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"Well-being happens in relationship": The implications for women, children and development practice

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“Well-being happens in relationship”: The implications for women, children and development practice

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Abstract. The complexity of the dynamics of women’s and children’s relationships cannot be underestimated. However, the trends in development policy practice either fail to give an adequate account of women and children as individuals who can exercise agency in their own development, or view women as a development dream in which women simultaneously promote child welfare, earn income, and manage community assets. This paper positions well-being of women and children within a capability approach framework, thus underscoring the significance of well-being on the personal level and highlighting the ways in which well-being is influenced by relationships with others. The paper draws out the variegated ways in which “well-being happens in relationship” (White, 2010). Relating with others is a central capability on its own, but membership in or affiliation to groups or kin can also generate more capabilities and freedoms through collective action, others’ external capabilities, and the support given through relationships of love and care. Nevertheless, the quality of relationships, including the power dynamics, trade-offs, and inherent social norms implicated in relationships, colours the extent to which relationships contribute to expanding one’s overall capability set. This paper integrates theory with a discussion of its practical implications, and broad recommendations are made for how a relational understanding of women and children’s well-being could be recognised in development policy and practice.

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1. Introduction

A polarity exists in current approaches to the well-being of women and children in development. On the one hand, the 'smart economics' paradigm stresses the essential complementarity of children's and women's interests, seeming to overlook the fact that "even the most nurturing relationships involve some conflicts of interests and essentially contradictory relationships" (White, 2002a, p.1099). On the other, the interdependence and "genuine mutualities of interest" that can also characterise relationships of love and care often appear eclipsed within right-based discourses that emphasise the conflict, competition and abuse to which women and children are subject (ibid).

The purpose of this paper is to challenge these two dominant perspectives on women's and children's well-being to find more nuanced understanding of how relationships influence their well-being. The paper begins by reviewing the two approaches and demonstrates that a failure to give an adequate account of the complexity and centrality of relationships to women's and children's well-being has resulted in significant operational weaknesses for both approaches. The section concludes by proposing that any attempt to promote the well-being of women and/or children must recognise that ways in which "well-being happens in relationship" (White 2010, p.171) and navigate the tensions and solidarities inherent in their relationships with others.

The second part of the paper introduces the capability approach as a theoretical framework to explore the implications of women and children's social embeddedness on their well-being. Although Sen's capability approach has been criticised for methodological and ethical individualism, recent debates have attempted to more adequately theorise the relational dimensions of these core concepts. The paper continues by mobilising concepts emerging from these debates such as 'external capabilities' (Foster and Handy, 2008), 'collective agency' (Ibrahim, 2006), 'structures of living together' (Deneulin, 2008) and 'relational capabilities' (Uyan-Semerci, 2007) to map out the significance of relationships to the achievement of well-being by women and children. The theoretical discussion is integrated with a discussion of its practical implications, and broad recommendations are made for how a relational understanding of women and children's well-being could be recognised in development policy and practice.

1.1 Locating women and children within the history of development practice

The treatment of women and children in the history of development practice shows striking parallels (White, 2002a; 2002b; Oakley, 1994; Lansdowne, 1994). Beginning with the paternal charity of classic 'welfare' approaches, the tendency to view women and children through the lens of 'need' and as objects of assistance has been remarkably persistent through the decades (Moser, 1993). According to Oakley (1994), the 'vulnerability' of women and children is rooted in the operation of masculine power rather than innate biological weakness. Constituted as "non-adults" who lack competencies of rationality and autonomy, women and children's subordinate status has excluded them from basic social and legal protections while allocating (masculine and adult) others the right to decide 'their best interests'.

Assumptions of women's and children's social and economic dependency have also contributed to making the household the dominant unit of analysis for much development practice and research. Although this has practical advantages for data collection, the effect has been to obscure women and children's individual experiences and entitlements within "black box" of the 'family', masking the way in which households can be sites of inequitable power relations, unequal distribution of resources and abuse for women and children (Oakley, 1994, p.19; Whitehead, 1981).

Although the potential of women as contributors to development has subsequently been discovered with great enthusiasm by anti-poverty and efficiency approaches, the tendency has been to utilise women as a development resource, seeing them as objects of investment rather than recognising them as development subjects. Planners have continued to instrumentalise women in their mothering role, constructing women as "objects of reproduction" that require discipline as well as support in order to nurture children into productive citizens (Bradshaw, 2008, p.199).

Children, meanwhile, have been valued by planners "not in their being but in their becoming" (Oakley, 1994, p.23). Regarded as "adults-in-waiting", (Kelly, 2004 in Lister, 2006, p.322) children have been targeted for 'human capital investments', designed to ensure that they mature into tomorrow's educated, healthy and economically productive workforce.

These three trends in development policy practice fail to give an adequate account of women and children as individuals who can exercise agency in their own development. The rights-based approaches discussed below attempt to rectify this oversight.

1.2 Rights-based approaches: creating individual agents of change

Rights based approaches (RBAs) respond to critiques of welfare, efficiency and anti-poverty approaches by demanding a radical shift in the way that development practice conceptualises children and women. They call for women and children to be recognised as "the subjects of rights and participants in actions affecting them" rather than merely "passive beneficiaries" and challenge the way that their interests have been amalgamated with the family unit (Biggieri et al, 2006, p.60). The development agenda moves away from meeting 'needs' towards securing rights, and advocacy, mainstreaming and the direct participation of women and children in development planning become the new priorities for development agencies (White, 2002b, p.508).

