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Ideas for development: reflecting forwards

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Summary

Part 1 (1997): If development means good change, questions arise about what is good, and what sorts of change matter. Answers can be personally defined and redefined. The changing words, meanings and concepts of development discourse both reflect and influence what is done. The realities of the powerful tend to dominate. Drawing on experience with participatory approaches and methods which enable poor and marginalised people to express their realities, responsible well-being is proposed as a central concept for a development agenda. This links with capabilities and livelihoods, and is based on equity and sustainability as principles. The primacy of personal actions and non-actions in development points to the need for a pedagogy for the non-oppressed. This includes self-critical awareness, thinking through the effects of actions, and enabling those with power and wealth to experience being better off with less. Others are invited and encouraged to reflect, improve on this analysis, and write their own agenda.

Part 2 (2004): Since 1997, the polarisation of power and wealth in the world has become even more extreme. The personal dimension is central in mediating every big issue but continues to be relatively neglected. Words and concepts used in development have remained potent. Social capital and sustainable livelihoods have met needs in powerful organisations and have been widely adopted and influential. Responsible well-being, pointing to individual agency, has languished at the same time as the scope for action and impact has been enhanced by growing interconnectedness. The methodologies proposed earlier are needed more than ever. So are new lines of thinking: to complement rights of the poorer and weaker with obligations of the richer and more powerful, worldwide and between all levels; to recognise power and relationships as central issues; to integrate institutional and personal change; to ground pro-poor policies and practice in realism; to think for oneself and take responsibility; to choose words and identify priorities personally; and to seek guidance by reflecting on what a poor person would wish one to do.

Keywords: Development Discourse; Ethics; Obligations-based Approach; Participation; Personal Values; Poverty; Reflexivity; Rights-based Approach

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Let me thank the many people who have contributed to this paper through their ideas, advice and help. Fuller acknowledgements will be in the book. The usual disclaimers apply. These ideas are a stage of work in progress. Critical comments and suggestions are invited and will be most welcome.

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Part 1

Responsible well-being: a personal agenda for development[1]

It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways for managing society, the economy and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave.

(Havel 1992)

What we need is an impassioned, intellectually honest, and, above all, open-ended debate about how each person should best conduct his or her life.

(Forsyth 1991: 269)

1.1 Introduction

To write about a development agenda is rash and perhaps arrogant. There are multiple realities – ecological, economic, social, political, and personal. Change accelerates and uncontrolled global forces make prediction ever harder. Any development agenda is value-laden, and some academics abhor anything that smacks of moralising. Yet not to ask questions about values is value-laden by default, and not to consider good things to do is a tacit surrender to professional conditioning, personal reflexes, and fatalism. Perhaps the right course is for each of us to reflect, articulate and share our own ideas about values, problems, potentials and priorities, accepting these as provisional and fallible. Paraphrasing Heraclitus, we can then recognise that concerning what we think and what we should do, nothing will be permanent but change. Right behaviour then includes trying to understand ourselves and changing what we do. Doubt, self-awareness and embracing error are virtues. This means that while thinking and acting we also question how we think, what we think, and the rightness of what we do. It is in that tentative and self-doubting spirit that this editorial is written.

1.2 What is development?

The eternal challenge of development is to do better. Usually this is tackled by identifying policies, programmes and projects. Both the *Human Development Report 1997* (UNDP 1997) and the *World Development Report 1997* (World Bank 1997) follow in a long tradition by listing policies and actions to make the world a better place, especially for the poor. The argument of this editorial is that this does not go far enough. There is a crucial missing link. We need to add the personal dimension. This implies stepping back and engaging in critical self-examination. To do better, we have to examine not just the normally defined agenda of development "out there"; but ourselves, how our ideas are formed, how we think, how we change, and what we do and do not do.

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1 The first part of this paper is an invited editorial published in *World Development* (Chambers 1997a). I am grateful to Geoff Barnard, Jenny Chambers and Janet Craswell for helpful comments on a draft. In some cases I have substituted or added references by the same authors which have been published since 1997.

Words are a starting point. Fritjof Capra (1996: 282) has put it that:

> The uniqueness of being human lies in our ability to continually weave the linguistic network in which we are embedded. To be human is to exist in language. In language we coordinate our behaviour, and together in language we bring forth our world.

For professionals committed to development, the world we wish to bring forth is linked to what we mean by development.

On the cover of *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs 1992), a sentence by Wolfgang Sachs proclaims, 'The idea of development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Its shadow obscures our vision.' In contrast, Daphne Thuvesson has written (1995) 'As the existing system crumbles around us, new and exciting alternatives are sprouting up in the rubble.'

Sachs's pessimism and Thuvesson's optimism are both needed.[2] The record of "development" is mixed. Those who damn the errors, failures and deficits tend to ignore the counterfactual, how much worse things could have been if nothing had been done. Those who laud achievements and successes tend to overlook how much better things might have been even than they were. A balanced view has to recognise renewals and continuities in the landscape as well as ruins and rubble, and older trees as well as new sprouts.

To explore the terrain, let us start, as *The Development Dictionary* does, by examining words and concepts that are common currency in contemporary development discourse and with which we seek to "bring forth our world".

Development has been taken to mean different things at different times, in different places, and by different people in different professions and organisations. The dominant meanings have been those attributed by economists and used in economics.

Development has thus often been equated with economic development, and economic development in turn with economic growth, often abbreviated simply to growth. But the meanings given to development have also evolved,[3] not least through the concept of human development in the *Human Development Reports* of UNDP. In all cases, though, however clinical the analysis or disparate the definitions, the word seems to have had two aspects: it has been normative; and it has involved change. So the underlying meaning of development has been good change. That is the sense in which it is used here. Views have differed, and perhaps always should and will differ, about what is good and what sorts of change are significant.

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2 For a classical and entertaining discussion of the need for the interaction of both poles of a range of development dichotomies, see Streeten (1983).

3 See e.g. *Development* (1997) for a useful overview.

Change is continuous in what changes and how it changes, and in what we see as good. All this is reflected in words and meanings. These are both formative and adaptive: they both influence and express conditions, ideologies, perceptions, practices and priorities. That vocabularies and meanings evolve is then itself necessary and good, and both cause and effect of other changes.

1.3 A changing vocabulary

So it has been that new words have been continuously introduced and spread. Additions to the common lexicon of development in the past two decades have been prolific. New words have been added faster than old have fallen into disuse. Some such as integrated, coordinated, planning and socialism have peaked and passed into decline. Others in the eclectic and perhaps ephemeral language of postmodernism, such as deconstruction, narrative and meta-narrative, text and subtext, have largely languished in academic and literary backwaters. Others, such as equity and poverty, have been robust and resilient. Yet others, some old, some new, which have come close to the mainstream of much development discourse during the past two decades include:

> accountability, capabilities, civil society, consumer, decentralisation, democracy, deprivation. diversity, empowerment, entitlement, environment, gender, globalisation, governance, human rights, livelihood, market, ownership, participation, partnership, pluralism, process, stakeholder, sustainability, transparency, vulnerability, well-being.

Of these only three – environment, market and participation - receive chapters in *The Development Dictionary*.

1.4 The power of language

The power of vocabulary to change how we think and what we do is easy to underestimate. It influences the course of development in many ways: through changing the agenda; through modifying mindsets; through legitimating new actions; and through stimulating and focusing research and learning.

New language is easily dismissed as rhetoric or jargon. Seasoned sceptics can see changes in words and meanings as transient, superficial, and insignificant. Those impelled by authority or prudence to use new words signal their cynicism by dubbing them "buzz words", "flavour of the month", and "politically correct". So consultants, bureaucrats, and those seeking contracts, support, security or promotion, tap out and parrot[4] the latest vocabulary.

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[4] Or, to change the zoological metaphor:

> Consultants with contracts to win
> use language they know to be in
> Chameleons, they
> fake a fashion display
> camouflaging for cash is no sin

Language is, however, about much more than rhetoric and opportunism. It shapes and interacts with the ways we think and behave. An obvious case is gender syntax. Reversing "he or she" to "she or he", or using "she" as the pronoun for "the African farmer", have not come easily to many, but their capacity to challenge and shock, and their gradual acceptance, have been a small but significant bridgehead into male-biased thinking and patriarchy. So in our development context, we can see that language has helped to bring forth and change the world of development professionals. This has happened in three ways: introducing, stressing and defining words; combining them in new ways; and listing and disaggregating.

1.4.1 Introducing, stressing and defining words

How the thinking and actions of development professionals may have been affected over the past two decades can be assessed by reflecting on the contexts of the words listed above. Table 1.1 shows how they can be separated.

A personal impression is that 20 years ago none of these, except equity and poverty, was as prominent as today. Increasingly, these words are embedded in the mindsets of development professionals, and increasingly used by them unreflectively, that is to say, without forcing, and without feeling insecure or self-conscious or a need to justify or explain their use. In this process they change how development realities are constructed and seen. An example is the new and specialised meanings of capabilities and of entitlements as progressively elaborated by Amartya Sen (1981; 1985). New words can also confront old. Livelihood has been put forward as a challenge to the reductionism and specificity of employment. Deprivation has been put forward as a challenge to the narrowness of poverty.

Table 1.1 Development vocabulary

The human condition	capabilities, deprivation, entitlement, livelihood, poverty, vulnerability, well-being
Organisation, power and relationships	accountability, consumer, decentralisation, empowerment, ownership, participation, partnership, process, stakeholder, transparency
Domains, dimensions	civil society, environment, globalisation, governance, market
Values	democracy, diversity, equity, gender, human rights, pluralism, sustainability

1.4.2 Combining words

Combinations of words have been influential in three ways.

First, they have been used to focus and present radical concepts in a technical guise. *Primary stakeholders* as proposed in the World Bank,[5] is a technical phrase which implies a priority for poor people affected positively or negatively by a policy, project or programme. The term was widely welcomed and applauded but reportedly had to be put in cold storage by the Bank because of political pressures from governments in the South. But by then it had escaped and had a life of its own. *Social development* was not much used 20 years ago, but now there are many social development advisers, and the Social Development Summit was held in Copenhagen in 1995.

