

u'Good!? Research Programme

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Wellbeing: The what and why

1. **Wellbeing** as a push back against negative characterizations of people's lives – e.g. development, poverty, exclusion, dysfunction
2. **Wellness** as positive, aspirational and inclusive
3. Rejects compartmentalization, stigmatizing, and is holistic, “promising to connect mind, body, and spirit” (White, 2010, p. 159)
4. Centred “in **the person** and his/her own perceptions and experiences of life” (White, 2010, p. 160)
5. For many years focused on **material** and **subjective** wellbeing



Wellbeing: The what and why

- 1. Material** wellbeing: the assets you have, the state of physical welfare, standard of living, consumption, livelihoods, and wealth.
 - **What you have**
- 2. Subjective** wellbeing: perceptions of material, social, and human positions; cultural values, ideologies, and beliefs
 - **How you feel about what you have, how you feel about your ability to change your circumstances**



Wellbeing: The what and why

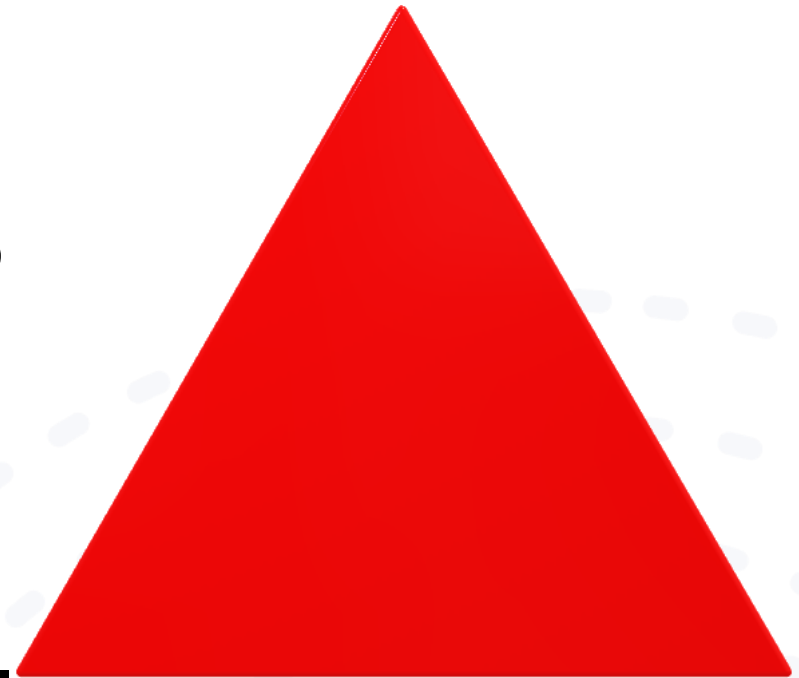
1. **Material** wellbeing - **What you have**
2. **Subjective** wellbeing - **How you feel about what you have/ability to change**
3. **Relational** wellbeing: social relations, access to public goods, capabilities, attitudes to life, and personal relationships
 - **What you have through/because of others (individual, social, environmental)**

Taken as a whole often called “Multidimensional wellbeing” (Cooper 2018 et al)

MATERIAL

RELATIONAL

SUBJECTIVE



Relational wellbeing also called...

1. **Social wellbeing** – Keyes (1998, 2003)

An individual's circumstances and functioning in society... involving **the role of social structures in the individual's ability to properly respond to the challenges of life.**

2. **Collective wellbeing** (Mahali et al, 2018)