Although its re-assertion of women's and children's subjectivity and agency is much needed, the individualistic discourse of rights-based development approaches is problematic (White, 2002a; 2002b; 2007; Trani, 2013). By emphasising individual claim-making and autonomy, RBAs ignore the way that people's "practical options and entitlement claims" are often embedded in their relationships with others (White, 2002a, p.1098). This is particularly true for women and children where their social and/or legal status is as the property of men/adults (ibid). White (2002b) argues that by insisting on speaking an alien language of individual rights to collectivist cultures, RBAs risks alienating potential supporters and missing opportunities to utilise local (relational) discourses to promote the welfare of children.

Furthermore, the way in which rights-based approaches "disorganise" people from their context and "re-organise" them into the categories of 'women' and 'children' often has little to do with their own perceptions of their identity or the location of their interests (White 2002a, p.1098). Despite the emphasis of RBAs on the divergence between interests of adults and children, females and males, etc., people's strongest sense of identification is usually across these divides in kinship or family groups where interests can be extremely enmeshed (ibid). Children's embeddedness in relationships of care and dependency for example, means that their well-being "depends self-evidently on that of the families and communities to which they belong" (White, 2002a, p.731).

Moreover, in situations of chronic poverty it is often both inappropriate and impossible to address the deprivations and abuses to which women and children are subject outside of their family and community context (White, 2007). To do so is to mask the extent to which poor men, women and children experience a collective denial of their basic rights, entitlements and services, and to diagnose issues of political economy as problems of mis-recognition (ibid, p.734).

1.3 Smart Economics and the mutuality of women and children's interests

> *"The well-being of women and children is inseparable. What is good for women is good for children with few, if any exceptions.... A world fit for children is also a world fit for women. They are inseparable and indivisible – one cannot exist without the other."* (UNICEF, 2007, pp.12,15)

So-called 'Smart Economics' paints a picture of women as the development dream: a "conduit of policy" that, when conditions are right, efficiently and effectively translate investments in their well-being and rights into a reduction in child poverty while also having a positive effect on economic growth (Molyneux, 2006).

The unproblematic synergy between the well-being of children and women that the approach proposes is founded on evidence that women tend to be more "other-oriented" and child-centred in their preferences and use of agency than men (Chant, 2006, p.12). Thus by improving women's status, increasing their participation in decision-making, and improving their access to and control over income, the approach assumes that it can create knock-on benefits for children, since 'empowered' women will naturally use their influence to prioritise a greater share of resources towards children's needs and to advocate for children's interests (Whitehead, 1981; Chant, 2006; Bradshaw, 2008; Jones et al., 2007; UNICEF, 2007). Policy-makers promise that the results will include "more efficient use of resources... significant social returns... improving child survival... [and] considerable intergenerational pay-offs" (World Bank, 1995, p.22).

The promise that "two birds can be killed with one stone" (Chant, 2006) is understandably appealing to New Poverty Agenda policy-makers as well as strategically useful to feminists. However, despite some success in placing issues of women's rights on the agenda of more conservative development organisations, feminists have extensively critiqued the logic of the approach for contributing to a "feminisation" of responsibility for poverty reduction (Chant, 2006; 2008).

By creating the expectation that resources targeted to women will translate into improvements in household and child well-being, smart economics places the burden for

"fixing the world" on women, while ignoring the costs to their own well-being of shouldering an "intensifying" and "diversifying" burden for household well-being (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). As development interventions attempt to exploit women across their triple role – as bread-winners, carers and community managers – women's already limited time for sleep, leisure and self-care shrinks (Elson, 1995; Moser, 1993), while children experience knock-on consequences in the quality and quantity of their care if women's reproductive responsibilities are not supported or shared (Jones et al, 2007; Hannan, 2000).

Moreover, as Molyneux (2006, p.49) points out, despite purporting to tackle gendered disadvantage and inequality, smart economics approaches are often premised on the exploitation of the "gendered assets and dispositions of women." Thus while maternal cash transfer programmes such as Progresa/Oportunidades and Creciendo Juntas may secure impressive reductions in child poverty, they also entrench existing social perceptions that child well-being is a female responsibility, promoting "a highly non-egalitarian model of the family" and "exacerbating prevailing tendencies among men to limit women's rights, and to avoid assuming responsibilities for their children's upkeep" (ibid; Chant, 2006, p.185).

Although smart economics presents the distinction between women as the 'means' and child poverty reduction as the 'ends' of development as irrelevant, in reality, interventions are left with little incentive to address gendered structures and disadvantage that do not directly impinge on women's performance of a caring role (Baden and Goetz, 1998; Jackson, 1998). Women are essentialised as mothers and the tensions that can exist between the aspirations, needs and interests of children and women (both as carers and non-carers) are not acknowledged. By falsely conflating the needs and interests of women and children, smart economics risks subjugating women's well-being to the pursuit of child poverty reduction and child welfare (Chant and Sweetman, 2013).

Examining these dominant development approaches to women and children in development reveals that "well-being happens in relationship" (White, 2010, p.171). Children and women cannot be abstracted from their relationships. The individualistic discourse and category-centred approach of RBAs fail to take account the extent to which women and children's well-being is embedded in their relationships with family and community. The complexity of the dynamics of women's and children's relationships cannot be underestimated. Practitioners must "creatively inhabit" the dynamic tensions that exist in relationships of love and care, recognising that they are sites both of solidarity and of conflict and neither assuming unproblematic mutuality or essential contradiction (White, 2002a).

2. Conceptualising well-being

This paper uses the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999) as a framework to explore the central role played by relationships in the well-being of women and children. The broad informational space of the capability approach may pose certain difficulties for its operationalisation but enables the framework to more adequately represent the complex world of human social life than narrower and simpler theoretical approaches (Smith and Seward, 2009). In particular, recent attempts to extend the conceptual framework of the capability approach have sought to give a more thorough account of the collective and relational dimensions of human well-being. A basic description of the core elements of the capability approach is given below, while section 3 of this paper draws on concepts emerging from those debates to elaborate some of the ways in which children and women's well-being is relationally embedded and to suggest their implications for development policy and practice.