Second, combining words can expand disciplinary views and provide bridges between disciplines. Put negatively 'Like blinkers, the terms we adopt to express ourselves limit the range of our view' (Capra 1996: 268). Put positively, we can expand and alter our view and what we do by combining terms. This can be illustrated by the shift in priorities and thinking that has been taking place from things and infrastructure to people and capabilities. As the importance of people has risen in the development agenda, the practical question has been how to help the professions, notably engineering and economics, that have dominated donor agencies, especially the World Bank, to accommodate the new priorities. The transition has been eased linguistically by applying to people the familiar language and concepts of things and numbers. So we have learned to speak of *human capital, human infrastructure, human resource development, social infrastructure, social investment,* and now *social capital.* On the negative side, these may standardise, depersonalise, and miss much that matters to people, and may purport to measure what cannot meaningfully be measured. On the positive side, they make it easier for economists to incorporate people and social institutions in their mental and mathematical models.

Third, combinations of words can be formative, starting largely undefined and presenting a challenge and opportunity to provide a meaning, as this editorial does below with *responsible well-being. Sustainable livelihoods* was embodied in the title of a conference (Conroy and Litvinoff 1988), caught on as a phrase, and then was progressively explored and elaborated for meanings of sustainable, of livelihood, and of the two words taken together (e.g. Chambers and Conway 1992; Bernstein *et al.* 1992). Social exclusion opens up a new perspective on deprivation. Most recently, *state capability* (World Bank 1997, *passim*) draws attention to what a state can and should do in relation to its ability to act.

1.4.3 Listing and disaggregating

Listing and disaggregating are means of qualifying the reductionism of much development thinking. Listing adds diversity and complexity. Disaggregating unpacks concepts. Thus the reductionism of poverty

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5 The term "primary stakeholders", defined as 'those expected to benefit from or be adversely affected by Bank-supported operations, particularly the poor and marginalized' had a chequered history. It was included in early drafts of *The World Bank and Participation: Report to the Learning Group on Participatory Development*, and applauded by many Bank-watchers. But it was dropped from the final version (World Bank 1994), reportedly because some Bank Directors from countries of the South objected that it constituted interference with internal political affairs.

defined for professional convenience by a single measure of income or consumption has been qualified in three ways: by listing and examining other dimensions of deprivation, such as vulnerability, physical weakness, powerlessness, discrimination, humiliation and social exclusion; by separating out aspects of poverty itself, and using the terms income-poverty (as in UNDP 1997, *passim)* or consumption-poverty for that subset which is normally measured and used for comparisons; and by enabling poor people themselves to use their own words and concepts to express, list and analyse their realities, local, complex, diverse, dynamic and uncontrollable as they so often are (Chambers 1997b: Chapter 8).

1.5 Whose language counts?

If vocabulary can make so much difference, we must ask: who changes the words we use? Whose language brings forth our world and guides our actions? Who defines what words mean?

The world brought forth is usually constructed by the powerful in central places or by those well placed to influence them. The words and concepts of development both express and form the mindsets and values of dominant linguistic groups, disciplines and professions, and organisations. Among linguistic groups, the English language is, irreversibly it seems, the most influential. Other transnational languages such as Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish – can dominate national and other vernaculars. Among disciplines and professions, the words and concepts of engineering preoccupied with things, and applied economics preoccupied with quantification, still set the agenda and vocabulary of much development discourse. The procedures which fit and reinforce their paradigms, such as the logical framework and social cost-benefit analysis, are authoritatively taught and required. Among organisations, those clustered in the Eastern United States are pervasively influential, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with the greatest concentration of development professionals, power and intellectual capability in the world; UNDP increasingly through the *Human Development Report;* and the US government. These are major sources of new vocabulary and ideas which gain currency. The President of the World Bank, in particular, exercises enormous power over development thinking and action through the words he,[6] or his speech-writers, choose to use. Robert McNamara's 1973 Nairobi speech on poverty is an example, followed now by James Wolfensohn's promotion of participation.

1.6 Personal values and concepts

All, though, need not be determined by the powerful, from the central cores and from above. Richard Forsyth (1991) has presented a challenge for each person to devise her or his own religion. Similarly, development professionals, in a spirit of self-doubting pluralism, can help one another by drawing up and sharing personal lists and patterns of values and concepts, and seeing where and how these differ and

6 All Presidents of the World Bank so far have been men.

cohere. There is space here for reflection on how one's personal realities and values have been formed, and to choose, change and give meaning to a personal list of words and concepts. There is scope here too to give priority to the values and preferences of the weak.

For all development professionals, there are many sources of values, vision and concepts. The great religions will always be sources of inspiration to explore for values and vision. For analytical concepts and insights there are now numerous new sources. The theories of chaos, edge of chaos and complexity (Gleick 1988; Resnick 1994; Waldrop 1994) contribute insights and analogies: how complex self-organizing systems can be based on few rules, with parallels in decentralised, democratic and diverse human organisation; how small actions at certain times can have huge effects later, pointing to the power of individual choice and responsibility; and how there can be zones of stability in turbulence, suggesting reassertions of continuities even in chaotic conditions. The new ecology contributes understandings of local heterogeneity, networks, dynamism, sequences, transitions and synergies, with continuous change and adaptation: in Capra's (1996: 295) words some of the basic principles are 'interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility, diversity and, as a consequence of all those, sustainability'. Other sources include soft systems theory (Checkland 1981) and management theory and practice (e.g. Peters 1989; Senge 1990; Handy 1989). Sources such as these present vocabularies, concepts and ways of thinking to be tapped and more can be expected.

Another source is the experience with PRA (participatory rural appraisal). This has influenced my own view. Others will judge for themselves whether for them too it may help. PRA[7] is a family of continuously evolving approaches, methods, values and behaviours which has turned much that is conventional on its head. It seeks to enable local and marginalised people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate. In its philosophy, practice and vocabulary it has come to stress:

- the question 'whose reality counts?' raising issues of equity and empowerment, and of enabling women, poor people and others who are marginalised to express their realities and make them count
- the primacy of the personal, especially behaviour and attitudes, and exercising personal judgement and responsibility. Let us examine these in turn.

1.7 Whose reality counts?

In our world of global communication, those who are connected electronically are a new exclusive elite. Those who are not connected to internet, email and fax are a new group of the excluded. At the same

[7] For introductory sources see Mascarenhas *et al.* (1991); and Chambers (1997b). For recent sources and concerns see RRA *Notes* (1988-present) (now PLA *Notes),* Absalom *et al.* (1995), Mallik *et al.* (1996), and Kumar (1996).

time, the realities of professionals and of poor people are notoriously disparate. Again and again the realities of those who are poor and marginalised are ignored or misread. The challenge is how to give voice to those who are left out and to make their reality count.

Participatory methodologies, perhaps most notably PRA, have shown both power and popularity in enabling those who are subordinate to express their realities.[8] Insights and priorities have included, for example, the importance of all-weather roads for access to medical treatment and markets during the rains, the need to reschedule the timing of school fees away from the most difficult time of year, and training health staff to be friendly and respectful to poor people seeking treatment. In Bangladesh, where the focus of analysis by poor people was on "doables", differences in priorities between women and men, and between urban and rural**,** were highlighted (UNDP 1996). The first doable priority of urban women was drinking water, and the second private places for washing. A widespread desire of poor people was enforcement of the anti-dowry laws. Elsewhere, a better understanding of sectoral priorities, for example between health and education, has also resulted.

Thematic investigations using PRA approaches and methods have also illuminated local realities in a range of contexts, for example:

- area stigma – how living in an area with a bad reputation for violence makes it difficult to get jobs (from Jamaica – Moser and Holland (1997); Levy (1996); Moser and McIlwaine (2004));
- how a quarter of girls of school age were "invisible" to the official system (from The Gambia – Kane *et al.* (1998));
- how the problems and priorities of women differ not only from those of men but also between women depending on their access to basic services and infrastructures, and their social background (from Morocco – Shah and Bourarach (1995));
- how an official belief that indigenous tenure systems no longer existed was wrong, and how diverse and crucial they were (from Guinea - Freudenberger (1998));
- the ability of local people to define sustainable management and conservation practices for themselves (from India and Pakistan – Gujja *et al.* (1998)).

Strikingly, through PRA processes local people have again and again presented values and preferences which differ from those of outsiders or those supposed for local people by outsiders. When asked to card-sort households in what was originally wealth ranking (Grandin 1988) local people have so consistently sorted not by wealth but by some composite concept close to well-being, that the process has been

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8 Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) using PRA approaches and methods have been pioneered in Ghana (Norton *et al.* 1995; Dogbe 1998), Zambia (Norton *et al.* 1994; Norton and Owen 1996; Milimo, Shillito and Brock n.d.), South Africa (Attwood 1996; May 1996; Murphy 1995; Teixeira and Chambers 1995), and in Bangladesh (UNDP 1996) using a variety of processes. For reviews of PPAs see Norton and Stephens (1995); Robb (1998, 2002); Chambers and Blackburn (1996); Holland with Blackburn (1998); Norton (1998a and b); and Norton *et al.* (2001).

renamed well-being ranking. In well-being, income has often had a surprisingly low priority compared with health, family life, respect and social values.[9] Empirically, well-being and its close equivalents seem to express a widespread human value open to diverse local and individual definitions.

PPAs and PRA approaches and methods are not panaceas. They do, though, present new opportunities for policy influence on behalf of those normally excluded. They can bring poor people and policymakers together in new ways. They can present realities in visual diagrams with a new credibility. To the question 'Whose Voice Counts?' they have shown that the answer can be, more than before, the voices of those previously unheard.

1.8 Personal behaviour and attitudes

The experience of PRA has been expressed in, or leads to, words and concepts which have not been prominent in mainstream development thinking. Some of these are commitment, disempowerment, doubt, fulfilment, fun,[10] generosity,[11] responsibility, self-critical awareness, sharing, and trust.

