is what we refer to the “capacity” in attaining or sustaining social well-being.

A strong social structure may have a reduced number of people whose individual well-being may not improve, but the overall trend is likely to have an irreversible and sustainable well-being improvement curve. This makes it necessary to formulate: The necessary condition for an irreversible well-being attainment is reached when:

$$\boxed{\text{Well-being attainment}} = \boxed{\text{Social well-being}} + \boxed{\text{Individual well-being}}$$

We intend to open the black box of social structure in the evaluation of well-being, inequalities and poverty in relation to globalization. The relocation of the

research focus for the individual well-being to social well-being is to open a new perspective to include the amenability of social structure to well-being production and achievements. Furthermore, such research can create knowledge and ideas for changing institutional arrangements and policy directions to assist irreversible and sustainable well-being attainments.

Social well-being attainment depends largely on the strength of a society's shared norms and the coherence of its political societies (e.g. political parties), civil societies (traditional and professional associations) and economic societies (all business and industrial establishments). If globalization impacts in decreasing the effectiveness of the determinants of social well-being attainments and the given society tolerates and even more incorporates the new reconfiguration to re-tailor its institutional arrangements, such a society can be said to have a weak basis for social well-being attainment. Conversely, if globalization's impact on the determinants of well-being attainments does not lead to such subtractions, the society may be referred to have a reasonable social well-being attainment.

Conclusion

The goal of development is to offer people more options and freedoms. One of their options is access to income and wealth – not as an *end* in itself but as a means to acquiring quality of life. But there are other options and freedoms as well, including long life, knowledge, political freedom, social-cultural sustainability, personal security, community participation and guaranteed human rights. People cannot be reduced to the single dimension of being creatures, they are also social beings. To link Sen's development thinking with our argument and for a better understanding of well-being attainment and measurement, we argue that some developing countries around the world struggling with the process of development have made varying degrees of success while others are much deeper in crises, depending on the criteria of indicators. Many measures cannot simply be assessed by professional economic data. Our motivation is to extend the analysis on well-being understanding as well as to challenge the application of economic science to social issues so as to set a link between economic development and an ethically justice society.

Globalization is re-shaping individuals and institutions in most economies of the world. Liberalization, de-regulation, privatization, de-nationalization and cutback on public spending and services and the roll back of the state in economy are some of the salient policies that have been used by governments. Here we intended to emphasize not so much the economic impact of globalization in terms of observable phenomenon (e.g. poverty and income distribution, economic growth, trade, welfare) but more the destructive impact on human

society in terms of the invisible social-cultural-psychological holocaust (deep insecurity, marginalization, concentration of power, erosion of social capital and despair). This non-monetary impact has strong implications for the rise of potential contending social forces often in their violent forms and with diverse names and labels to challenge the dominant ideological, political, economic and social order.

Notes

¹ The US president Truman was among the first who used the word “underdeveloped” in his speech on January 22, 1949 when he took office: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of *underdeveloped* area...”(Berthoud, 1992:6, italic added).

² According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the hungry within the Third World countries outside the Eastern Bloc and China rose by approximately 15 million during the 1970s and by 37 million during the first few years of the 1980s (FAO, 1991:30). In over 70 countries, per capita income is lower today than it was 20 years ago (Ignacio, 1998)

³ This report, written by leading researchers and activists like Jerry Mander, John Cavanagh, Sarah Anderson, Debi Barker, Maude Barlow, Walden Bello, Robin Broad, Tony Clarke, Teddy Goldsmith, Randy Hayes, Colin Hines, Andy Kimbrell, David Korten, Sarah Larrain, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Simon Retallack, Vandana Shiva, Vicky Tauli-Corpuz and Lori Wallach, examines the impact of globalization on poverty alleviation and other indicators of human well-being. The report refutes repeated claims on the part of the leaders of the Bretton Woods institutions - World Bank, IMF, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as various government officials - that globalization is the best way to help the world's poor (source from www.ifg.org).

⁴ Subjective well-being (it can also be called emotional well-being) refers to an individual's evaluation of his/her physical and spiritual well-being. Such an evaluation is often expressed in affective terms, such as “being happy”, “feeling lost”, etc.

⁵ The three-tiered system refers to a well-organized health care system. In urban areas the tiers consisted of street health stations, community health centers, and district hospitals and in rural areas village stations, township health centers, and county hospitals. This three-tiered system was designed to promote an efficient allocation of health care resources at the grassroots level between primary and tertiary care facilities. It was a very innovative delivery system especially for less developed countries that were lack of medical specialists and could not afford modern equipment.

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