The concepts of 'functionings' and 'capabilities' are integral to the capability approach's understanding of human well-being. 'Functionings' in the capability approach refers to the achievement of the beings and doings that people have reason to value such as being literate, being adequately nourished and having warm and supportive relationships with others. Meanwhile 'capabilities' refers to the freedom that people have to realise such objectives. Well-being achievement (functionings) as a realised state is distinguished from well-being freedom (capabilities).

Since the exercise of human agency in selecting valued objectives is considered an essential element in human flourishing, the capability approach evaluates adult well-being in the space of well-being freedoms rather than achievements. "The 'good life' is regarded as one that is partly a life of genuine choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life – however rich it might be in other respects" (Sen, 1996, p.59). As a result, the goal of development is not to achieve universal levels of particular functionings, but to expand the freedom that people have to achieve the life they have reason to value (Sen, 1999, p.74). This is more contentious when it comes to children's well-being, however, as will be discussed.

If the goal of development is to expand capabilities, then poverty itself is understood as "capability deprivation" (Sen, 1999). The capability approach maintains that poverty is a multi-dimensional state of ill-being that cannot be reduced to simple measurements of household consumption or income. Although a lack of material inputs can be an important contributor to capability deprivation, the approach emphasises that a variety of individual, local and structural "conversion factors" affect the capacity of individuals to transform commodities into the realisation of valued choices (Frediani, 2010, p.176). Understanding the capability deprivation of women and children therefore requires taking account of such factors as the availability of public services, gender norms and roles, intra-household distribution of resources, discrimination, vulnerability to water-borne disease, illiteracy, lack of mobility, etc., (Sen, 1999, p.88). The task of planners is not only to improve access to material resources but to promote social arrangements that expand people's freedom to pursue the objectives they value.

Capabilities themselves may play an instrumental role in limiting or promoting the acquisition of further freedoms and are regarded as both the "primary ends" and the "primary means" of development (Sen, 1999). Absolute poverty can be seen in capability terms as "the failure of basic capabilities" in which a lack of core functioning in areas such as adequate nourishment, bodily health or bodily integrity undermines the exercise of other dependent capabilities (ibid).

Although "avoiding pain and having a joyful life cannot but be among the various objectives we have reason to value" (Sen, 2002, p.85), a capability understanding of well-being emphasises what people can do and be over and above their expressions of satisfaction, happiness or pleasure. Sen's caution around using subjective satisfaction as a proxy for well-being stems from his previous work into household resource allocation where he finds that people tend to adjust their expectations downwards in response to prolonged exposure to poverty and deprivation (ibid). As a result of such adapting their aspirations and preferences to 'realistic' levels, people may register apparently high subjective satisfaction despite living in conditions that are self-evidently damaging to their welfare. By focusing on what people can actually do and be rather than their subjective satisfaction, Sen argues that capabilities offers a more "objective" and direct assessment of well-being and development, while subjective experience is incorporated as part of the broader capability set (Sen, 1990; 2002).

Marginalising considerations of subjective satisfaction in evaluations of well-being does not eliminate the problem of adaption however. As White (2010, p.165) points out, people are not only “subject of” - actively involved in creating meaning out of their lives - but are also “subject to” “values, ideologies and beliefs” that shape the degree to which possible options represent compelling choices. Biggieri et al.'s (2006) attempt to use a bottom-up participatory approach to draw up child-specific capability lists illustrates well the role that life history and social environment can play in constituting capabilities. While a focus group composed of former child labourers readily propose paid work as a relevant capability, not a single other child questioned for their study – conference delegates without a background in the labour market - conceptualises this as valuable capability for children (ibid).

Furthermore, isolating subjective experience from wider achievements and goals in this way can seem rather artificial. Even the achievement of basic capabilities is fundamentally structured through what White (2010, p.165) calls “shared understandings of how the world is and should be”. Experiencing adequate nourishment for example, requires far more than simply achieving a particular calorific intake but also takes in the symbolic resonance of the foodstuff consumed – for example, rice rather than potatoes in the case of Bangladesh – and who it is shared with. White’s (2010) argument that well-being emerges in the “interplay” of the “externally observable and independently verifiable” aspects of people’s lives and their “perceptions and assessments” of their circumstances offers a more compelling and holistic way of conceptualising the intersection of the subjective, material and relational aspects of capabilities.

3. Well-being and Relationships

Amartya Sen's version of the capability approach takes individuals as its unit of analysis. Sen acknowledges that capabilities are "socially dependent" yet regards capabilities themselves as the properties of individual persons, except in the case of truly global achievements such as the eradication of world hunger (2002, p.85). Likewise, although he acknowledges that social arrangements and collectives can play a critical role in shaping what people are able to think, do, and be, the focus of evaluation is on their instrumental rather than intrinsic value. They are important only in so far as they promote or restrict the expansion of the freedom and well-being of individuals.

While making individuals the ethical focus of development safeguards women and children from the tendency to merge their interests and utility with that of the family unit (and each other) (Nussbaum, 2000), it fails to recognise the crucial role played by family, kin and community values in shaping and constituting their well-being and agency. Sen's capability approach has been extensively critiqued for its methodological and theoretical individualism and concepts emerging from these debates are mobilised in the remainder of this paper to explore the ways in which women and children's well-being "happens in relationship" (White, 2010, p.161) and to suggest some of the implications that a relational understanding of women and children's well-being should have on development policy and practice.

3.1 Relating as a capability

The opportunity for "affiliation" or "to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction, to be able to imagine the situation of the others" is recognised in the capability approach as among the most basic dimensions of human well-being (Nussbaum, 2000).

