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Title: 'No, living well does not mean being rich': Diverse understandings of well-being among 11 to 13 year old children in three Ethiopian communities

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Biography

Laura Camfield has a PhD and MA in Anthropology from University of London, and her research focuses on experiences of poverty, resilience, and methodologies for exploring and measuring subjective wellbeing in developing countries. She was a research fellow with the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Group from 2002-2007, and also coordinated their research in Thailand. Laura is one of the Young Lives Child Research Coordinators based in Queen Elisabeth House, Oxford, working on the theme of 'Risk, Protective Processes, and Wellbeing' and has particular responsibility for coordinating research with the qualitative research teams in Ethiopia and Vietnam.

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'No, living well does not mean being rich': diverse understandings of well-being among 11 to 13 year old children in three Ethiopian communities

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Participatory research into how people living in material poverty define and experience wellbeing and illbeing is increasingly common in developed and developing countries. Such research highlights the importance of experiential aspects such as being respected and able to preserve one's dignity, and having meaningful choices. But these findings rarely cover children's experiences and are often not contextualised or triangulated with other data. The paper will extend this exploration using data from qualitative research with a sub-sample of children aged 11 to 13 in three urban and rural communities, drawn from *Young Lives*, a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four countries, including Ethiopia (www.younglives.org.uk). It addresses firstly how understandings of a good life and what is needed to achieve this differ between different types of community and children from different backgrounds within those communities (for example, boys and girls, children from richer or poorer households), and secondly the place of social relationships in understandings of a good life. The paper confirms the importance of children taking at least a 'partial role' in measuring and monitoring their well-being (Ben Arieh, 2005, 575) and provides an example of how this might be done.

Key words: Children; wellbeing; poverty; Ethiopia; qualitative; participatory

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Introduction

Monitoring, protecting and promoting 'child well-being' has become an increasingly important development goal, even though understandings of both 'well-being' and 'childhood' are highly variable (Camfield, Streuli and Woodhead 2009). For example, a common approach to well-being is to see it in experiential terms as 'psychological', 'subjective', and/ or 'physical' (e.g. Bergland and Kirkevold 2001) and these dimensions are assumed to be discrete, universal, and therefore amenable to measurement. While *experienced* well-being is inevitably subjective, as it is measured individually, it is created and sustained with others, in particular communities, under particular conditions, during particular historical periods, etc. The logic of individual measurement therefore creates a false impression that well-being can be created individually, for example, through economic strategies that involve separation and even alienation from family/ community. This is despite structural constraints on individual agency and opportunities, and patterned differences in the possibility of experiencing well-being.

This critique notwithstanding well-being can act as a bridging concept within childhood studies and development studies, not just as a heuristic device, but also a way to bring together the diverse dimensions of health, social relationships, meaning, and subjective experience to tackle the individual challenges posed in each area. For example, Dinham (2007:183) suggests that 'the idea of well-being is generally helpful in providing us with a glimpse of something important: the basic conditions for happiness and fulfilment as of right. In addition, it is conceptually useful in drawing into direct relationship the social, psychological, 'spiritual' and physical dimensions to which many discussions refer'. Of course, one could observe that that these dimensions have always been in direct relationship and that this is obviously the case for children as it is for adults; however, this is not the impression given by many international-funded indices or interventions (Ansell, Barker and Smith 2007). The approach to children's well-being developed by *Young Lives* focuses on children in the social contexts they inhabit, and for this reason accessing children's views, in the context of their communities, is of central importance.

Worldwide there are many studies of adults' understandings of well-being and ill-being, namely what constitutes and contributes to a good or bad life in their context. While there are fewer qualitative studies of well-being or ill-being in developing countries and fewer still in Ethiopia (see Camfield 2006 and Camfield, Crivello and Woodhead 2009 for a review), these nonetheless represents a substantial body of data. For example, nationwide Participatory Poverty Assessments carried out in 1999 and 2004/2005 [Rahmato and Kidanu, 1999; Ellis and Woldehanna 2005], which used semi-structured, task-based methods rather than questionnaire surveys to access a range of local perspectives and encourage reflection and debate. But do these 'participatory' studies offer a reliable guide to the aspects of life people value most (the sources of their well-being), and how these are developed and maintained in resource-poor contexts? And more importantly, where are children's views and experiences? Participatory work has been criticised for being predominantly group-based, which may obscure individual differences and bias findings towards public goods (Copestake and Camfield 2009), approaching poverty as unidimensional and universal (White and Pettit 2005; Jones and Sumner 2009), and raising expectations through an assumed link with development practice (Cooke and Kothari 2001). However, in the context of this paper, the primary shortcoming of research into understandings of well-being and ill-being is a lack of attention to children's perspectives, and where these are acknowledged, insufficient attention to diversity within the broad category of children. For example, a tendency to contrast the children's singular 'voice' with the adult 'voice', without acknowledging the many opinions within each group and the processes of power that ensure that some 'voices' are audible and others are not. This criticism has also been made of the 'consultations with the poor' study (e.g. Cornwall and Fujita 2007) which in order to contrast the perspectives of poor people with those more commonly acknowledged in development planning created an essential and singular category of 'the poor' who removed from their contexts became virtually indistinguishable.