These have had little place in the headlines of the literature of development. None features as a chapter heading in the *Development Dictionary* (Sachs 1992).[12]

In addition, PRA has adopted and evolved a number of injunctions:

- ask them
- be nice to people
- don't rush
- embrace error
- facilitate
- hand over the stick
- have fun
- relax
- they can do it (i.e. have confidence that people are capable)

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9 For fuller presentations of the evidence about wealth and well-being as criteria see *RRA Notes,* No 15 and Chambers (1997b: 176-9).

10 In this list, fun is an apple among oranges. The other words are serious and moral. Fun looks frivolous. That fun is out of reach for so many - the desperately sick, suffering and poor, those who are abused, trapped, victims of violence, those fleeing in terror from war - may make it seem obscene in a development vocabulary. But it is as important as the others. With play and fun come creativity, laughter, the breakdown of barriers, the expression of realities, new insights, and the weakening of defences and of structures of power. That it is out of reach for so many is an outrage.

11 In an earlier draft I used altruism. But altruism is an austere, unsmiling word with overtones of "do-gooding". I am grateful to Norman Uphoff (1992: 341) for pointing out that altruism and generosity can be used interchangeably. His Chapter 12 is exciting and essential reading on this.

12 There is, however, a chapter by Marianne Gronemeyer on "Helping" which is close to altruism or generosity. But the chapter has a negative orientation. Gronemeyer analyses the modernising of the idea of help. Help, she argues, has evolved from spontaneous response to a cry of need to an instrument for the sophisticated exercise of power, in which neediness is determined not by the cry of the afflicted but by the diagnosis of the development establishment.

Strikingly, these words, phrases and injunctions point to personal behaviour and attitudes. The three original pillars of PRA (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1991) were:

- methods (many involving visualisations through diagramming, mapping, scoring and so on
- sharing
- behaviour and attitudes.

There is a growing consensus that of these by far the most important is behaviour and attitudes (see, e.g. Absalom *et al.* 1995; Kumar 1996; Blackburn with Holland 1998). Yet these have been absent from most professional training and from most agendas of development. Taken together with the one sentence manual 'Use your own best judgement at all times', the experience and ethics of PRA stress not just personal behaviour and attitudes, but personal responsibility.

1.9 Responsible well-being

The two themes generated by the PRA experience – locally defined concepts of well-being, and personal responsibility – can be combined as responsible well-being, a two-word concept to explore. The challenge is to see what this might mean for all people, in their relations with themselves, with others, and with the environment. Two basic principles on which there is wide agreement are equity and sustainability. Two elements which are both ends and means in development thinking are livelihood and capabilities.[13] These can be linked with each other as in Figure 1.1.

The overarching end is well-being, supported by capabilities and livelihood. Equity and sustainability as principles qualify livelihood to become livelihood *security,* and well-being to become *responsible* well-being.

Each word can be presented in a statement:

The objective of development is well-being for all. Well-being can be described as the experience of good quality of life. Well-being and its opposite, ill-being, differ from wealth and poverty. Well-being and ill-being are words with equivalents in many languages. Unlike wealth, well-being is open to the whole range of human experience, social, psychological and spiritual as well as material. It has many elements. Each person can define it for herself or himself. Perhaps most people would agree to including living standards, access to basic services, security and freedom from fear, health, good relations with others, friendship, love, peace of mind, choice, creativity, fulfilment and fun. Extreme poverty and ill-being go together, but the link between wealth and well-being is weak or even negative: reducing poverty usually diminishes ill-being; amassing wealth does not assure well-being and may diminish it.

Livelihood security is basic to well-being. Livelihood can be defined as adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs and to support well-being. Security refers to secure rights, physical safety and

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13 Parts of the text of this section are derived from Chambers (1997b: Chapter 1), with minor modifications.

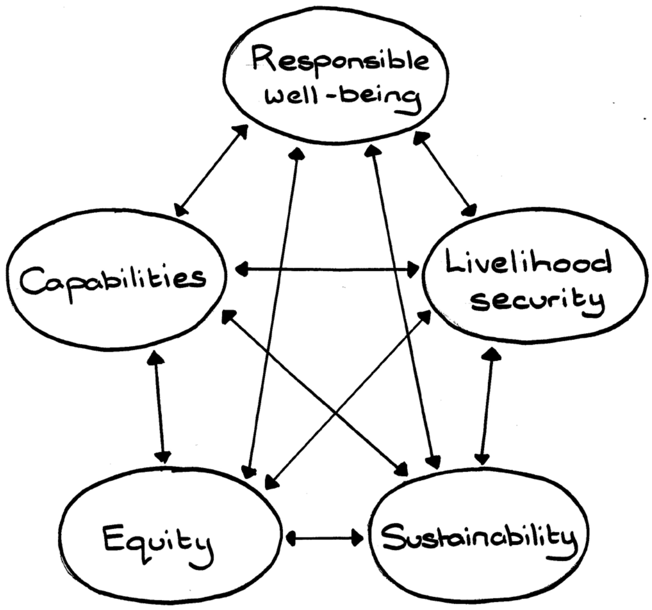
reliable access to resources, food and income, and basic services. It includes tangible and intangible assets to offset risk, ease shocks and meet contingencies.[14] Sustainable livelihoods maintain or enhance resource productivity on a long-term basis and equitable livelihoods maintain or enhance the livelihoods and well-being of others.

Capabilities are means to livelihood and well-being. Capabilities refers to what people are capable of doing and being. They are means to livelihood and fulfilment; and their enlargement through learning, practice, training and education are means to better living and to well-being.

Equity: the poor, weak, vulnerable and exploited should come first. Equity qualifies all initiatives in development. Equity includes human rights, intergenerational and gender equity, and the reversals of putting the last first and the first last, to be considered in all contexts. The reversals are not absolute, but to balance and level.

Sustainability: to be good, conditions and change must be sustainable – economically, socially, institutionally, and environmentally. Sustainability means that long-term perspectives should apply to all policies and actions, with sustainable well-being and sustainable livelihood as objectives for present and future generations.

Figure 1.1 The web of responsible well-being



Note: the overarching end is well-being, with capabilities and livelihood as means. Equity and sustainability are principles which qualify livelihood to become livelihood *security,* and well-being to become *responsible* well-being.

[14] For further discussion of livelihoods. including sustainable livelihoods, see Chambers (1987), Conroy and Litvinoff (1988), Bernstein *et al.* (1992), Chambers and Conway (1992), and Davies (1996).

When well-being is qualified by equity and sustainability it becomes responsible well-being, as the overarching end, to which all else is means. Well-being is then not at the cost of equity and sustainability, but is enhanced when it contributes to them. Responsible well-being recognizes obligations to others, both those alive and future generations, and to their quality of life. In general, the word "responsible" has moral force in proportion to wealth and power: the wealthier and more powerful people are, the greater the actual or potential impact of their actions or inactions, and so the greater the scope and need for their well-being to be responsible. Responsible well-being refers thus to doing as well as being; it is "by" as well as "for". The objective of development then becomes responsible well-being by all and for all.

1.10 The primacy of the personal

Because the responsible of responsible well-being applies to all human beings, it points to the personal dimension.

The neglect of the personal dimension in development at first sight seems bizarre. It is self-evident to the point of embarrassment that most of what happens is the result of what sort of people we are, how we perceive realities, and what we do and do not do. Whether change is good or bad is largely determined by personal actions, whether by political leaders, officials, professionals or local people, by international currency speculators, executives of transnational corporations, non-government organisation (NGO) workers, or researchers, by mothers, fathers or children, or by soldiers, secret agents, journalists, lawyers, police, or protesters. Especially, what happens depends on those who are powerful and wealthy. One might have supposed then that trying to understand and change their perceptions, motivations and behaviours would have been at the centre of development and development studies, and a major concern for the IMF, the World Bank, other donor agencies, governments and NGOs. Yet there have been few studies of individual officials as leaders.[15] Studies of greed and generosity are few.[16] There are quite a number of institutes devoted to development studies but there is, to my knowledge, no institute devoted to the study of greed or power.

Part of the neglect stems from academic culture with its anathema of evangelism, its value of objectivity, and its search for general rather than individual explanations. More potently, perhaps, the neglect is a defence. It can disturb profoundly to reflect on what one does and does not do. It embarrasses to be confronted by poverty and suffering compared with one's own condition. When a poor farmer in India asked me my income I could not reply. To put the personal to the fore in this editorial is to expose my own hypocrisy and to make it difficult to continue. But hypocrisy is no excuse for silence.

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15 David Leonard's study *African Successes: Four Public Managers* in *Kenyan Rural Development* is a notable exception (Leonard 1991).

16 One study (Frank *et al.* 1993) found alarmingly that economists were more likely than non-economists to act in a non-trusting, non-cooperative, self-interested manner. The median gift to big charities by economists among 1,245 randomly selected college professors was substantially lower than for non-economists; and about 9 per cent of economists gave nothing, as against a range of 1 to 4 per cent for other disciplines. In a prisoners' dilemma game economics students defected 60 per cent of the time compared with 39 per cent for non-economists.

The enormity of this missing link is illustrated by the most recent *Human Development* and *World Development Reports* (UNDP 1997; World Bank 1997). The *Human Development Report 1997* is concerned with poverty. It recommends six essential actions – empowering individuals, households and communities; strengthening gender equality; accelerating pro-poor growth; improving the management of globalisation; ensuring an active state; and taking special actions for special situations. All of these require action by those who are powerful and relatively wealthy. For its part, the *World Development Report 1997 is* devoted to The State in a Changing World. It presents many recommendations for action. In recognising the importance of leadership and vision (e.g., pp 14, 123, 154-5, 166), noting political constraints and vested interests, and lamenting the 'unbridled pursuit of riches or power' (p159) it gets closer to the personal. But it does not go the whole way. It does not come to terms with the need for personal change. Where the moving force is to come from is not clear. Incentives are recommended, but the question remains who determines and pushes through the incentives. Neither report confronts the personal dimension.