Although social inclusion can be a critical conversion factor in the achievement of wider capabilities, people do not simply value engaging in social relations for their instrumental benefits. People are quintessentially social beings and interacting with others is considered an integral part of what it means to live a good life. Walker et al. (2011), for example, find that whilst greater social connectedness facilitates better access to care and support for disabled children in slum areas of Mumbai, opportunities to play and socialise with others are valued for their own sake by children. Quality of life studies find a consistent association between poor perceived quality of life and social isolation and exclusion (White, 2010).

Relating to others may be a universal human need, but the quality and nature of the interactions that are important to well-being may vary considerably according to age, cultural context and other factors of social identity. Younger and older children prioritise the importance of time socialising with peers vis à vis dedicated time with a parent or key-adult very differently, whilst being able to appear in front of others without shame tends to be especially important for adolescents, often requiring access to various culturally-specific material resources (The Children's Society, 2012; Camfield and Takere, 2011; Carers Trust, 2011).

Implications for practice

If social 'affiliation' is accepted as a vital component of what it means to live a good life, then promoting opportunities for people to enjoy fulfilling social interaction with others and a positive sense of social belonging must be recognised as a legitimate and worthwhile development goal in its own right. This contrasts with many other development approaches which tend to view people's relationships and address exclusion from social relations largely from an instrumental perspective, rather than recognising opportunities to socialise or act collectively with others as intrinsically important to people's well-being.

Identifying and addressing the women and children that are vulnerable to social isolation and exclusion therefore becomes an important task of development professionals seeking to promote female and child well-being. The intersectional nature of women's and children's identity is likely to be significant in determining which groups of women and children are most vulnerable to relational deprivation. Walker et al. (2010), for example, observe that perceptions that disabled girls were at particular risk of sexual abuse meant that gender with disability, rather than disability or gender alone, was a determining factor in whether the children in their study were isolated from opportunities to socialise with others.

The demanding nature of caring responsibilities make child-carers and women who care for young children or

those with disabilities particularly vulnerable to suffering isolation (Carers Trust, 2011; Kirk, 2003). Bornstein (2013) argues that supporting such women and children into greater well-being requires a "network-centred" rather than person-centred model of health and social care services, which explicitly focuses on creation of informal support networks around carers as well as the provision of professional support. Although a wider social network can support the performance of caring roles by improving access to practical supports such as supplementary child-care, advice, and material support, promoting warm friendships and opportunities for enjoyable social interaction should be recognised and promoted for their intrinsic value to carers as critical sources of well-being (Kirk, 2003).

3.2 Well-being through others

Foster & Handy (2008) introduce the idea of 'external capabilities' to describe how people access and utilise the capacities of other individuals in their social networks in order to expand their own ability to function. This is readily observed in very young children and babies whose physical weakness and inexperience makes them dependent on the functioning of parents or carers to achieve even basic levels of well-being. Parents may also use their connections with children to achieve additional functionings in particular contexts. In many conservative Islamic societies for example, it is common practice for women to rely on the mobility of sons as errand-runners and chaperones in order to enhance their own freedom of movement. Likewise, migrant women in diaspora communities may frequently find themselves relying on children's abilities in the host language to navigate their new environment (since children generally show a greater faculty for language learning and have greater opportunities to socialise with native speakers at school).

Adult-child relationships of care, particularly those within the family unit, are a critical determinant of what children are able to do and be both in childhood and later in their lives. Not only do the income and assets of care-givers structure the capability space of children, playing a key role in determining children's access to formal and informal educational opportunities, for example (Andreson et al., 2012), but the realisation of certain capabilities in children can be dependent on the care-giver's possessing a related set of capabilities and functionings (Biggieri et al., 2006). This can be clearly seen, for example, in the link between maternal health and nutrition and the birthweight and health of babies. Biggieri et al. (2006, p.63) term this the "intergenerational transmission of capabilities." Moreover, adult well-being itself is also path-dependent, and the achievement of particular levels of functioning in childhood (adequate nutrition, education, literacy, etc.) is a precondition for the exercise of the majority of adult capabilities (Biggieri et al., 2006; Nussbaum, 2000).

Implications for practice

Capabilities should always be promoted for their intrinsic value for the well-being of the individual concerned. No individual should be regarded as a "mere tool" for the well-being of others to the detriment of their own well-being (Nussbaum, 2000, p.55). However, the fact that particular capabilities are able to create additional positive spill-over effects on the well-being of family, friends and contacts can and should be incorporated into development planning. By observing which capabilities can be most readily shared with others and in which relationships such capabilities are most readily multiplied, planners can target resources and interventions more effectively to address capability deprivation in women and children.

Although individuals relying on external capabilities may experience more qualified and contingent gains in well-being compared to if the same capabilities were possessed independently, external capabilities can be an effective stop-gap solution for capability deprivation, and over time can sometimes lead to the replication of that capability in the recipient individual (Foster and Handy, 2008). An excellent example in practice can be seen in 'family learning' approaches (UNESCO, 2008). Where educators work simultaneously with children and their carers, literacy outcomes for both are significantly improved. Reciprocal sharing of learning takes place within the home while both experience greater motivation and home support for learning as a result of the participation of the other.

3.3 Well-being with others

Collective capabilities

Individuals do not act in isolation to pursue their valued goals and objectives, nor do they form their particular goals and objectives in isolation from one another. Ibrahim (2006; 2013) proposes the concept of 'collective capabilities' to describe the way in which human well-being is generated in and through group membership. Such achievements "exist or perish with the group" (Foster and Handy, 2008, p.13), and cannot be reduced to the contributions of group members. Indeed, the existence of the group itself, and commitment to explicitly shared goals and a shared identity is often the key impetus for individual engagement in collective action.