The focus of this paper is the diversity of understandings of well-being and ill-being from boys and girls aged 11 to 13 in three Ethiopia communities (capital, remote and near rural). We use qualitative and quantitative data from *Young Lives*, a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four countries, including Ethiopia

(www.younglives.org.uk) to address how understandings of a good life and what is needed to achieve this differ between different types of community and children from different backgrounds within those communities. The survey data enables the preliminary conclusions drawn from the group activities to be generalised to a larger sample and encourages a critical awareness of how responses are affected by the way questions are framed and the context in which they are asked. The paper focuses on children aged 11 to 13 as although data was also collected from children aged 5 to 6 they were considered too young to respond to the child questionnaire in 2006 and participated to a more limited degree in the qualitative research. However, Camfield (2009) has analysed data from wellbeing exercises in four sites with children aged 5 to 6 which broadly support the findings reported here.

Children's understandings of wellbeing: International studies

As Information on children's aspirations and practices seems self-evidently important in setting policy and planning interventions, a key question is how it can be best collected (Camfield, Streuli and Woodhead 2009). Asher Ben-Arieh, founder of the Child Indicators Research Society, argues that existing measures of child well-being are insufficient to capture the quality of children's experiences, and that children should therefore take at least a 'partial role' in measuring and monitoring their well-being (2005: 575). However, studying children's well-being involves firstly understanding what different children are doing, what they need, what they have, what they think and feel, how they contribute to their own and others' well-being, etc., and secondly, engaging with their diverse and dynamic understandings of well-being and ill-being (Ben-Arieh and Frønes, 2007).

The paper draws on the theoretical and methodological proposals of the 'new sociology of childhood' or 'new Childhood Studies' (Prout and James 1997; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig 2009) and emphasises that while childhood is seen as 'a meaningful metaphor for most people [...] it is not an entity that exists in a given format' (Fronnes 2007, 13). The label 'child' is therefore both a lived experience and a constructed status, which offers constraints and opportunities to individual children in diverse contexts. These include a range of understandings as to what counts as well-being and how it can best be achieved, which may be differentiated by location of

residence, age, gender, ethnicity, caste/class, birth order, and many other factors. Childhood studies recognise that children are active agents with distinctive perspectives and experiences (and 'cultures') who play important roles in their households and societies in shaping their own lives and those of others. That children negotiate and also shape the cultures they belong to is reflected in the studies summarised below, which use qualitative or mixed methods approaches to explore children's understandings of well-being and ill-being (Camfield, Crivello and Woodhead 2009). The studies are primarily drawn from the majority world and Ethiopia in particular, although studies relating to children in other contexts are summarised in Table 1 (Appendix).

There are a growing number of studies addressing children's understandings of well-being and ill-being in the majority world and participatory methods have also been used to access children's perspectives and experiences on a range of related topics (e.g. environmental resources in Nepal [Johnson, Hill and Ivan-Smith 1995], child labour [Woodhead 1998], and physical punishment [Ennew and Plateau 2004]). *Young Lives*, for example, have explored children's understandings of well-being through group activities and subsequent individual interviews (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead 2009), producing voluminous pilot data on the importance to well-being of family support, education, recreation, good social relationships, and good behaviour. Common indicators of ill-being were also predominantly social and respondents even described material indicators such as dirty clothes or irregular meals as reflecting a lack of care and support. Johnson (2006) generated similar data on experiences of ill-being from 8 year old children in Peru when she used participatory 'poverty trees' in a collective exploration of children's ideas about the causes ('roots') and outcomes ('fruits') of poverty. For example, Johnston found that the quality of family relationships featured in children's definitions of poverty, and having parents who were absent or still very young was identified as one of the causes of poverty. Harpham et al.'s (2005) use of participatory methods such as drawing, mobility maps, and Venn diagrams with 7 to 11 year-olds in rural Vietnam also produced evocative data on the subtle differences between the lives of children living well or badly. For example, children living well have fish or meat everyday, while children living badly have rice with salt and sesame; the former are loved by

their teachers, while the latter are always being reminded that their parents haven't paid their tuition fees.