The importance of acting together, or measuring wellbeing together



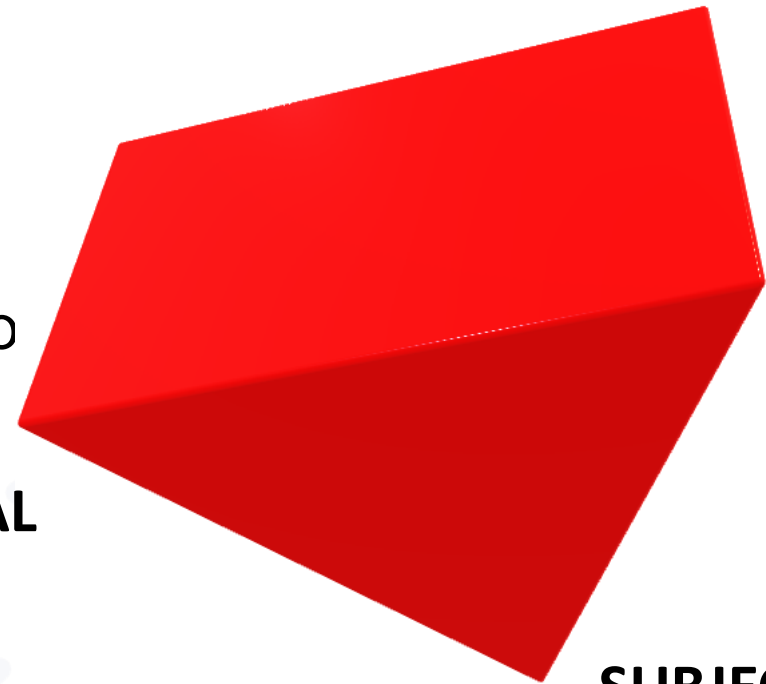
Relational wellbeing (well being, well-being) in academic literature

1. How relationships can be improved
 - Romantic
 - Parent-child
 - Employer-employee
2. Factors causing ill-being in human relationship
 - Technology use
 - Illness
 - Adoption or foster care
 - Sexual orientation
 - work environment
3. Some in the way we understand and are promoting it – often by other names

RELATIONAL

MATERIAL

SUBJECTIVE



Experiences from the Global South

Columbia • Ecuador • Egypt • Ghana • India •
Indonesia • Morocco • Romania • Senegal •
South Africa • Tanzania • Vietnam



The requirements for wellbeing (Mahali et al, 2018)

1. Wellbeing is only partly individually embedded
2. Framed by a **well-functioning, orderly, and regulated society** (Dolan and White 2007) with **strong social capital** and **broad participation** – often in the North
3. Southern societies profoundly shaped by **colonial, neo-colonial and postcolonial histories** that contribute to gross inequalities in the present.
4. But the South has **collective and cultural resources** that could impact on wellbeing – frequently ignored in wellbeing research



Characteristics of wellbeing

Mahali et al (2018 p. 9)

Relational wellbeing characterized by:

Its focus on the quality of relationships that contribute to individual well-being. ... includes increased access to **social support**, the building of **networks**, and the importance of nurturing relationships (Bess & Doykos, 2014). Relational well-being encompasses all the dimensions of an individual's **ecology** including family, **ancestors**, physical environment, society, and **culture**, with these aspects regarded as interdependent and relational (McCubbin, McCubbin, Zhang, Kehl, & Strom, 2013).



Wellbeing: a framework for development practice (Sarah White, 2010)

1. “Exclusion” and “isolation” are often markers of low wellbeing
2. In Southern contexts, wellbeing is also **moral** and **political**
3. “wellbeing as a social process. ...happens in relationship - between the **collective and the individual; the local and the global; the people and the state**”
4. “transforming the terms on which they engage with others and others engage with them” (p. 161)
5. “combine awareness of the present situation with a sense of trajectories through time” (p. 168)
6. “In exploring the scope for collective action, it is particularly concerned with the range of experiences that people have” (p. 168)

Relational wellbeing: A working definition

The concept of 'relational wellbeing' builds on two decades of research in Global South contexts about **how people come to live decent, satisfying lives while navigating challenges**. Relational wellbeing emphasises the **centrality of relationships, connections and connectedness to people that contributes** to our overall wellbeing. While relational wellbeing includes having enough (material wellbeing), and feeling good (subjective wellbeing), it is ultimately about **how life is lived as a series of shared interactions, connections, and strategies** that take place in **multiple domains, and at interlinking levels** – the **personal, societal and environmental**.