Ibrahim (2013, p.5) regards the relationship between group and individual freedoms as "mutually reinforcing" in that access to an expanded collective capability set can enhance what individual members are able to do and be, while the building of individual capabilities may in turn support more effective collective action by groups. She illustrates this reciprocal relationship through an analysis of a self-help initiative among poor squatter settlers in Cairo, in which migrants mobilised their social networks to provide and gain official

recognition for a social centre offering literacy and kindergarten services in their neighbourhood. The example demonstrates well how collective capabilities can be used to create gains for both individual and communal freedom and well-being.

The importance of collectivities stems not only from the instrumental role they can play promoting the abilities of individuals to pursue valued objectives but from the part they have in shaping individuals' very "perception of the good" (Ibrahim, 2006, p.404). The collective arrangements that are endorsed by groups – described as "structures of living together" by Deneulin (2008) – mediate individual freedom through the value and legitimacy they confer on various beings and doings and through the social technology they provide for individuals and groups to enact agency. Evaluating collective capabilities thus requires an analysis of the type of individual capabilities promoted through group membership as well as the way in which particular social arrangements or sets of relationships enable or disable acts of collective and individual agency (Stewart, 2004).

Although Sen (2002) affirms "the socially dependant" character of capabilities, he continues to defend the ethically individualistic stance of his version of the capability approach. He raises concerns that a focus on group well-being can act to essentialise and homogenise group members, missing the multiplicity and fluidity which characterises social identity, and obscuring in-group inequality in the distribution of collectively generated capabilities and benefits. Meanwhile, Alkire (2008) questions the way in which group strength can act to exclude and disadvantage outsiders, and curtail as well as promote the freedoms of insiders.

Participating in collective action may yield little or no positive change in the material aspects of an individual's well-being, even when a group's goals are successfully achieved. Yet the achievements of others with whom one identifies can make a significant contribution to one's own sense of well-being. Stewart (2004) notes, for example, the negative effect of poor group performance on the self-esteem of black Americans. More than simply "exterior" assets to be mobilised in pursuit of personal or collective interests, relationships themselves can be fundamentally "constitutive of the person" (White, 2010, p.164).

The way in which self-hood itself can be relationally inhabited is vividly illustrated in Uyan-Semerci's (2007) study of migrant Turkish women in the Gecekondu area of Istanbul. Her research subjects self-define with reference to kin as "fathers' daughters, brothers' sisters, husbands' wives, families' brides and [most importantly as] mothers of children", while their aspirations and achievements are consistently articulated in terms of 'we' rather than 'I' (ibid, p.209). Despite Nussbaum's assertion that capabilities are fundamentally individual phenomena since "the food on A's plate does not magically nourish the stomach of B... [nor does] … one person's exceeding happiness and liberty… make another person happy or free" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.56), Uyan-Semerci's study demonstrates that where the self itself is experienced as plural and shared, capabilities are no longer so clearly distinguished as the properties of individuals. Well-being emerges and belongs in relationships with others.

In particular, the capabilities of the Gecekondu women appear embedded in those of their children. Capability achievements in the areas of health, bodily integrity, etc., are framed predominantly in terms of their implications for children's well-being, while children's achievements in turn constitute "one of the most important sources of well-being" for the women themselves (ibid). There is also a "permeability" in the intimate relationships between women and other family members that is also noted by Camfield et al. (2006, p.20) in the context of Bangladesh. The behaviour of children has significant repercussions for the status of parents even into adulthood, and the chastity of women and girls is integral to the honour of male kin.

Yet this apparent blurring of individuals' welfare should not be accepted uncritically. Given the strong social pressures women face towards altruistic behaviour and family orientation, there is a real possibility that this 'relational' experience of well-being reflects the colonisation of women's subjectivity by hegemonic social norms that demand the subjugation of their needs and interests to others (Sen, 1990; Nussbaum, 2000).

Implications for practice

Since group freedoms provide the context through which both individual and group capability achievement (or deprivation) takes place, development practice cannot afford to limit its focus to the individual alone. The 'structures of living together' that misrecognise particular social identities and exclude them from access to entitlements and power must be challenged if the agency of groups and their individual members is to be expanded. The focus of development practice and evaluation should therefore be on expanding freedom and promoting well-being at collective as well as individual levels (Deneulin, 2008; Ibrahim, 2013).

While the freedom of groups to engage in collective action may be constituted by social arrangements, social structure is not reified but is being constantly reconstituted through group action itself (Deneulin, 2008). Political action by groups – for example women's activism – offers important windows of opportunity to adjust the rules of the game onto more advantageous lines for group and individual well-being. Development practitioners can support marginalised groups of women and children to develop their political capabilities in order to renegotiate the terms of their social inclusion.
While pursuing access to universal rights for women and children may be an important part of the processural aspect of supporting their capability achievement, Trani et al (2013, p.423) caution that "local realities" must be incorporated into

the realisation of rights based approaches. In collectivist cultures such as Afghanistan, they argue this will require recognising the importance of social links between individuals, and engaging in collective deliberation about how rights for women and children can be operationalised in a culturally appropriate way. Addressing collective arrangements that limit individual freedom (while preserving those that enhance capabilities) is paramount to ensuring collective gains are equitably distributed.

Development practice can support women's and children's well-being through family-centred interventions which respond to the way that women and children experience and achieve well-being in relationship with others. Interventions that provide simultaneous and joined-up support to family members – children, women and men – are one way of recognising their interdependence and intersubjectivity.

Balancing the needs of family members in such interventions will not be straightforward, since households are not homogenous units and contain an array of sometimes aligning, sometimes competing needs (Warin, 2007). Yet, treating people embedded in intimate relationships as if they were isolated individuals is not the solution to the dilemma. Planners need to keep women's and children's needs and interests visible, while approaching them within the context of the intimate relationships that play such a critical role in their well-being. In the case of children, for example, this might mean including parental outcomes as a core part of planning, delivery and evaluation (Kirk, 2003, p.95).