Boyden et al.'s (2003) comparative study of children's experiences and perceptions of poverty in Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone suggested that '...except in situations of acute and generalized scarcity, relative poverty has a more significant impact on children's well-being than absolute poverty' (ibid, 39). This was expressed through symbolic markers such as clothing and shoes, cleanliness, and having enough money to participate in recreational activities, the absence of which made children vulnerable to teasing, bullying and exclusion. de Berry et al. (2003) carried out similar participatory work with children and their families in Kabul where children's well-being was understood as 'hoped-for achievements', as a standard for the important things in children's lives, and as the qualities that children should develop (ibid,7). These understandings revolved around the local concept of *Tarbia* which refers to children's behaviour (manners) and the quality of their relationships with others. Armstrong et al. (2004, 44-45) similarly asked parents and children in five villages in Eastern Sri Lanka 'what is it about a person that tells you that they are doing well?' to elicit local understandings of the constituents of well-being and ill-being. Aspects of well-being related to socially valued behaviours (for example, 'being loving or kind', *anbu*), good interpersonal qualities, educational outcomes, health and fitness, and paying attention to manners and personal care. Bhatnagar and Gupta (2007) explored what Indian boys and girls aged 9 and 10 felt gave them happiness, lead to their 'greatest well-being' or made them feel 'unpleasant'. A detailed content analysis produced ten domains of well-being, of which health, affiliation and achievement were the most important. Nonetheless, the authors noted variation in importance by gender, socio-economic status, and location, for example, urban children from the slums felt that having employment and opportunities for recreation were much more important than children from other locations. September et al. (2007) similarly compared the findings of her participatory study with children aged up to 14 in the Western Cape with those Fattore, Mason and Watson (2007) in Australia (see Table 1) to demonstrate that although there were shared meta-themes such as 'feeling valued and secure', these were specified very differently in the two settings. For example, in Capetown threats to security were seen as coming

from inside as well as outside the home and 'basic need deprivation' referred to a threat to survival rather than something of purely emotional significance. The common ground between the studies was their emphasis that understandings of well-being are not and cannot be purely individual as children are actors with responsibilities for others who need to respond to the expectations of the broader community.

Children's understandings of wellbeing: Ethiopian studies

Less work has been done with children in Ethiopia on their understandings of well-being (for adults see the work of the Well-being in Developing Countries ESRC research group (www.wed-ethiopia.org), e.g. Bevan and Pankhurst 2004; Pankhurst 2006; Lavers 2008), although two recent studies by Tekola et al. (2009) and Tafere (2007, unpublished) produced useful insights. For example, Tafere's comparative analysis of two urban communities from *Young Lives* qualitative sample demonstrated the perceived importance of social relationships, personal characteristics, engagement with environment, and spirituality, while Tekola's use of community maps with 26 poor children in Addis Ababa generated interesting information about well-being and ill-being in relation to education. For example, many children liked the school flag (incorporating the Ethiopian national colours of red, green, and gold), which they described as a symbol of belonging, the school compound with trees and flowers, and for boys the school football field. Girls and boys disliked violent teachers and disruptive children (for example, older boys who truanted by climbing the fence during lessons), and girls in particular disliked the school toilets. A nation-wide UNICEF study in 2005 on Ethiopian children's understandings of well-being combined written and visual responses to four questions addressing 'dreams in life for yourself, your community, and your country' ($n = >700$) with task-based focus groups on the same theme led by youth facilitators (Continici, Kui and Tsadik 2005). Education was the most important 'dream' as it was seen as 'key to having a better life, getting out of poverty, 'becoming someone', and being able to help other vulnerable children' (ibid,11), although respect, representation, and rights were also important themes.