In contrast, the concept of responsible well-being puts the personal in the centre. Responsible well-being is an individual condition. The major issue is how to encourage and enable the powerful and wealthy to accept this ideal, or something close to it, and to define it for themselves in ways which make things better for those who are weak and poor.

1.11 A pedagogy for the non-oppressed [17]

For responsible well-being, it is then especially individuals who are powerful and wealthy who have to change. This entails confronting and transforming abuses of power and wealth. For this, one need is for a pedagogy for the non-oppressed (including ourselves, the sort of people who read *World Development),* to enable us to think and act differently. There are many disparate domains for analysis and action, among them: how we treat and bring up children; how to achieve reconciliation after conflict; how donor agency staff behave on mission (as noted by Taylor 1997: 151-52 in an earlier editorial); how to rehabilitate those who have suffered a PhD. Besides these and others, and relating directly to responsible well-being, three areas stand out for methodological innovation and application:

(a) How to facilitate personal change and self-critical epistemological awareness

Methodologies exist, and more are needed, to facilitate personal awareness, including epistemological awareness, meaning being self-critically aware of how we learn and mislearn and how we construct our realities. It is difficult to exaggerate the central importance of this subject. The degree to which economists have been found to disagree (see, e.g. Frey *et al.* 1984: 986-9) is, to a non-economist, alarming when they exercise so much power. It is also striking how dramatically their dominant views change, as illustrated in Hans Singer's (Singer 1997) earlier editorial on 'The Golden Age of the Keynesian Consensus – The

[17] A sharper antithesis to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970) would be "pedagogy for the oppressors", but this would unnecessarily alienate some, and not apply to others who might also benefit from a pedagogy for the non-oppressed.

Pendulum Swings Back'. Part of the way to resolve differences between economists, and to enable them to be more in touch and less wrong, is through self-aware introspection; it is through reflection to understand how their views, like those of others, have been formed, and to be open to doubt and embracing error.

Similarly, reflection and awareness of interpersonal behaviour and power relations is critical. On the behaviour and perceptions of donor staff on mission and of host government staff who deal with them, depends the well-being of millions of poor people. Because of their power, such missions are vulnerable to being misled. Yet to my knowledge they have never been studied or documented beyond the level of personal anecdote.

The implication is programmes for self-critical awareness, and attitude and behaviour change, which in turn have implications for bureaucratic recruitment, procedures, incentives and cultures. The World Bank under the leadership of James Wolfensohn, is attempting to grasp this nettle. Senior staff are not only to receive exposure to management practices in institutions such as Harvard, but are also to have a week of immersion in a village or slum. This may seem a small innovation. It is, though, a major departure from past practice, and if it lasts and spreads, may prove a defining watershed of change.

(b) How to enable those with power and wealth to think through and recognise the effects of their actions and non-actions

The truism of "out of sight, out of mind" has awesome implications for those with power to make a difference. A little reflection on causal chains will suggest that a decision in a meeting in Washington to hold a poor African country to debt repayments will kill children; but those who make the decision will never see this, and never be called to account. Indeed, they deserve sympathy and understanding for the responsibility they shoulder, though those they harm deserve an altogether different level of compassion.

A mechanism is needed for such meetings, and for individual decisions and actions, for thinking through the implications. Lessons could be learned from therapeutic jurisprudence where attempts are made to identify the effects of proposed laws. With development decisions two advocates could be appointed to argue, one on behalf of women, children, the poor and the excluded, and one on behalf of future generations, in each case analysing and presenting likely effects of alternatives. The causal and linkage diagramming which has proved effective in PRA could be part of the analysis.

Many of the key decisions that affect the poor are made by those who work for transnational corporations. Nothing said here should weaken the normal means of trying to influence them, through ethical investments and consumption, through organised pressure and through governments. But in addition, they too can be invited to define responsible well-being for themselves; they too are human and capable of good actions. At the launch of the *Human Development Report 1997,* the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias asked whether aerospace executives who sold arms to countries with bad human rights records would read the diaries of those in prison. Perhaps those executives should be invited and encouraged, again and again, to read those diaries, and to analyse, in a participatory way, the causal links between their arms sales and the repression and imprisonment of others. Perhaps all of us could and should do the same for our actions and inactions, using visual diagramming as a tool. Perhaps companies should be shamed who do not include advocates of the poor and of future generations in their deliberations. If some would show leadership in these directions, others might follow.

(c) How to enable those with more wealth and power to welcome having less

For well-being to be responsible, in a sustainable global eco-social system, those with more have to accept having less. This applies to both wealth and power. The biggest challenge for development as good change in the long-term, is to find more ways in which those with more wealth and power will not just accept having less, but will welcome it as a means to well-being, to a better quality of life.

Much normal thinking about wealth and power is zero-sum. In this thinking, for those with less to gain, those with more must have less, and so lose. If all are assumed to be selfish, zero-sum conflict can appear inevitable. But as Norman Uphoff (1992) has argued, there is scope for positive sum thinking and action. In conflict resolution there are often gains for all. Generosity brings its own non-material rewards. Empowering others can be deeply satisfying. The PRA experience of changing dominating behaviour, sitting down, handing over the stick, and enabling others to conduct their own analysis and explore their own realities, has often been a source of excitement, fun, fulfilment and learning for all those concerned. The needs and opportunities here have barely begun to be recognised. The methodological challenge is to find more ways for reversing the normal view: for those with wealth and power to find and feel themselves better off with less; for having less in material terms to be experienced as a gain; and for disempowering oneself to empower others to be experienced as positive.

1.12 Conclusion

In a context of accelerating change, words and concepts will continue to succeed one another. The question is whether in the volatile and transient vocabulary of development, some stable continuity of core concepts, continuously redefined, can or should be sought. An analogy from chaos theory is a strange attractor, a pattern continuously reaffirmed in turbulence, like the Red Spot on Jupiter. The same words or concepts might then be used, in the same relations with each other, as in the web of responsible well-being, while being constantly reexamined and redefined both collectively and individually.

Responsible well-being, interlinked with capabilities and livelihood, and with foundations in principles of equity and sustainability, is simply one set of concepts inviting exploration. Whether it can serve a common purpose others can judge. Whether concepts such as these can go further and be drivers for good change is for trial. In the spirit of the one sentence manual adopted in PRA – 'Use your own best judgement at all times' – each development professional can critically reflect, and draw up and use a personal list of ends and means. Perhaps what we should seek, then, is not consensus but pluralism, not a conclusion but a process, and not permanence but change in evolving concepts. For that we need an ethic of action, self-critical reflection, search and sharing.

In that spirit, let me conclude by inviting and encouraging others to reflect, to think out their own concepts and definitions, and to write and share their own editorials, improving on what has been presented here.

2 Reflecting forwards

You must become the change you wish to see in the world.

Mahatma Gandhi

. . . one cannot be responsible for others' well-being without being responsible for one's own, but neither can one be well on one's own without taking some responsibility for the well-being of others.

Patta Scott-Villiers (2004)

Between 1997 when the editorial was written and now, 2004, much has happened. Polarisation has been galloping. Wealth and power have become more blatantly unequal and inequitable than ever. In world politics, pathologies of power, greed, misinformation, ignorance and aggression have manifested repeatedly, most recently in the invasion of Iraq and its sequel. In much development aid the big shifts have been away from earlier more project-oriented approaches towards policy influence and direct budget support. The diversity and complexity of poverty, and of the livelihoods and aspirations of poor people, have become better recognised. International campaigns like Jubilee 2000 for debt relief have had some successes. In development studies and practices, though, despite all these changes, there is still a sense of treading water, or swimming in treacle, or running up a down escalator. Much energy is expended but the structures remain little changed. Institutions reproduce themselves. People are socialised into behaving much the same as their predecessors. It is as though we need something new – a key, or springboard, or launching pad, or point of departure. It is alarming that so little changes. Something is missing. There has to be a better way of going about things.

I may not have answers, but let us at least revisit some of the analysis in the editorial. The main points made earlier apply now with more force than ever.

2.1 Evolving ideas, words and concepts

With the continuing rapid evolution, adoption and relegation of ideas, policies and practices in development, words have continued to change. Since 1997 there have been newcomers to the list on page 3. These are words and concerns most of which were around before but which have become more central. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the Millennium Development Goals (the MDGs) have become prominent in development policy. The MDGs in particular have become both mantra and focus in the official development discourse. Almost every document performs an obeisance in their direction. *Human rights* too are now a more accepted concern, and for many NGOs *rights-based approaches* (RBAs) have increasingly been espoused, overlaying earlier approaches based on needs. *Citizenship* has also come in, with attention to democratic processes, accountability, and civic and political rights and activism. *Corruption* is more openly raised and discussed, ironically at the same time as it has increased in the most powerful nation. *Multidimensional* as a word qualifying poverty and deprivation was not in the 1997 list, and came in strongly with the World Development Report on Poverty and Development (World Bank 2000). It flags and expresses the departure from the reductionism of concepts of poverty based on only income or consumption. *Multi-stakeholder* has also made an appearance. *Congruence,* referring to consistency of behaviour, attitudes and relationships between actors, and between levels, organisations and locations, is increasingly used, and if widely adopted would highlight the contradictions between centralising, standardising and autocratic organisational cultures and personal styles, and the rhetoric of participation, partnership, decentralisation, diversity and democracy. *Relationships*, with the insight that these mediate all development processes (Eyben 2004a), are more and more part of development discourse. Most significantly, *power* (see below), once almost a taboo word outside academic circles unless referring to local elites, is now freely spoken about and more honestly recognised, not just by radicals but also by more of the powerful actors themselves.

Responsible well-being, though, has not been adopted and has not spread. If not stillborn, it has shown little sign of life. Apart from a moving personal account by Patta Scott-Villiers (2004), and an email from Richard Bawden using the term 'responsible, sustainable and inclusive well-being', I know of no case where it has been used. This is in spite of the wide circulation of *World Development* in which the editorial was published, and some elaboration of the term in *Whose Reality Counts?* (Chambers 1997: 9–12). In contrast, the concepts expressed by two other pairs of words – *social capital*, and *sustainable livelihoods* – which were already current in 1997 have continued to spread and have become part of the common currency of development. Since my argument is that new words and concepts can make a difference, we can ask whether lessons can be learnt from why these have taken off and responsible well-being as yet has not.