Multiple ways of understanding Relational Wellbeing

- 1. RWB as a dimension of wellbeing:** Centrality of relationships, connections and connectedness to people as contributor to overall wellbeing (complements material and subjective wellbeing)
- 2. RWB as an approach to research:** Emphasizing
 - **relational thinking** – flows and interplay between actors and factors across domains, sectors or disciplines.
 - **relational working** – engaging co-operatively with those who are subjects, collaborating with other initiatives to build broader coalitions

Multiple ways of understanding Relational Wellbeing (2)

- **relational subjects** – a person-centred approach, seeing people as agents, embedded in contexts, understanding how relationships structure opportunities and decisions, are co-constitutive

3. RWB as a strategic guide

- in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating interventions
- consider different drivers at multiple levels; looking at unintended consequences and at synergies

Tensions and trade-offs between outcomes for different aspects of life, different kinds of people, people and the planet, and present and future generations.

Young people in the global South

1. 90% of the world's youth live in Africa, Latin America and Asia
2. The Global South is a social construction.
3. Characterised by being:
 - *Former colonies*
 - *Excluded from global trade routes, regimes and treaties as equal partners*
 - *On the periphery of ensuing knowledge systems*

(Cooper, Swartz, and Ramphalile, 2021).



Relational wellbeing and young people in the Global South

1. What do they **have**, and is it enough?
2. **How do they feel about what they have**, and in what ways do they have the ability to change their lives?
3. In what ways are they connected to **each other, to others, to systems and structures** that determine (or at least influence) their life outcomes?
4. How could **research** be conducted, in a relational way, about their lives and wellbeing?
5. How could **interventions** be devised that are relational, and that connect young people rather than divide them?
6. How could these shared **interactions, connections, and strategies** be strengthened, in **multiple domains**, and at **interlinking levels**?

Four thematic areas of focus



Literature on young people, livelihoods and wellbeing is limited

Recognises livelihoods as critical to wellbeing; some extent consider implications for communities/social relations, but mainly:

- 1. Focussed on material outcome** (formal labour market)
- 2. Neglects wellbeing/social outcomes** of livelihood interventions
- 3. Ignores the possible impact of relationships** on the success of livelihood outcomes
- 4. Treats youth as a standard category** for evaluation



5. Dominated by SA, Tanzania, Ghana, India, Egypt

*In Ugandan - positive effects of an intervention programme on quality of life, psychological wellbeing and self-esteem; negative effects on personal independence and **no impact on social relations** (Renzaho et al, 2020)*

*empirical differences result not only in the ongoing exclusion from self-determination, wealth, and technology (as shown by UNDP, 2018) but this is accompanied by **different capacities for responding to adversity and thus livelihood opportunities***

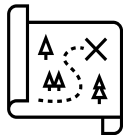
*“an emerging body of literature examines skills development training in the Global South, but **the findings are mixed regarding whether and how such training produce positive outcomes for young people's livelihoods and, in turn, wellbeing** (Dejaeghere et al, 2020)*

Future work must foreground relationality and 'unfreedoms'

'unfreedoms' - illiteracy, poor health, social exclusion, livelihoods insecurity, social norms, and poor governance affect the achievement of livelihoods for youth in the Global South disproportionately (Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2021)

YRWB research offers the opportunity to:

1. **Improve conceptualisation on the components of livelihoods and the linkages between livelihoods and wellbeing** (particularly what the contribution of RWB is to ensuring livelihoods)
2. **Address poor conceptualisation of access** (critical construct in livelihoods research)
3. **Address gap in meta-analytic and comparative research** on livelihoods (that could illustrate the extent to which relationality impacts on livelihoods)
4. **Expand 'limited' work at the intersection** (Young people, relational well-being and livelihoods) in many of the focus countries



Youth Mental Health: Global South perspective

India
South Africa
Romania
Egypt
Senegal
Ecuador
Indonesia
Morocco
Colombia
Ghana
Tanzania
Vietnam

1. Growing body of literature on youth mental health in global South but not as substantial as in global North
 - Pendse et al 2019: “**little work** has been done to consider mental health in more challenged, resource-constrained, and ‘developing’” contexts
2. Ongoing review shows a bias towards **prevalence** and studies on the **determinants** of mental health – rather than **supportive networks or protective factors**
3. Strong focus on anxiety, depression, psychological distress and suicide
 - 78% of suicides, globally, occur in **in LMIC** where most youth live (Orri et al., 2022; WHO, 2017)
 - Yet, less studies on **youth suicide and suicide ideation** in the global South compared to research on depression or anxiety

EXAMPLE

Enhancing adolescent mental health in school contexts
How do we create school environments that promote mental health?