In summary, the most important aspect of children's well-being in the studies reviewed appears to be the quality of their relationships with others (e.g. see Table 1 where they appear in all the studies cited). In particular whether children feel 'valued and secure', if they can depend on 'good quality family relationships', whether they 'enjoy comfort and openness' in their relationships, and finally, if they feel included and respected. Related to this are aspects of the self such as choice, agency, and 'being a 'moral actor'' (usually expressed in relation to their behaviour towards others, for example, 'being a good daughter') and having 'respect, representation, and rights' within a particular community. Education was also extremely important, and to a lesser extent so were the fulfilment of other basic needs, having a secure physical environment, and opportunities for recreation. After a brief description of the methodology, we will see to what extent these themes are reflected in *Young Lives* data.

Methodology

This section introduces *Young Lives* and describes the two main data collection methods for the data analysed in this paper, the quantitative Child Questionnaire and the qualitative group activities (the Well-being exercise), which were both used with children aged 11 to 13.

Young Lives is a major international project on child poverty (2000-2015) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). It was initiated as a 'millennium study' and recruited 8,000 children born at the turn of the millennium (2000/1), along with 4,000 children who were eight years old at the time (born 1994/5) from Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India), Peru and Vietnam. Together they comprise the two study 'cohorts' who, along with their caregivers, are participating every few years in a data-gathering survey that collects information on diverse aspects of their lives and livelihoods. The first survey round took place in 2002 and provided baseline information about *Young Lives* children, their households and communities. Separate survey instruments are administered to older cohort children, their caregivers and community members. The completion of the second round of data collection in 2006-7 and subsequent rounds scheduled every few years through to 2015 will track changes in children's circumstances and enable longitudinal analyses. The qualitative component was introduced in 2007 as an integrated sub-study, using qualitative research

methods to explore in greater depth the lives of 204 Young Lives children across the four study countries over the remainder of the project.

Quantitative data

The Child Questionnaire complements the household and community questionnaires by focusing on children's perceptions, aspirations, and relationships. In Ethiopia it was first administered in 2002 to 1,000 8 year old children across 20 sentinel sites in the five largest regions (Amhara, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's region (SNNP), Tigray, Addis Ababa, and Oromia) by enumerators from the Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Addis Ababa (see Outes-Leon and Dercon 2008 for a description of the sampling frame). It was administered again in 2006 when they were aged 10 to 11; and this data are analysed here as the 2006 questionnaire had sections addressing 'feelings and attitudes', including data on children's perceptions of school, and 'perceptions of economic status, and was collected one year before the qualitative research. The attrition rate between data collection rounds was 1.9% or 1.3% if attrition due to mortality is excluded (ibid).

The analysis of the child questionnaire was carried out using the whole sample ($n=979$, 484 girls and 495 boys, 583 of whom came from rural areas and 396 from urban) and then repeated using just the qualitative children, which confirmed that there were no significant differences. Further analyses were done for subgroups of gender, location (rural versus urban), and perceived socio-economic status ('poorer than other households in the community', 'average', 'richer than other households in the community'). The sections analysed covered current perceptions of school and work, including the value of education; future aspirations relating to school and work; and two indicators of subjective well-being. The measure of subjective well-being used in the questionnaire was the 'ladder of life', an adaptation of Cantril's self-anchoring ladder [1965] where the top - 9 - represents the 'best possible life' and the bottom - 1 - the worst (the conventional scale midpoint is 6 following a large-scale international study with children aged 10 to 12 (Currie et al 2004). The ladder was administered using a picture of a ladder with nine rungs to establish firstly where children felt they were now and secondly where they felt they would be in four years time, which was assumed to reflect

their sense of optimism and control over their future. Most of the variables were dichotomous so percentages were reported for the whole sample and in some cases for subgroups as well. The statistical significance of between-group differences on the 'ladder of life' was tested using independent samples t-tests (Mann-Whitney U for non-normal subscales) or ANOVA with a post-hoc Scheffe test.

Qualitative data

Sites and sampling

Five sites were selected from the five regions sampled by the survey following consultation with the *Young Lives* quantitative team and analysis of survey data from Round 1 covering perceptions of poverty, household utilities and services, educational participation, child work, parental education and ethnicity. The sites comprised two urban communities (Addis Ababa and a regional capital) and three rural, two of which were relatively remote. The data analysed in this paper comes from three of these sites: *Debre* (urban, Addis Ababa region), *Bale* (near-rural, Oromia), and *Angar* (remote-rural, Tigray), which are described below (pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect the identities of children and their communities).

