

# Introducing the WeD research programme and the ways in which it can inform policy

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**Photographs by Alula Pankhurst**

# Outline of the talk

- **Introducing the WeD research programme**
- **Questions and comments**
- **Using academic social research to inform policy**
- **Questions and comments**

# Introducing the WeD research

- **Four-country multi-disciplinary academic study 2002 - 2007**
- **An exploratory research programme whose purposes include:**
  1. **to introduce to development research and practice**
    - (1) a clearer focus on people
    - (2) new methods to study them and their contexts
  2. **to explore how people in local communities think about 'well' and 'ill' being**

# Introducing the WeD research (continued)

- An exploratory research programme (cont.):
  3. to explore how differences in life quality are produced within the social contexts of  
unequally structured
    - households
    - communities
    - country
    - world

# Introducing the WeD research (continued)

- An exploratory research programme (cont.):
  4. to draw conclusions
    - for the country
    - for similar countries
    - for development theory
    - for empirical research
    - development policy and practice

# A clearer focus on people

- **Going beyond....**
  - ‘households’ and ‘the poor’
  - ‘health’ and ‘education’
  - ‘gender’, ‘youth’, child labour
  - ‘empowerment’ ‘participation’
- **People are social actors**
  - people make choices
  - people’s choices relate to their cultural values and beliefs

# A clearer focus on people (continued)

- People are social actors (continued)
  - people's actions also relate to their social roles and relationships
  - people's actions often have well/ill being consequences for other people as well as themselves
  - their own well/ill being is affected by the actions of other people
  - development depends on changes in choices and actions

# A realistic focus on people

- **Gender differences and the human lifecycle**
  - local definitions of well/ill being and well- and ill- doing are different for
    - girls and boys
    - female and male adolescents
    - adult men and women
    - old men and women
  - social roles within households, communities and the country vary
  - thus the choices open to different kinds of people vary

# A realistic focus on people

- **‘Genderage’ differences (continued)**
  - decisions to migrate vary according to gendered position in the life cycle
  - the effects of decisions to migrate by significant others vary
- **An example of ways in which these differences matter:**
  - WeD evidence of threats to life quality according to gendered position in the life cycle

# Person Life Quality

- **Baby girls and boys - THREATS**

- harm to mother during pregnancy, birth, early life
- mother unable to breastfeed
- disease, unclean water, poor sanitation, malnutrition
- no clothes, no vaccination, no or poor medical treatment



# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- ‘Knee and roaming’ boys and girls
  - similar threats as to babies
  - plus threats from moving in the natural environment
  - plus threats from the social environment – violence, work
  - in the RANS sample ‘the main activity in the last month’ of 8% of 3-6 year olds was herding, childcare or fetching wood or water



# Person Life Quality (continued)

- **‘Working and learning’ girls and boys**
  - similar to younger children
  - particularly too much work, or work that is too hard
  - the main activity of 35% of boys and 38% of girls was work
  - boys and girls may be beaten by adults and older siblings
  - at school: 45.7% boys and 40.5% girls
  - girls at risk of abuse

## THREATS



# Person Life Quality (continued)



## THREATS

### Male adolescents and VYAs

- failing to establish personal identities and relationships in the community
- failing in negotiations over work, income, education, access to their own productive resources
- the attractions of drinking, chewing chat, fighting, and womanising

# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- **Female adolescents and VYAs**
  - failing to establish personal identities and community relationships
  - rape and abduction
  - usually heavily burdened with domestic work
  - cultural pressures to get married when they don't want to



# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- **Adult women**
  - infertility
  - problems related to pregnancy, childbirth, infancy
  - too many pregnancies
  - maternal anxieties about the survival and prospering of children



# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- **Adult women**
  - no daughters
  - too much work
  - violence from husbands and sons
  - widowhood and divorce



# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS



- **Adult men**
  - no / inadequate livelihood resources
  - low status in the community
  - becoming ‘defeated’ – ‘laziness’, drink / chat
  - no wife / death of wife

# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- **Adult men**
  - no children / no sons
  - badly behaved children
  - failure to meet patriarchal responsibilities
  - violent conflicts with neighbours and others in / beyond the community; war



# Person Life Quality (continued)

## THREATS

- **Old people**
  - no control of livelihood resources such as land or livestock
  - no partner / bad relations with partner
  - bodily decline leading to disabilities and chronic ill-health
  - no or inadequate healthcare



# Person Life Quality (continued)



## THREATS

- **Old people**
  - decline in the status of the elderly / disrespect
  - no children or uncaring children
  - inability to find meaning in the life that is coming to an end

# Questions and comments

# Using academic social research to inform policy

- A major goal of academic social science is to find out how societies, economies, politics, and cultures work.
- This involves using theoretical ideas and research methods to establish ‘truths’ about the world
- Some ideas, methods and ‘truths’ eventually work their way into policy and practice discourses

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- The dominant concepts, ideas and methods currently used in policy and practice discourses come from the discipline of economics
- There is huge scope to rationalise the communication links between
  - policy makers and practitioners; and
  - sociologists, social anthropologists, and political scientists

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Academic research is designed in the context of university-based disciplines and the academic chooses the topic and approach**
- **Research for policy and practice is usually commissioned by government / donors / NGOs in the light of their current interests**
- **Research is usually done by consultants following terms of reference**

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Consultants rarely have time to keep up with the new ideas, theories and methods under development within academic disciplines**
- **Academics are not qualified to make policy recommendations**
- **A role for academics: to increase the background knowledge and understanding of consultants, policy makers and practitioners**

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **A role for consultants and practitioners**
  - to use this knowledge and understanding to criticise and inform current development ideas and practices
- **Ways of making connections**
  - writing and reading books
  - writing research papers and briefings on topics of interest to donors
  - academic / practitioner workshops
  - go-betweens
  - other?

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Connecting through the WeD Ethiopia book:**
  - a new conceptual framework and methods which present some challenges to the current orthodoxies
  - identification of the important causal mechanisms involved in the generation of well- and ill- being in Ethiopia
  - analysis of country and international contexts

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Connecting through the WeD book (continued):**
  - descriptions and interpretations of local experiences and perspectives in Ethiopia
  - descriptions of social and cultural structures and patterns of inequality at community and household levels
  - descriptions of mobilisations for and against a range of changes by different kinds of community actor

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Connecting through papers for donors:**  
e.g. Irish Aid paper
  - conceptual analysis – what kinds of migration exist?
    - commuting on a daily basis
    - seasonal and short-term migration
    - long-term migration within Ethiopia
    - international migration
  - one implication is that there are a number of different potential ‘policy objects’

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Irish Aid paper (continued)**
  - **descriptions and interpretations of local experiences and perspectives related to migration**
  - **descriptions of the consequences of migration for**
    - **different kinds of migrant**
    - **the people, households and communities they have left behind**
    - **the places where they have settled**

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Irish Aid paper (continued)**
  - **contains descriptions of some of the social and cultural structures underpinning migration**
  - **the findings are used to suggest policy implications (from an NGO perspective)**

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Connecting through academic / practitioner workshops: e.g. this one**
  - **Academic input:**
    - paper leading to a research briefing, three presentations (with no recommendations)
  - **Practitioner input:**
    - working groups – govt, donors, NGOs, academics
    - reporting back and discussion

# Using academic social research to inform policy (continued)

- **Connecting through academic / practitioner workshops**
  - **Question:**
    - **What are the implications of the reported research for government / donors / NGOs / academics?**
  - **Output:**
    - **A policy brief using the workshop expertise**

# Questions and comments