Social capital was used several times during the twentieth century,[18] and after a long gestation in academia, rapidly spread to become common in development discourse in the latter 1990s. Since about 1995, its rise has been meteoric and controversial (see e.g. Fine 2001; Harriss 2002; Eade and *Development in Practice* 2003). It is used as a portmanteau for 'relations of trust, reciprocity, common rules, norms and sanctions, and connectedness in institutions' (Pretty and Ward 2001), and also variously can include friendship, mutual support, networks, respect, solidarity and social cohesion, and even 'the glue that binds

[18] This discussion draws heavily on John Harriss's delightful and piercing polemic *Depoliticizing Development: The World Bank and Social Capital* (2002). The term social capital was evidently adopted independently by several authors including Meyer Fortes (a source identified by Caroline Moser) in 1958, and Bourdieu in 1980.

society together'.[19] Its explosive adoption and spread has its recent origins in Robert Putnam's 20 years of research and statistical analysis in Italy which found a correlation between "civic engagement" and economic development (Putnam 1993) and provoked considerable academic criticism.

The concept of social capital met needs in the World Bank (Bebbington *et al.* forthcoming).[20] First, it gave non-economist social scientists a credible means of persuading economists of the significance of social factors in development: for example, a study of social capital (Narayan and Pritchett 1997), econometric in focus, produced correlations which suggested that lack of social capital was a powerful determinant of household poverty. Second, and as persuasively argued by John Harriss, it was a means of depoliticising development, evading questions of inequalities of power and wealth. Third, it justified working with civil society rather than with local government. Though the concept and its applications were much disputed in academia, it was vigorously adopted, researched and spread in and by the World Bank where it could be seen as the "missing link"[21] in development.

Practitioners vary in their judgements of the practical utility of social capital. Not all would go as far as an observer of Jamaican experience who concluded: 'Understanding social capital means investing in the potential strengths of individuals, groups, and communities. It is the only path to development' (Wint 2003: 413). But notwithstanding the critiques of why it has been so widely adopted, what *social capital* names and covers is important and its very generality and inclusiveness is an asset as well as a liability.

Sustainable livelihoods has had a more steady but also extensive spread. The two words were used together in the May 1985 discussions of the Advisory Panel on Food Security, Agriculture, Forestry and Environment of the World Commission on Environment and Development and included in the Brundtland Report which had a huge circulation and influence.[22] Then there was a large international conference, and the term was put in the title of the book that followed *The Greening of Aid: Sustainable Livelihoods in Practice* (Conroy and Litvinoff 1988). A big step was when analytical content was given in a diagram (Scoones 1998) which included not only different forms of capital such as natural, human, financial and social,[23] but also institutions, providing a realistic and quite comprehensive checklist for practical analysis. Organisations, including OXFAM in the early 1990s, and DFID later, adopted, developed and disseminated sustainable livelihood approaches. DFID set up a Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office as part of its Rural Livelihoods Department. The IDS Sussex manages a website –

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19 This phrase, also in inverted commas, is from Deborah Eade's editorial in *Development in Practice,* Vol 13 No 4 August 2003: 307–8 which gives a balanced overview. The whole issue is devoted to social capital.

20 Anthony Bebbington, Scott Guggenheim, Elizabeth Olson and Michael Woolcock have written a fascinating study (Bebbington *et al.* forthcoming) of the history of concepts of social capital in the World Bank. This gains authority and credibility by analysing the agency of individual actors, and how the concept was debated and evolved through the interplay of professional and institutional commitments and interests.

21 Grootaert (1997) cited in Harriss (2002).

22 See *Food 2000* (WCED 1987a), the report of the Advisory Panel on Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Environment convened by the World Commission on Environment and Development and the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987b: 129,138).

23 Interestingly Scoones (1998: 4–5 and 17) proposed four capitals – natural, economic/financial, human and social, noting that other forms of capital could be identified, for example political capital and symbolic capital, and that DFID had separated out physical capital as a fifth form. The five capitals – physical, natural, human, financial and social – have since become standard.

Livelihoods Connect (www.livelihoods.org) for lesson learning and sharing experiences from practical applications of a sustainable livelihoods approach. And a big literature has been generated (see e.g. Carney 1998, 2002; Carney *et al.* 1999; Hussein 2002; Solesbury 2003).

Besides meeting institutional needs, sustainable livelihoods had a lot else going for it. Sustainable is a deeply significant and accepted environmental word which resonates with environmentalists and natural scientists as well as others. Through the 1990s livelihood largely replaced employment to make space for the actual complexity and diversity of how most poor people gain a living. It is also not difficult to see how sustainable qualifies livelihood and adds the dimension of security. Further, sustainable livelihoods belongs to no one discipline and provides a common neutral ground on which they can all meet. Nor in the way it is applied does it have moral, personal overtones. Though it could be, it is not used to point a critical finger at "us" and the unsustainability of our livelihoods. It is used for "them" and "their" context, not for "us" and "ours".

Responsible well-being shares with *social capital* and *sustainable livelihoods* the asset, seen by some academic critics as a liability, of a portmanteau character of commodious imprecision. This has the advantage of inviting many interpreters to give their own meanings, and gives space for many definitions and dimensions. Also well-being, as an opposite to poverty, has a certain universality, with equivalents in different languages and cultures, and is widely accepted and used in development discourse.[24]

On other counts, though, *responsible well-being* has lacked the advantages of the other two. It does not lend itself to be theme of an international conference. It has not to my knowledge been part of any international report.[25] It has virtually no literature. It has no institutional champion. It does not serve the interests of any organisation. It has no internal political, persuasive and practical function, as social capital had for social scientists in the World Bank, and as sustainable livelihoods had for natural and social scientists in DFID and elsewhere. It is difficult to see how it could be operationalised in a programme. It does not lend itself to research and is not based on or supported by research, as social capital was seen to be with the work of Robert Putnam (1993), and as sustainable livelihoods has come to be. Its moral overtones do not commend it to academics or hard-nosed development professionals. Nor is it politically neutral. Social capital and sustainable livelihoods divert attention from inequalities in power relations and property rights; *responsible* directs attention towards them.

Perhaps most of all, in pointing to personal responsibility, especially of the rich and powerful, *responsible well-being* discomforts and exposes those of us who are "haves" for what we do and what we leave undone. It shares this with precisely that aspect of sustainable livelihoods, as earlier described (Chambers and Conway 1992), which never took off. This was the idea that a sustainable livelihood

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24 See for example Sen (1993 and 1999), Narayan *et al.* 2000 (Chapter 2, 'Well-being and Illbeing: The Good and the Bad Life', pp 22-43) and Alcamo *et al.* (2003).

25 As one of the 51 authors of *Ecosystems and Human Well-being* (Alcamo *et al.* 2003), the conceptual framework for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, I tried to introduce the concept of responsible well-being. I did not articulate it well, and it was met with polite scepticism. It was rejected in part because it was seen as normative (but so were other concepts though less obviously so). Missing this opportunity diminished the responsible dimension of my own well-being. Had I been more confident and more of a fighter, it might have got it in as more than an aside. It is centrally relevant to that book and to the spirit of the assessment.

should not damage but enhance the livelihoods of others (whether through claims, access, international trade, environmental effects or in other ways) now and or in the future. This, of course, applies most to the rich and powerful, to their lifestyles, and to their impacts both on the livelihoods of others and on the environment through pollution, climate change and resource depletion. A worldwide campaign for awareness and abstinence was implied, one part of which could be personal livelihood environmental balance sheets for the rich (ibid: 31). The concept of sustainable livelihoods has, however, been applied selectively only to the poor. As with so much of development research, discourse and action, the searchlight is not directed at "us". "We" do not have to look at ourselves, only at "them" those whom we seek to do good to, help and empower.

And yet there is a universality to both sustainable livelihoods and responsible well-being. They both concern physical, social, political and ethical aspects of the human condition. Both raise questions of rights and obligations. They apply to all of us: we all need livelihoods; we all augment or weaken sustainability; our acts and omissions all affect the livelihoods of others; we all carry social and political responsibilities; however we see and express it, we all seek well-being. The sticking point, the barrier, is looking critically at *and changing* our own behaviour, that of the "haves". This demands something stronger, deeper, and more explicit than words, and less easy to evade. Words may help; but they can never be enough.

2.2 Agency and responsibility

With the realities and narrow self-interest of the powerful dominating the world stage to a degree which few could have foreseen in 1997, responsible well-being, stressing responsible on the part of the haves, those with power and wealth, is needed more than ever. *Pro-poor* is stamped on every development document and repeated in every speech. But to my knowledge, not much progress has been made with the development or spread of the three pro-poor methodologies proposed in the editorial:

- *for personal change.* To be sure, there are immersions (Eyben 2004b; Irvine *et al.* 2004) but they have not yet taken off, let alone become part of normal, expected professional practice. They are still a tiny side show, not mainstream priorities on the development agenda.
- *for thinking through effects of actions and non-actions.* An initiative in Zambia may, though, be a straw in the wind. This is an attempt to analyse what would be likely to happen with a proposed land reform. This includes a repeat, a decade later, in the same communities and by the same team, of the earlier PPA (Norton *et al.* 1994; Milimo *et al.* n.d.) focused this time on land reform issues, and combined with separate stakeholder and institutional analysis of organisations that would be involved (pers comm Anis Dani).

- *for enabling those with more wealth and power to welcome having less.* There are efforts like the Hunger Project which give the very rich psycho-social rewards for parting with some of their money, and the Rockefeller Foundation sponsors workshops for young heirs of fortunes. There are inspirations in great religions and the lives some people have led. But otherwise, is there anything that could be called a pedagogy for the non-oppressed? Or more sharply, a pedagogy for the oppressors? If so, where and what is it? And if not, why not? What is wrong with us?