3.4 Agency and social values

Well-being freedom and agency freedom

Freedom, according to Amartya Sen (1999), encompasses the dual notions of 'well-being freedom' and 'agency freedom'. Distinguishing between well-being freedom – an individual's freedom to pursue goals to his/her personal advantage – and 'agency freedom' – "an individual's freedom to choose and bring about the things he/she values" (Frediani, 2010, p.176) – enables a more adequate theorisation of intimate relationships of care in which carers (most often women, less frequently men, sometimes children) may make daily decisions to prioritise the needs and interests of others at the expense of their own welfare. Having the freedom to choose and act is a critical component of what it means to have well-being and choices do not have to be under-pinned by self-interest in order to comprise valuable exercises of agency (Sen, 1999).

Development practitioners and researchers should be cautious about accepting acts of altruism as 'freely' chosen, however. Agency is "inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to us" (Sen, 1999, pp.xi-xii) and our "ability to choose" is profoundly influenced by relations of power that underpin social norms, discourses and institutions and which shape our preferences, create obligations, and legitimise or illegitimise particular modes of action (Frediani, 2010).

The role of social structure in constituting agency should be of particular concern to those seeking to support the well-being of women and girls. Jackson (1993) argues that women's perception of their true interests is distorted by the hegemonic operation of social values on two levels. On the one hand, women internalise the ideals of self-sacrifice and subservience that are central to many cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood. They are socialised into prioritising the needs and interests of children and men over their own and altruistic activity becomes the basis for feminine identities and self-worth. On the other, women's recognition of their own needs and the validity of their claims on household resources is distorted by "perception biases" that devalue female needs and economic contributions relative to those of men (Sen, 1990, p.149).

As a result women and girls may not only actively collaborate in their own neglect and oppression but also collude in that of other women and girls (Sen, 1990; Jackson, 1993). Although 'smart economics' logic asserts that increasing women's status and decision-making power within the household can eradicate gendered disadvantage, this overlooks the way in which women themselves internalise and act out gendered social ideologies. They are complicit alongside men and boys in "female foeticide and infanticide, in food and health biases within households, in exploitative relations with other women" and other gendered practices (Jackson, 1993, p.50).

Implications for practice

To understand and monitor how social values contribute to capability deprivation, quantitative methods alongside qualitative techniques can provide a more holistic picture. Although focusing on what children and women are able to do and be through measures of nutrition, life expectancy, educational achievement, etc., may give a more "objective" picture of the poverty and inequality they experience (Sen, 1990), qualitative approaches can help researchers and practitioners to understand the part played by social perceptions in creating capability deprivation. Whilst quantitative measures may be useful to side-step adaptive preference and reveal patterns of disadvantage that may not be apparent to individuals, qualitative research and evaluation methods can provide information about how discourses around particular social identities or other aspects of social structure create and sustain such disadvantage. Effective interventions to reorder social relations onto a more beneficial footing for disadvantaged women and children can only be designed when the role played by particular social values in deterring children and women from realising otherwise achievable capabilities is clarified.

Additionally, development policy and practice can promote public debate around social norms. The constitution of women and children's agency through social structure means that development planners must address more than just the processual aspects of realising capabilities. For example, Chant (2007) highlights how the resilience of traditional gender roles and models of masculinity and femininity mean that many anti-poverty programmes fail to substantially expand the choices available to women despite effectively improving their access to material resources. Where social values continue to sanction and reward individualism for men while proscribing altruism, subservience and a family-orientation for women, the degree to which improvements in income, skills and education truly 'empower' women remains limited.

Yet, social values are not "immutable" and development can and should encourage poor women and children to recognise, question and renegotiate the social order that contributes to their deprivation and disadvantage (Sen, 1990, p.126). By supporting women's activism and political organisation, and engaging in consciousness-raising activities, development agencies can participate in reshaping the discourses around gender roles, attributes and relations that continue to constrain women's and children's agency and their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004 in White, 2010).

Social identities are created through "relations of division, difference and inequality" that construct their characteristics, power and entitlements in relation to a necessary 'other' (Alanen, 2001, p.13; Walker et al., 2011). If development planners wish to "destabilise deeply embedded structures of... inequality" (Chant, 2007, p.185) it is vital that they engage with the part that men, adults and other privileged social groups play in producing and perpetuating the discourses of identity and forms of social organisation that devalue and disadvantage children, women and particular groups of children and women and limit the opportunities that are practically and 'thinkably' available to them.

Jackson (1993, p.58) for example, argues that expanding the options available to poor women will necessarily entail addressing the gendered practices and discourses of the non-poor (dowry-giving and the seclusion and veiling, for example) since these play a key role in shaping the gender ideologies (and status aspirations) to which poor women are subject. At the same time, supporting and publicising the achievements of upper and middle-class women can make an important contribution to enlarging poor women's "capacity to aspire" by expanding perceptions of what it is possible for women to be and do (Appadurai, 2004 in White, 2010). Development interventions cannot afford to a have a single-category focus, and must identify and address the influence of other social groups in shaping the agency and entitlements of women and children.

Agreeing the freedoms against which development should be measured and evaluated is a critical part of operationalising the capability approach to well-being. Sen (1999) advocates the use of bottom-up processes of "democratic deliberation" in order to select relevant capabilities rather than the use of universal lists drawn up by "cultural experts." He maintains that this approach avoids paternalism and allows for diversity in the doings and beings that people in different contexts may value while leaving well-being criteria open to revision and challenge.