1 Social

- What prevents and/or promotes seeking MH?
 - E.g., social norms, perceptions, attitudes around MH

2 Support

- What services, programmes or individuals are available to promote and protect adolescent MH?
 - at school, in community, family, peers etc.



3 Political

- What MH policies/mandates/laws are available to protect youth?
 - How are these implemented and where are the gaps?

4 Relational

- How do various factors interact to compromise or promote MH?
 - What is missing?
 - If all factors are in sync, how will MH be improved?

A RWB approach to study and promote youth mental health thus recognises that real problems don't happen in silos and nor do their solutions. This collective investment will have widespread impact to advance positive mental health outcomes.

Young People and Climate Change

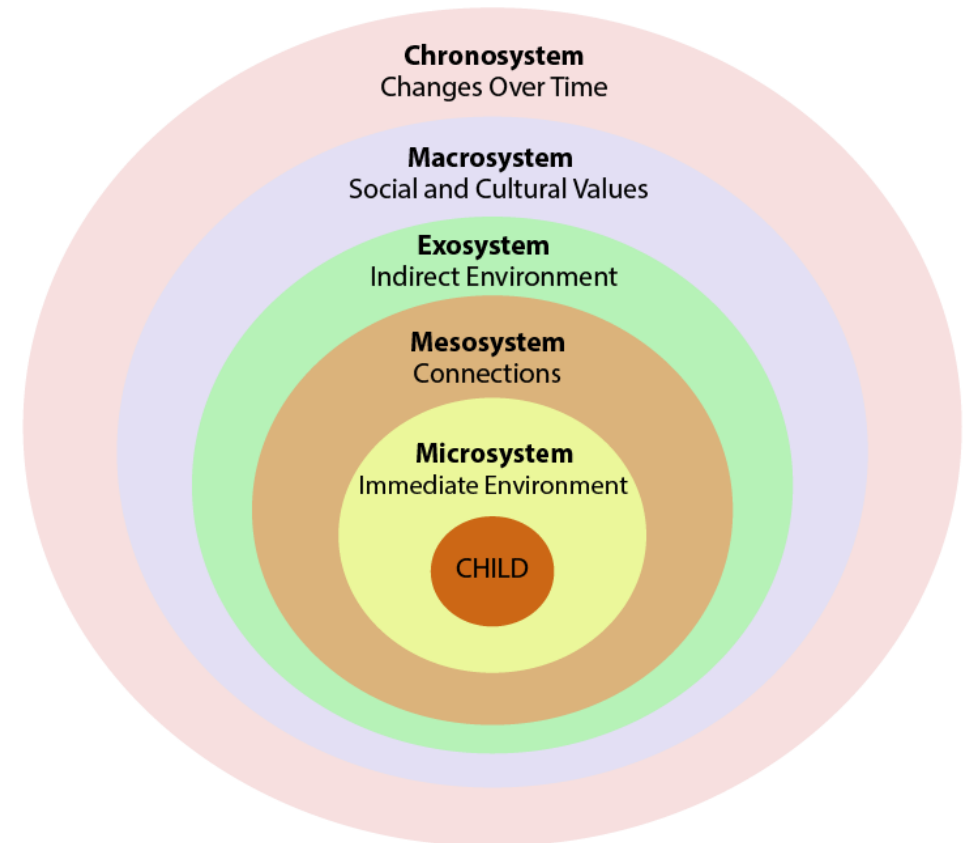
1. **Little research on relational wellbeing and climate change**, and young people are side-lined in it
2. Research on young people and climate change is dominated by **youth activism focus**;
3. Research dominated by focus on **mental health**;
4. Range of **scientific, economic, social, and political** issues that relate to youth wellbeing ignored
5. **Climate-related impacts intersect with existing social** characteristics such as gender, age, location, refugee status and disability.