Yet we have agency, the ability to act and change the world, and this brings with it responsibility for the effects of actions and inactions. Responsibility is an unsmiling word, often used critically – 'That is your responsibility', 'Who is responsible for this?' and 'Who can we pin responsibility on?' meaning who can we blame. A dictionary (Collins 1998) gives this:

> Responsible: 1 . . . having control or authority (over). 2 . . . being accountable for one's actions and decisions 3 . . . (of position, duty, etc) involving decision and accountability. 4 being agent or cause (of some action) . . . 5 able to take rational decisions without supervision: accountable for one's actions . . . 6 able to meet financial obligations: of sound credit.

All of us have agency and responsibility, and these vary with wealth and power and rise or fall with socio-economic, political and technological change.

Recent years have seen a daunting though largely unremarked rise in agency and with it responsibility. Several factors have contributed to this. There is more wealth in the world, and its distribution is more polarised and concentrated. The same is true of power. At the same time, we are all more connected and more able to exert influence than before. For those with money and access, the revolutions in transport and communications have multiplied the number of activities open. Mobile phones and email have transformed communications. In the past decade for those with access to the internet and with money for travel, the range of choice of things to do that make a difference has risen exponentially, almost beyond the reach of the imagination. It is easier than ever, and with a broader choice than ever, for a middle income person in an OECD country to choose to give money, to team up with others who are like-minded, or to campaign for causes. The responsibility of those with more power is even more awesome. The scope they have, through their actions and inactions, to make a difference to those who are marginalised, deprived and powerless simply blows the mind. A few, like George Soros, seize their chances; but most do not.

One consequence of this heightened interconnectedness is that small actions can be more significant. Two examples can be given. First, there is vulnerability to small events which make a big difference. The so-called "butterfly effect", where a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world could lead to a storm in another, was illustrated in the flawed Florida election, where a handful of votes and chads tipped the balance to Bush, not Gore, with impacts which have touched billions of people and will touch billions more in future generations.[26] The lesson here is vigilance, commitment, and the ever increasing responsibility which American citizens have towards their fellow human beings. The second example is collective action. As amply illustrated in *Global Citizen Action* (Edwards and Gaventa 2001), international action by citizens and civil society can be coordinated in ways that were almost unimaginable before the 1990s. The effective clout that can be mustered and applied is indicated by the degrees of success achieved by the Narmada protest against the World Bank, the landmines campaign, Jubilee 2000, and some other international movements for human rights, social justice and the environment. Small actions have always been able to combine to become big movements, but now they can add up and be transmitted in ways we did not have earlier, and do this faster and on a global scale. It follows that since our scope for action is greater, so too is our responsibility.

The limits of responsibility are for debate. Questions are easy; answers difficult, as two representative questions can show. The first is a question of commission, of something done:

> *A campaign to promote bottled milk for babies in a poor country is successful. Thousands of mothers buy baby milk. In consequence, thousands of children have diarrhoeal episodes, the termination of breast-feeding shortens birth intervals, families are poorer and children die who would not have died without the campaign. Who is responsible?*

Similar questions can be asked about unsuccessful development projects,[27] about loans and debts incurred with the World Bank, the IMF, the regional development banks and commercial banks, about structural adjustment policies, about agricultural subsidies in North America and Europe, about the dumping of agricultural surpluses, and about quotas and tariffs erected by industrialised countries.

With questions of commission, there are problems of attribution. Many actors are involved, with many degrees of awareness or ignorance, wilful or otherwise. It is easy to deny the reality, to take say there were many other causes, to plead ignorance, or to blame others or the system. 'I was only doing my job.'

The second is a question of omission, of something not done. While writing a draft of this paper I saw an OXFAM Afghan Crisis appeal in the newspaper which said in bold:

> **Just £25 from you could provide enough to feed two people for the winter.**

But I did not rush for my cheque book but back to my laptop to record this example. So if people in Afghanistan go hungry, who is responsible? Am I?

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26 An olde English version of the butterfly effect runs: For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the battle was lost. For loss of the battle the kingdom was lost. A twenty-first century version is: For want of oil drops, the chads were lost. For want of chads the State was lost. For want of the State, the election was lost. For want of the election, Kyoto was lost. For want of Kyoto, the earth was lost. There was lack of drops of oil at one end of the causal chain, and billions of barrels at the other.

27 I include myself here among those who bear responsibility for an unsuccessful development project, in my case for a pastoral grazing scheme in Samburu District in Kenya. With hindsight it is not difficult to see much that was done that should not have been done, and much that should have been done that was not done. What matters now is to learn the lessons and pass them on.

The same question can be asked about other charities not supported, about things we spend money on, about issues we do not raise in meetings, about corruption we do not confront, about human rights abuses we do not tackle, about campaigns we do not take part in.

With questions of omission, there are problems of awareness, linkages and choice. There is no shortage of excuses and evasions: the money would go on other things; other people will take care of this; this is something the Government should do with the taxes I pay; I am already contributing to other causes; charity begins closer to home in my family and community; I would never know where the money went, or whether it really made any difference; and I can't do everything.

There may be no simple answers. What matters is to puzzle again and again, to be alert and sensitive, and to keep on trying to see what best to do. And to rejoice that for many of us the choice is wider than before and continues to get wider still.

Readers will have their own sources of guidance and inspiration. Many are linked with the great religions and with cultures. Many are political, through movements and activism. For some there is a primacy in politics, as Colin Leys argued so forcefully in the 1970s. Nothing here should detract from these. But in looking for ways forward, four lines of thinking may be promising and like responsible well-being, invite further definition and application:

- Obligations-based approaches
- Transforming power and relationships
- Integrating institutional and personal change
- "Ask them" for guidance on the way

2.3 From rights to obligations

Rights-based approaches to development have been advocated and widely adopted. They have been pursued with most vigour by certain NGOs, with more caution by bilateral agencies, and not openly by the World Bank on the grounds that its charter constrains it to be non-political. The *Human Development Report 2000: Human Rights and Human Development* (UNDP 2000) put rights high on the international agenda. DFID's (2000) paper *Realising Human Rights for Poor People* is another landmark, providing a framework and laying out an agenda with three cross-cutting principles – participation, inclusion, and "fulfilling obligation". Also remarkable are the *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* (OHCHR 2002) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The scope of human rights as defined and ratified by many states in the International Bill of Rights[28] has been interpreted and extended beyond more strictly legal into more generally social dimensions (see for example UNDP 2000). To illustrate this breadth, these have included livelihood security (Moser and Norton 2001) and the right to appear in public without shame (OHCHR 2002: 42–3).

[28] The International Bill of Rights includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant in Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Rights are one side of the coin. Whether they are considered socially constructed or (more usually) inherent in being human, they can be claimed by right-holders. Those who need to claim them most are those who enjoy them least. Obligations or duties[29] are the other side of the coin and apply most to those with wealth and power and who already more fully enjoy their rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is applied mainly to the poor. There is no Universal Declaration of Human Obligations applied mainly to the rich. Why ever not?

Obligations to uphold and fulfil rights are normally construed to rest primarily with the state for its citizens. In practice, fulfilling the state's obligation proves quite weak, since many actors besides the state are implicated in whether or how much people, especially poor people, can enjoy their rights. This is the more so when rights extend beyond the political and legal spheres into those which are economic and social. In economic and social spheres the (neo-)liberal state is expected to do less, and there are anyway practical limits to what states could do. As Brian Pratt (2003) has observed 'Proclamations at international conferences of economic, social and cultural rights such as livelihoods, education, health and shelter are barely worth the paper they are written on as they are not enforceable in the absence of a credible duty bearer'.

This turns our attention to other potential duty-bearers besides the state. One view is that the duty to avoid depriving others 'must be universal and therefore applies to every individual and institution, including corporations' (Shue 1980: 112 cited in Stammers 1995: 496).

To what extent *non-state institutional* actors, for example transnational corporations (TNCs), have legal or moral obligations relating to human rights is a matter of debate and definition (see DFID 2000: 27; Nyamu-Musembi 2002: 15–17). There is a tendency to see the regulation of TNCs as a role for the state: the OHCHR guidelines argue that developing states should enhance their negotiating capacity in international fora and also for dealing with TNCs. In this view the burden of responsibility falls on the state to regulate the TNCs, rather than on the TNCs to regulate themselves.

For their part, questions of *individual* duties or obligations have received relatively little attention. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) declares that 'All human beings . . . should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood'. Apart from that, only one part of one of the 30 Articles of the Declaration touches on duties: Article 29 (1) reads 'Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his *[sic]* personality is possible'. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (OAU 1981) goes further, stating that every individual shall have the duty 'to respect and consider his fellow beings without discrimination, and to maintain relations aimed at promoting, safeguarding and reinforcing mutual respect and tolerance' (Article 28), 'To preserve the harmonious development of the family and to work for the cohesion and respect of the family; to respect his parents at all times, to maintain them in case of need' and 'To preserve and

[29] For definitions and discussion of duties and obligations, see UNDP (2000: 16 and 24–6).

strengthen positive African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and, in general, to contribute to the promotion of the well being of society' (Article 29).[30]

These statements are limited. They apply in "the community" with the Universal Declaration, and in the family, community, State and Africa in the African Charter. They are also out of date. In an age of globalisation and excesses of power and wealth, they are not specific about global duties, do not cover non-state actors like TNCs, and do not deal with the duties of the wealthy and powerful people who are those most able to make a difference for the better.

There is then a case for a much more even balancing of rights with duties or obligations, and for complementing rights-based approaches (RBAs) with obligations-based approaches (OBAs). Taking obligations to apply more to the haves than the have-nots, two levels stand out for remark.

The first is the developed or OECD state. The OHCHR guidelines (2002: 55) affirm that 'A developed state should not only formulate a PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy) in relation to poverty within its domestic jurisdiction; it should also have a strategy for poverty reduction beyond its borders'. This includes indicators of tariff- and quota-free access for developing States, one of which is domestic and export subsidies for agriculture in OECD states. This recognises the obligations of developed states not just to their own citizens but to poor people in developing states. Their obligations are global.