Seeking out children's participation in the selection of the doings and beings important to their well-being is particularly important because of the way that children's well-being has historically been seen through an "adult nexus" (Trani et al., 2013). By revealing the ways in which the dimensions of children's well-being substantively differ from those of adults, participatory capability lists can improve the design and targeting of child poverty interventions while also fostering greater recognition of children's agency.

Yet relying solely on deliberative processes to determine development priorities and monitor progress is problematic. The strength of dominant social values can suppress women's and children's recognition and expression of their interests by mediating "what it is thinkable to desire" as well as what it is permissible to say in public forums (Jackson, 1993). Although perfect reconciliation of the structure-agency dilemma in determining well-being criteria may be impossible, recent innovations in methods for devising capability lists have the potential to reduce the influence of adaptive preferences. Methods require further work but include cross-referencing the results of deliberative processes against human rights, normative capability lists and the use of intercultural comparisons (Robeyns, 2003; Clark, 2009).

3.5 Autonomy within dependency

Children simultaneously prioritise both care and freedom (Biggieri et al, 2006; Andreson et al, 2012) and childhood is characterised by the tension between children's receding dependency and their emerging autonomy (ibid; Oakley, 1994). For children to thrive requires caregivers to balance safeguarding children's current and future functioning – "the child's right to be protected" with a respect for children's agency – the child's right to "have a voice" in decisions about their own welfare (Lansdowne, 1994, p.42; Biggieri et al, 2012). Discerning when children's desires should be overruled for the sake of their future freedom is not straightforward. While compelling children to attend school for example seems reasonable, Lansdowne (ibid) points out that arguments of 'best interest' have frequently been used to justify the control of children in ways that have served adult rather than child interests.

The extent of children's dependency and autonomy varies significantly with age. This is reflected in the nature of the doings and beings that children value at different stages of their development – with older children placing more value on

mobility and time autonomy, for example – and in the ability children have on a practical level to independently select and realise the capabilities they value (Biggieri et al., 2006, p.64). For example, children between the ages of 0-5 show little autonomy across all capabilities, and none at all in the capabilities of religious choice, time use and mobility (ibid). Whilst children's well-being may be embedded in relationships of care, the nature of their needs and interests in those relationships is constantly changing and being negotiated (White, 2002b, p.1103).

Relationships of care can exemplify the way that autonomy is able to coexist with dependency. Examining the situation of disabled children in Mumbai, Walker et al. (2011) note the way in which children with speech or cognitive impairments develop communication systems with their mothers and utilise their relationships with carers in order to mediate their agency. Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, White (2002b) observes that recognition of children as legitimate agents in Bengali society is dependent upon their relationships with socially-approved 'guardians' through whom they gain the ability for autonomous action.

As relationships of care illustrate, rather than the isolated decision-making of individuals, agency may often take place in and rely on relationship with others. Devine et al. (2006, p.5) go so far as to assert that in particular contexts "autonomy can only be realised through interdependence". They observe that in collectivist societies such as Bangladesh, "experiences of autonomy occur primarily within and through people's interpersonal relationships", mainly through hierarchical relationships of patronage and horizontal relationships with clan, although sometimes also through more formalised collectives such as savings circles (ibid, p.110). Relationships are not only the locus of identity but also of action.

Devine et al. (2006)'s research also highlights that in Bangladesh women's expressions of agency have a more relational character than that of men. Family members are central to the achievement of women's autonomy (for example, having a husband that will invite the input of his wife(s) on major decisions) while the goals and domain of agency achievements are often home-based and centred on maintaining the quality of relationships with other members of the family.

Implications for practice

As discussed, being embedded in relationships of dependency or care does not preclude the use of agency and can indeed be the means through which it is expressed. In collective societies and for children in particular, exit from such relationships can reduce autonomy rather than expand it. It may be neither possible nor desirable to be extracted from such relationships. The extent to which individuals are able to influence shared decision-making processes to exercise autonomy is extremely variable however (Deneulin and Shahani, 2009). Supporting the agency of women and children will not necessarily require attempting to reposition them as individual agents pursuing individual entitlements but rather renegotiating the terms on which they voice and exert their interests in relationships with others.

Rather than "essential contradiction" or harmony, White (2002a) posits that relationships between children and adults are characterised by a dynamic balance of solidarity and conflict, in which the degree to which their interests overlap is constantly shifting according to external socio-economic factors. Monitoring how development interventions affect this balance is essential, since the quality of people's relationships with others is a critical determiner of their freedom to pursue well-being goals and exert agency. Camfield et al. (2009, p.88) write that "more than any other factor, [relationships] determine what people are able to do or be, and what they actually achieve or become."

3.6 Well-being trade-offs

Fulfilling the social role endorsed by one's household, community or society can be a critical condition of access to social entitlements (Smith and Seward, 2009; Trani et al., 2011). Social roles are commonly differentiated by gender and/or age as well as by other cross-cutting aspects of identity. For women, achieving social recognition and status is often closely associated with the fulfilment of maternal and reproductive roles as well as the display of altruistic behaviours, while for children this is more commonly linked to the exhibition of traits of obedience, compliance and apprenticeship to elders (ibid; Alanen, 2001).

Although adequate performance of prescribed social roles is instrumentally important in order to secure the resources for well-being achievement, social roles are also embedded in broader ideologies about 'how things ought to be' that are internalised by individuals. As a result, the subjective experience of well-being, including senses of self-worth and life-satisfaction, is closely linked to the "feeling of acting according to the norms of the community", particularly in highly collective societies (ibid, p.419).

