



# Multidimensional Well-being: Conceptual, Methodological, and Analytical Perspectives

Christian Suter and Madheswaran Subramaniam



# Introduction

- Well-being as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, with a variety of competing theoretical and methodological concepts and perspectives, but a consensus on its multidimensional nature (e.g. Campbell 1976, Allard 1993, Sen 1985, 1999, Kahneman et al. 1999 etc.)
- Evolution and broadening of well-being research (e.g. from the global North to the global South, integration of well-being and vulnerability perspectives, etc.)
- Long-term, cross-cultural, comparative and multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary composition of the research team



# Research team

- Swiss team:
  - University of Neuchâtel, Department of Sociology (Ch. Suter)
  - University of Lausanne, FORS (P. Farago)
  - Ongoing research on:
    - Social change and well-being in Switzerland (Swiss Social Report)
    - Long-term evolution of social inequalities in Switzerland
    - Precarious prosperity and household strategies
    - Multidimensional nature of poverty in upper middle-income countries
- Indian team:
  - Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru (S. Madheswaran, K.S. James, M. BalaSubramanian)
  - Ongoing research on:
    - Inequality, human development and multidimensional poverty (state of Karnataka)
    - Discrimination in the labour market
    - Aging and well-being
    - Demographic dividend and female labour force participation
    - Urban ecosystem services



# Three research axes

- Conceptualizing multidimensional well-being
- Measuring multidimensional well-being
- Empirically analyzing and exploring  
multidimensional well-being



# Conceptualizing well-being

- Comparing Indian and Swiss approaches and conceptualizations of multidimensional well-being
- Comparing different disciplinary approaches and conceptualizations of well-being (e.g. sociology, economics, political sciences, environmental sciences)
- Comparing well-being conceptualizations of different theoretical traditions: utilitarian, capabilities, resource-based approaches
- Comparing among competing concepts of multidimensional social progress, notably (multidimensional) well-being, (multidimensional) vulnerability, and (multidimensional) poverty.
- Conceptualizing well-being at the different levels, notably at the societal level and at the individual level
- Conceptualizations of different components of well-being (e.g. cognitive, hedonic/affective, and eudaimonic well-being etc.)
- Conceptualizations of well-being in different life domains



# Measuring multidimensional well-being

- Developing and construction of measures and indicators of well-being in the various life domains, at the different levels, and for the different components of well-being
- Constructing and evaluating existing measures of multidimensional well-being for India and Switzerland (like Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, child development index, gender inequality index and multi-dimensional poverty index)
- Constructing, comparing and evaluating measures of multidimensional well-being, multidimensional vulnerability and multidimensional poverty
- Comparing different methodologies in constructing synthetic measures of multidimensional well-being, notably (1) traditional composite indexes approaches, (counting approaches, structural equation modeling); (2) constructing well-being profiles based on multidimensional ordinal data (partially ordered set theory); (3) CART data mining methodology.
- Based on quantitative methods and data (large surveys in both countries)



# Exploring multidimensional well-being

The objective of this third axis is to explore specific issues of multidimensional well-being, notably:

- Relationship between social and demographic change and well-being, e.g. how does demographic, economic and social change impact on well-being? How does aging and changing intergenerational relationships affect well-being?
- Relationships between different components (and aspects) of well-being and trajectories of vulnerability
- Analysis of the well-being situation of selected groups in the two countries – how do people, households and social groups perceive and experience their well-being situation?
- Relationship between ecosystem services and health of selected social groups, notable of poor and vulnerable people - which ecosystem services are contributing to human well-being? How do institutional barriers affect well-being of present and future generation?



# Expected outcomes and impact

- Providing more robust conceptual, methodological and empirical knowledge on multidimensional well-being
- Joint scientific research outputs (conference presentations, working papers, articles)
- Providing new insights and more robust knowledge on the Swiss and Indian societies
- Contributing to the implementation of the new UN sustainable development goals