The second level is individual. All human beings, rich and poor, powerful and weak, have obligations as well as rights. But how much they kick in varies with power and wealth. For those who are powerless and poor, the balance for equity and justice is realising more of their rights: then the more these are realised, the more their obligations rise, for there is more they can do. For those with power and wealth, the balance for equity and justice is the other way round: it is meeting more of their obligations, their rights having largely been met. The implication is that the Rights-Based Approach, focusing more on "them", needs to be complemented and balanced by an Obligations-Based Approach, focusing more on "us". It reflects on our self-serving mindsets that this is not already more part of development thinking and action. There are complementary reversals here for the haves who are relatively rich and powerful: turning the gaze back on themselves to reflect on their actions and non-actions and the effects these have; supporting and empowering the poor ("putting the last first"); changing power relations ("putting the first last"); and seeking guidance on what to do ("ask them").

Obligation-Based Approaches can be put in perspective through comparison with three other approaches, as in Table 2.1.

30 The other duties concern serving and supporting the state, including paying taxes and contributing to African unity.

Table 2.1 Four approaches to development

Approach	Benevolent, for welfare	"Participatory" for "partnership"	Rights-based, for empowerment	Obligation-based,for responsibility
Core concept or value	Doing good	Effectiveness, efficiency	Rights of "have-nots"	Obligations of "haves"
Dominant basis and mode	Technical	Social	Political	Ethical, behavioural
Process	Blueprinted	Consultative	Transformative	Reflective
Relationships of aid providers to recipients	Paternal, providing funds, assistance	Instrumental to programmes and projects	Influencing governments. Empowering people	Reciprocal, learning and being guided
Primary stakeholders perceived as	Beneficiaries	Implementers	Citizens	Guides, teachers, sources of insight, inspiration and commitment
Accountability	Upward to aid agency, taxpayers, INGO supporters	Upward with some downward	Multiple *–upwards, downwards, horizontal . . .	Personal – internal, values, and then mainly downward
Procedures	Bureaucratic conformity	More acceptance of diversity	Negotiated, evolutionary process	Critical reflection, immersions, experiential learning
Organisational drivers	Pressure to disburse	Balance between pressure to disburse and results	Pressure for results and impact assessment	Space for agency, expectations of responsible use of discretion

* Multiple accountabilities include international human rights monitors and INGOs, and intra-community and intra-group accountabilities.
Note: The four approaches are not comprehensive; there are others, notably variants of participation. Nor are they mutually exclusive. They are delineated so as to sharpen and clarify characteristics. In practice they coexist and overlap. The challenge is to get the mix and balance right for each person, group, context and time.
Source: first four columns lightly adapted from Groves and Hinton (2004) with the fifth column added.

2.4 Transforming power and relationships

Power and relationships are an increasingly prominent theme in development discourse, and have a considerable past and current literature.[31] But they have not, at least until recently, been central, or even much mentioned, in the mainstream development vocabulary of, for example, the multilateral banks, the bilateral aid agencies. There is a considerable literature on power and relationships. But these have not been central, or even much mentioned, in the mainstream development discourse of, for example, the multilateral banks, the bilateral aid agencies, INGOs, or governments in developing countries. As a word, *power* has been almost taboo. Yet power is everywhere. Considering development without power and relationships is like analysing irrigation without water and its distribution. Evidence and arguments converge on the conclusion that power and relationships are at the core of development. Yet they have been almost pathologically repressed and neglected.

In order to discuss this, we need first to clarify types of power. The word is often used to describe *power over*, implying control, but there are other more positive forms – *power to* referring to 'the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and the world' (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 55), *power with* through collaboration, solidarity, collective action and so on, and *power within* through self-worth and confidence. Power is often thought and spoken of in an undifferentiated way as a good thing to have. Power is "gained" "seized" or "captured", and "lost" "abandoned" or "surrendered". It is as though it were a commodity subject to a zero-sum game where more for one person means less for another. In practice there are many power relationships in which all gain. Through changed behaviour and convening, catalysing, facilitating and supporting, *power over* can be turned into *power to empower*. This can give the satisfactions of enhancing the agency and fulfilment of others, and their *power within* and *power to* in turn. It can also foster others' *power with* in many ways such as decentralisation, alliances, networks, social movements, and communities of practice. Enhancing others' *power within* includes capacity building and development. In these modes, empowering others can also diminish the stresses of control which come with much *power over*. Using one's own *power to empower* others can often be effective, liberating, fulfilling and fun,[32] a gain in well-being not a loss.

Power over, especially when exercised crudely, brings many disadvantages. It misleads ("all power deceives") through deference, lies and concealment.[33] It inhibits or destroys trust. It deters initiative, creativity, and local diversity. It prevents relationships of learning together. It generates resentment. It

[31] For sources on power see for example Lukes (1974), ActionAid (2001), VeneKlasen with Miller (2002) and Gaventa (2003). For recent sources on power and relationships see Eyben (2004a), Pasteur and Scott-Villiers (2004) and Groves and Hinton (2004).

[32] For more on gains from personal disempowerment see *Whose Reality Counts?* (1997b: 235–6).

[33] In *Whose Reality Counts?* Chapter 5 'All Power Deceives' explores and elaborates this theme. I am therefore not expanding on it here.

weakens or prevents actions which are pro-poor through orders, controls and sanctions from the top which prevent responsiveness to the priorities and needs of poor people below. The list could be longer but the point is made.

Power and relationships are intimately interwoven. The problems with the exercise of *power over* are implicit in the recent and emerging vocabulary of development. Six of the words most used in current development speak – empowerment, accountability, ownership, partnership, participation and transparency – are about power and relationships; and with all six there are chasms between what the rhetoric implies and actual behaviours and relationships (see Box 2.1). Development professionals asked to score these for relative importance, and then for the degree of hypocrisy with which they are used, have given different answers. For Associate Programme Officers of DFID, partnership was top on both counts; for Forest Officers and NGOs working on foresty in India, it was transparency. Most commonly, though, it is empowerment that is considered the most important word and the one with the biggest gap between rhetoric and behaviour. Changes in relationships are also implied in emergent terms that are gaining currency: congruence, consistency, reciprocity, colleague and collegiality, ally and alliances, networking, sharing, and trust.

Box 2.1 The gap between words and actions

Empowerment implies power to those who are subordinate and weak, but the usual practice between levels of hierarchy is control from above. Aid agencies impose conditionalities at the same time as they preach empowerment.

Accountability between partners is two-way up and down the aid chain, but in practice accountability downwards is rare and weak.

Ownership implies national and local autonomy but this is limited by aid agencies' influence on policy, human rights and governance, whether this influence is exerted directly on governments or indirectly through citizens and civil society.

Partnership implies collegial equality but aid agencies with funds often call the shots.

Participation is considered a means by some and an end by others, and is used to describe a range of practices stretching from compulsory labour to spontaneous self-organisation.

Transparency implies information shared between partners, and accessible in the public domain, but aid agencies and governments often keep budget details and other information about decision-making confidential.

Source: IDS (2001) Policy Briefing *The New Dynamics of Aid: Power, Procedures and Relationships*, IDS Sussex.

The importance of power and relationships is the central theme of *Inclusive Aid: Power and Relationships in International Development* (2004) edited by Leslie Groves and Rachel Hinton. It brings together many illustrations. In her paper 'Relationships matter for supporting change in favour of poor people', Rosalind Eyben (2004a) makes the case that though many officials in aid agencies, especially those with big budgets, see aid as about instruments, it is really always about relationships. The shift to budget support and policy influence has made this clearer. For lenders and donors to strive for *power over* is counterproductive. Influence requires *power with* through collegiality, mutual trust, joint learning and collaboration. Aid is about investing in relationships.

2.5 For a grounded pro-poor realism

Meeting the responsibilities that obligations bring demands realism. Development policies, programmes and practices are now more than ever proclaimed to be pro-poor. Few would dispute that responsibility is to be sought in finding the right things to do and doing them. Yet the record, for all its successes, remains dismal. It is no good recognising obligations and "meaning well" if what is done does not fit the priorities and aspirations of those who are poor and marginalised, or as so often does them harm.

Solutions can be sought in a grounded realism, based on sensitive insights into the life experiences, conditions, needs, aspirations and capabilities of poor and marginalised people, matched by a realistic understanding of what is possible. A precondition for such grounded pro-poor realism and understanding is for uppers to be sensitive in their behaviour and to use empowering approaches and methods. These have been a feature of good PPAs. Since 1997 many more PPAs have been carried out, increasingly on subnational levels, and linked in with PRSP processes. The 'Voices of the Poor' study (Narayan *et al.* 2000) was a breakthrough on an international level, enabling as it did many poor people, in 23 countries, to express their realities and how these had changed, their ideas of the good and bad life, and their aspirations. Crucial to the success of that study was the training of facilitators in how they should behave and relate to those whose views and analysis they were eliciting. Non-dominating, friendly and empathic behaviour and attitudes were the key.

Pro-poor realism requires, though, much more than good PPAs and insights. It is difficult to achieve unless institutional and personal change go together in organisations, whether government, civil society or aid agency. Institutional and personal change interact, interlock and reinforce each other. They can move together in the same direction – towards hierarchy, control and standardisation, or towards participation, empowerment and diversity. From a hierarchical starting point, if development organisations are to reorient towards learning, change and responsiveness, so too must those who work in them. And if those who work in them are to reorient, so too must their organisations. On the personal side, this means that those in upper roles, to whom lowers are accountable, have to transform their behaviour, attitudes and roles from dominators to enablers, from controllers to coaches, from instructors to facilitators. Only then can reversals of power relations enable upward flows of realistic insights. On the institutional side, this means that procedures, incentives, expectations and organised experience are needed to encourage and support individuals in their trajectories of personal development, learning and change.