Avenues for future research

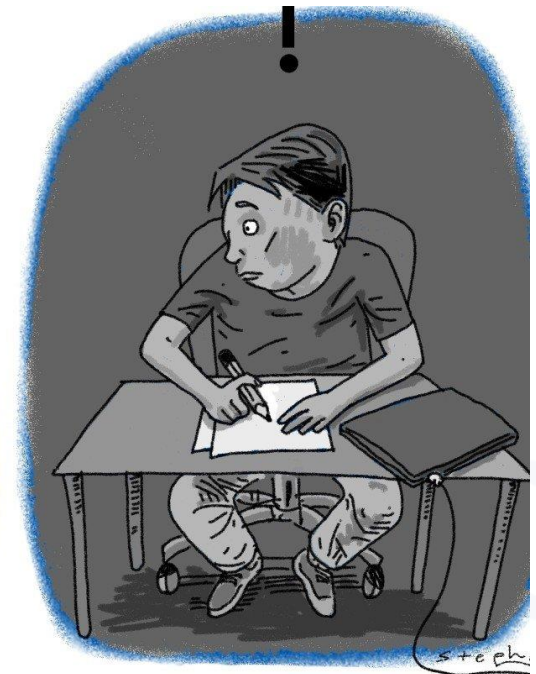
1. **Other forms of wellbeing** – physical health, livelihoods, etc. – are occluded by the focus on **mental** health and emphasis on **individual** well-being
2. Distinguish between the impacts of **direct** and **indirect** exposure to climate change
3. Identify the different ways these impact young people's well-being
4. Adopt a **social–ecological theoretical framework** for more targeted research interventions

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Digitalisation

1. WEF's 4th Industrial Revolution dominates the discourse, focus on Global North
2. Digital Inequality an extension of the Social Inequalities
3. Digital Economic Participation - depends on infrastructure, skills, relevant local content
4. Digital Inclusion Policy and Research is essential for the Global South – assumes the Private Sector can satisfy the needs of the poor



Relational Wellbeing Intersection

Environmental

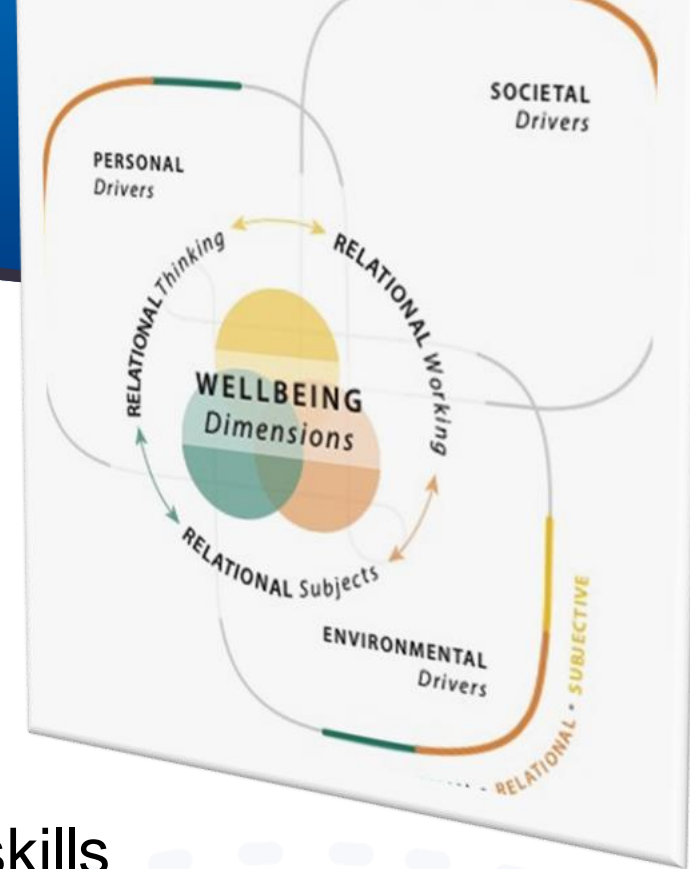
1. How do we overcome digital inequalities?
2. Digital Inclusion policies are paramount
3. What more can the public sector do?

Personal

1. How do young people develop digital skills when the skills demand evolves so quickly?
2. Who produces local content in Global South countries?

Societal

1. How has the nature/types of work changed due to tech?
2. How are platforms changing the employer-employee relationship



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