Although nurturing of children by parents or other caregivers is typically extremely important for the expansion of children's capabilities, performing a care-giving role can also be considered as a capability in its own right (Uyan-Semerci, 2007; n.d). In her study of migrant Turkish women in Istanbul, Uyan-Semerci (n.d, p.3) notes the way in which the women's achievement of capabilities such as bodily health is valued primarily for the way in which these enable them to care for their children. The women are so deeply invested in their maternal role that "their existence, their self-expression and their future plans are always expressed for and through their children." For many such women, fulfilling their social role as care-givers and securing the well-being of children constitutes a highly valued objective,

despite (and partly because of) the fact that such a responsibility is socially constructed as an essential feminine duty.

However, acknowledging that caring for others can constitute a valid dimension of well-being as well as a legitimate exercise of agency should not detract from recognising the costs that caring may exact from care-givers. Achieving the capability to care can often inhibit the freedom of carers to achieve other capabilities (Uyan-Semerci, 2007). Across the world, women remain primarily responsible for children's care, and the time and energy given to ensuring children's well-being may often be provided at the expense of a women's own sleep, mobility, leisure, health and ability to engage income-generating activity (ActionAid, 2011). The capability deprivation experienced by mothers and care-givers is exacerbated in situations of poverty in which household resources are under pressure and/or where the care-giver may be required to engage in additional productive work in addition to their care-giving activities (ibid). Inadequate support for women's reproductive role, for example in the form of poor public services, will also make care-giving more difficult (ActionAid, 2011).

Children, particularly girls, may also find themselves acting as carers. The unpaid work done by children in caring for siblings or elderly or disabled household members is rarely recognised in official definitions of child labour but is a clear (and gendered) constraint to the realisation of children's current and future capabilities. It is a common cause of the educational drop-out and underachievement of girls (Biggieri et al, 2006; UNICEF, 2007).

Households in poverty may often face difficult decisions about which aspects of well-being to prioritise and whose well-being should be prioritised and how. In particular, achieving adequate inputs of both care and material resources to ensure the well-being of household members is a challenge for many households. Although women's entry into the labour market can raise overall household income as well as improve their ability to advocate for children's needs within the household, without the availability of quality childcare facilities the employment of both parents outside the home can come at the expense of the quality and quantity of care given to children (Jones et al, 2007; UNICEF, 2007; Warin, 2006). Where women's reproductive work and responsibility for the care of younger children is transferred to older children, typically girls, child-carers experience both a loss of maternal care and an increase in domestic responsibilities (ibid).

Women's pursuit of well-being for themselves and their children can also require difficult choices between alternative forms of poverty. Although development myths emphasise the material deprivation and insecurity experienced by female headed households, Chant (2007) highlights the way in which women can regard the loss of male income, guardianship and assets as less detrimental to well-being when weighed against the violence, control and lack of ability to provide for children's needs associated with staying in an abusive or oppressive conjugal relationship.

Power relations between household members influence the way in which such well-being trade-offs play out. As described, "the capacity to foster and set the terms of personal linkages are not evenly distributed" and factors of age and gender may confer on household members very different capacities to resist or influence the claims that are made on their time, labour and resources, or indeed, to make such claims on others (White, 2002b, p.1098).

Implications for practice

Care is a central tension between the well-being of women and children. As discussed, relationships of care can be simultaneously rewarding and costly for those who give care, and mitigating the tensions between the capabilities of carers and those requiring care requires improving the conditions in which care is given. Improving women's access to, awareness of and the quality of public services is vital to reduce the costs of caring to women as well to support their capacity to carry out their caring roles (ActionAid, 2011, UNICEF, 2007).

Providing public support to women who play dual roles as paid workers and carers for children is also vitally important. Promoting flexible working arrangements, as well as safeguarding rights to maternity benefits and labour protections can help women more successfully combine their caring responsibilities and paid employment.

At the same time, programmes that promote women's enterprise and entry into the labour market must explicitly address the risk of creating a "care deficit" within households (UNIFEM, 2000, p.32). Affordable and quality alternative childcare options need to be available to avoid children and girls substituting as carers for working mothers and taking on inappropriate caring responsibilities (ibid).

Moreover, attention needs to be paid to rebalancing the responsibilities between men and women for children's care. Gender roles should not be regarded as set in stone and development planners should engage in processes that challenge the gendered division of labour and attempt to match the new norm of 'universal bread-winner' with a 'universal care-giver' model that sees men participating alongside women in the care of children (Lister, 2006, p.331). Development practitioners can consider strategies that include: awareness-raising among men of women's burden, promoting alternative forms of masculinity that can embrace care, providing and promoting take-up of employment benefits for fathers such as paid paternal leave and flexible working.

4. Conclusions

This paper has drawn out the variegated ways in which "well-being happens in relationship" (White, 2010). Relating with others is a central capability on its own, but membership in or affiliation to groups or kin can also generate more capabilities and freedoms through collective action, others' external capabilities, and the support given through relationships of love and care. Nevertheless, the quality of relationships, including the power dynamics, trade-offs, and inherent social norms implicated in relationships, colours the extent to which relationships contribute to expanding one's overall capability set. Unpacking this complex dynamic, the paper offers a more nuanced understanding of where well-being and freedoms can flourish in and through relationships.

To the risk that Bradshaw (2008) identified in development of excluding men from the 'problem' of well-being, the focus on women and children here is to challenge the dominant perspectives that have led to policies that view women and children either as instrumental to other social goals or as a single unit of analysis for their wellbeing and development. By positioning well-being of women and children within a capability approach framework, the arguments in this paper underscore the significance of well-being on the personal level and highlight the ways in which well-being is influenced by relationships with others.

The implications offered in this paper are meant to encourage practitioners to recognise and "creatively inhabit" (White, 2002a) the tensions of mutual and conflicting interests inherent in relationships of love and care. They are a basis for policymakers and stakeholders to take up and contextualise the arguments discussed in order to further promote well-being among women and children.

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