Change is not easy. Targets for outputs and disbursements can overwhelm and reorient back again those who support participation. It is arguable that in the World Bank the drivers and incentives to lend and disburse are so strong that they override inclinations to behave and relate differently. The World Bank immersions are a bold and necessary initiative, but the long-term test will be whether they make a difference in what the World Bank does and how it does it. In other development organisations, the MDGs, whatever their merits, also threaten with a self-defeating top-down orientation. To resist that requires insight, courage and commitment on the part of many actors, not least those furthest removed from the action – in the headquarters of the World Bank, the UNDP, the Regional Banks, the bilateral agencies, and in national governments. It will depend, once again, on powerful individuals who are willing and able to resist reflexes and to argue and act in ways informed by a pro-poor realism.

Table 2.2 Professional, institutional and personal conditions, values, norms and roles: shifts for a grounded pro-poor realism

	From	*Towards*
Paradigm of and for	Things	People
Orientation	Top down	Bottom up
Valued achievements	Targets, disbursements	Empowerment
Modes/Approaches	Standardised	Diverse
Roles, behaviour	Teacher Supervisor Controlling	Facilitator Coach Enabling
Accountability to	Donors, taxpayers	All stakeholders, especially the poor
	Upwards	More downwards
Sources of understanding the realities of poor people	Bookish, workshops	Direct, immersions
Learning and change	Didactic, instructions	Experiential learning

Note: the shift is not absolute, but a change of balance, to give more weight to the people side.

Commitment by individuals to pro-poor realism is one thing. Commitment of organisations, with change in relationships and cultures, is another. Individuals and organisations can show synergy, but neither can guarantee the other. In practical terms, this is more than a question of congruence between levels. It entails transformations of whole organisations by individuals and groups, and of individuals and groups by organisations. It is walking on both legs, not hopping on either, with varied sequences and mixes of divergence, debate, disagreement, conflict, convergence and congruence.

The hope has to be that those who are serious about poverty can combine and work as allies, catalysts and co-learners; that they will gain understanding and authority through experiential learning directly from and with poor people; and that this will help them work to transform their organisations. How many will do this, and how many organisations will encourage or let them, remains to be seen. But there are beginnings and encouraging signs.

2.6 Reflexive responsibility

The personal dimension in development is now more discussed and more recognised. Michael Edwards concludes *Future Positive* (1999) with a section on personal accountability and a final chapter 'How Can I Help?'. Tony Vaux in *The Selfish Altruist* (2001) has given us an honest, self-aware and self-critical review of the personal and ethical dilemmas he has encountered in relief work in famine and in war, and which many of us never have to face directly, even though they are there for us in our interconnected world. For all its terrible side, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has led many health professionals to a more sensitive and humane approach, showing the way in the importance of relationships. A main theme stressed at a conference of Government staff – of the Department of Social Development, held in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in March 2004 was personal transformation.

It is more acceptable now to try to be insightful about oneself, not in self-abasement, but in wishing to be more open and honest. This is not easy. Gandhi believed that the way to tell whether something was right or wrong is whether you feel you have to hide it. We are all fallible and most of us have things we want to keep to ourselves. But the direction is clear. It is towards shining a light on, and diminishing, more of our inconsistencies and hypocrisies, and opening the blind eyes we habitually turn on what we do not want to see. It is being reflexive. It is, in Rosalind Eyben's words (Box 2.2), reflecting on ourselves and our relations with others.

Box 2.2 Reflecting on ourselves

- Who are we and why do we understand the world in a certain way as a result of who we are?
- How does that understanding have an impact on our behaviour and our relations with others?

Source: Eyben (2004a: 21).

2.7 Thinking for oneself is fun

Moving in this direction does not have to be all heavy guilt-ridden moralising stuff. Reflexive responsibility means being self-aware while working out our own ideas and priorities. This makes it easier to exercise agency. It is something to enjoy.

It can be fun, for example to puzzle and produce personal lists of words and priorities we would like to be used and lived in development. There is no one right answer, no one way, no single concept. Pluralism, diversity and debate can be celebrated and enjoyed. The reader may wish to think through a personal list of words and priorities before turning over and seeing mine. With words there is a double practical challenge – to gain currency for the word and what it implies, and then to narrow the gap between the meaning and the reality. Redistribution of wealth, for example, is an obvious and effective way of simultaneously enhancing the well-being of those who are poor and the responsible well-being of those the non-poor (if only they or we can recognise and feel this), making responsible well-being a win-win for all.

Box 2.3 A personal list of words and priorities for development

Dimension	*word, focus, or activity*
Conceptual:	reversal
Wealth:	redistribution
Power:	(power), obligation, obligations-based approaches
Relationships:	(relationships), respect, understanding, trust, reciprocity, congruence
Personal:	reflection, passion, outrage, commitment, self-awareness, humour, fun, creativity, right-living, love
Methodological innovations and applications needed:	Learn how to:
	Feel better with less wealth
	Feel good empowering others
	Think through effects of actions and non-actions
	Bring up children
	Improve gender relations
	Conduct across-group encounters, learning and immersions
	Transform institutions for bottom-up congruence
	Replace "teaching" with experiential learning
	Become self-aware without taking oneself too seriously
	Provide positive, creative expression for male aggression and energy, especially for youth
	See another person's point of view
	Prevent and resolve conflict

Another way forward is Richard Forsyth's idea from the editorial. It is that each of us can form and evolve our own "religion", mindset, way of making sense of the world, and ethics. This can be part of education, not dictating or implanting but sowing and nurturing, allowing and encouraging diversity. 'A basic concept of learning and teaching participation is that individuals participate in generating their own personal theories which are relevant to their own context' (Taylor and Fransman 2003: 8). Experiential learning and reflection lead normally and naturally to seeing and interpreting things in new ways, to evolving personal practice, and to a grounded confidence on which further learning can grow.

2.8 "Ask them" for guidance

On the development journey there will always be far to go and always new ideas. And as we travel, we will always be looking for new steps ahead and always continuing to learn. We have been learning ways to enable those who are poor and marginalised to analyse their realities, to identify and express their priorities, to know and realise their rights, and to gain for themselves and their families more of what they need and deserve. We are learning the value of experiential learning from direct exposure and interaction in immersions, and from the reflections that can follow. The deep and troubling questions these raise can only be asked and answered by each of us for ourselves. For myself the answers are inconsistent with how I live. The gap of hypocrisy is broad, embarrassing and papered over with comfortable evasions.

One thought is that diversity is fundamentally good. This includes differences in ethics and codes, as long as these are open to question and debate. We are all irreducibly different individuals, with idiosyncratic histories, feelings and consciousness. What matters most and works for one may not matter so much or may not work for another. In seeking to know what best to do there are many choices. There are the values and practices shared by the great religions. Some pray. Some seek the guidance of their God, Gods or sacred texts. Some meditate. Some, agnostics and humanists, question and reflect. It is for celebration that the paths are many and diverse as long as they tolerate and celebrate the diversity of others.

Is this a point at which a concept of responsible well-being can help? That too is for personal answers. In Patta Scott-Villiers' (2004) words:

> Responsible well-being based on self awareness is a desirable end for development. It implies mental and material wellness nursed by taking a responsible part. It applies to all of us, rich and poor, the providers and recipients of development, and it turns the idea of giver and taker into a spiral of reciprocity. It is achieved through individual learning. This is not a call for an idealised approach to development only applicable to residents in ivory towers. This is about each individual within their sphere using the space around them to consider both the without and the within and in so doing making their work and its relationships a little more enjoyable and congruent, a touch more energised and spiced with an edge of questioning and creativity.

Responsible well-being remains a phrase in search of a meaning and a methodology. It invites further definition. But who defines responsibility? And who defines well-being? It has been becoming more accepted in development that the poor, weak and marginalised should analyse and express what matters to them, what for them is ill-being and what well-being, what for them would make a difference. The challenge is to make space for them to do this, to amplify their voices, to listen, hear, understand and then act. Harsh Mander's rivetting book *Unheard Voices* (2001) horrifies, shocks, distresses and tells us what we do not want to know. It also inspires through the tenacity and guts that many poor people show. They are capable of so much more than the professional classes have supposed. In many matters touching their lives they know most and best; and we know that we should ask them their aspirations for well-being for themselves. Can we go beyond that and ask them what they would regard as responsible well-being, as a good and responsible life, for us, for those who are better off than they are? Might we then not want to listen so much? Or might their answers show us the best ways forward of all?

At the end of an earlier book *To the Hands of the Poor* (1989), N.C. Saxena, Tushaar Shah and I quoted the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

> I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj[34] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

The question we then asked was – how often, and in what circumstances, with what learning and understanding, are the poor man, and more, the poor woman and child, met, listened to, and understood; and how often are the distant effects of decisions and actions, and of indecisions and non-actions, reflected upon?

From those questions one final idea can follow. This is open to all, whoever we are and whatever we believe. It is, as with Gandhi's talisman, when in doubt, to recall a poor person we have known. It is then to ask what she would have us do. It is to ask what she would wish, advise, encourage and allow. This goes further than just putting the last first, or the first last. It demands imagination, reflecting on the realities of the poor person, her aspirations and ideas of the good life, the example she sets, and our own recognition of causality and how our own decisions and actions are connected with her and others like her. And she can also be he. The question then is whether, when faced with daily and strategic dilemmas and decisions, asking what that poor person would have us do can be a guide, putting some of the *responsible* into *well-being* as a part of right and good living. Can it make it easier to see what to do? Can it stiffen commitment and courage? Can it show how those who are poor, powerless and deprived can gain more of what they need and deserve? Can it point to ways of transforming power and seeking social justice? Can it ease anxiety and be a source of peace of mind?[35] Above all, can it inspire good action grounded in realism?

These are personal questions. In seeking answers, experiential learning, critical self-awareness and reflection all help. And it matters who we are and what we become. But in the end it is action that counts most, and good effects from what we do.

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34 *Swaraj* means self-determination. I have given the quotation in full including this sentence with its reference to spiritual starvation. Arguably, it is precisely those who are not hungry, who are wealthy and powerful, who are more prone to spiritual lack.

35 As an agnostic, I am out of my depth here. Readers of different faiths will have different ways of seeking to know what to do. I recollect a phrase from my nominally Christian upbringing '. . . whose service is perfect freedom'. The thought here is that it lifts a burden of anxiety to know that you have a source of guidance when needed.

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