Debre is a densely populated community in the national capital (14,066 inhabitants) which is ethnically and religiously diverse, albeit with a predominance of the *Amhara* ethnic group and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. While indicators of absolute poverty were low, respondents nonetheless perceived themselves as poor relative to others in the community, suggesting the presence of material inequalities. *Debre* is located next to the city's fruit and vegetable market, which provides economic opportunities for adults and children (e.g. street vending, renting buildings for storage, or carrying goods for cash), but is dirty due to rotting fruit and vegetables. Young girls also reported harassment in the public spaces, and caregivers were concerned that their children were exposed to prostitution, gambling, and the consumption of home brewed alcohol and drugs.

Bale is a comparatively small (2,835) and ethnically homogenous community (predominately *Oromiffa* speaking Orthodox Christians, with a few Muslim families). It has good natural resources (for

example, irrigated fields for vegetable growing) and a temperate climate, but is nonetheless materially poor. The community has poor access to formal healthcare and educational participation is low, partly because there are no kindergartens (younger children go to religious schools) and education only goes up to grade 6 of primary school, although some children stay with relatives in a nearby town in order to study further.

Angar is a similar size to *Bale* and also ethnically homogenous (exclusively *Tigrinya*-speaking Orthodox Christians). However, it is more remote as the nearest town is two to three hours on foot and the road is only usable in the 'dry season'. Respondents were materially poor, participated in government 'safety net programmes' such as the Food for Work scheme, and had limited access to electricity and piped water. Male educational participation was low, as boys were needed to herd cattle. While almost every neighbourhood has a primary school covering grades one to four, there is only one 'second cycle' primary school (grades five to eight) and depending on location children can travel up to 1.5 hours to attend it, often across difficult and isolated terrain (the nearest secondary school is in the town).

After the sites had been selected, sampling of 12 case study children and 8 'reserves' per site took place using survey data from Rounds 1 and 2. Age and gender were the main criteria (equal numbers of children aged 5 to 6 and 11 to 13, and within each age group of boys and girls), but school enrolment and indicators of vulnerability such as orphanhood were also used.

Methods

The qualitative data reported in Results comes from the Wellbeing Exercise, which was conducted separately with groups of five boys and five girls in each site (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead 2009). The groups comprised three case study children and two reserves and were facilitated in a neutral space (e.g. a meeting room in the community) by two researchers of the same gender as the participants who had been trained in participatory methods. The discussions lasted between 1.5 and 3 hours, depending on the participants' interest, and were both audio-recorded and recorded by one of researchers who paid particular attention to group dynamics.

The Wellbeing Exercise explores what children consider a 'good' or 'bad' life for children of the same age and gender, living in their community, and what they identify as sources of risk and protection. Children drew pictures individually of children experiencing good or bad lives, and explained their meaning to the group, often eliciting critical or challenging responses (for example, debates over whether a 12 year old child was too young to chew *chat* – a mild narcotic). This was followed by a collective discussion with children's suggestions written on a flip chart divided into columns for 'good life' and 'bad life' so the suggestions could be more easily turned into 'indicators' which the participants ranked. For example, among boys in *Debre* 'getting a balanced diet' was considered as important as education because 'if a boy does not get a balanced diet he would not understand what he learns', which demonstrate a holistic and subtle understanding of the different dimensions of well-being and ill-being and how these are related. Individual children's ideas and rankings were recorded and these were usually followed up in the individual interviews (not reported here). The combination of individual and group methods partly overcame the difficulty of securing consensus, as described in the following extract from the researcher's notes on the process:

For Bekele losing parents is the first important indicator of ill-being, for Berhanu it is lack of proper follow up from family, for Beniam it is lack of proper education - a child who does not learn will finally be a thief, [...] for Afework, all are equally important', etc.

The group activity notes covered children's presentations of their ideas about good and bad lives, including questions from other children and any ensuing discussion, and the collective generation and ranking of wellbeing indicators.

Results

Quantitative

The main results from the Child Questionnaire are summarised in Table 1 below, which shows differences in aspirations and expectations by location, socio-economic status, and gender.

Table 1: Percentages and mean scores for educational aspirations and current and future position on the 'ladder of life'

	Urban	Rural	Poor	Average	Rich	Male	Female
Yes, let 12 yr old boy stay in school (%)	94.7	92.2	92.7	93.7	92.1	92.6	93.7
Yes, let 12 yr old girl stay in school (%)	95.7	91.8	92.3	94.3	92.1	91.8	95
Yes, formal schooling is essential for my future (%)	99.2	98.6	98.1	99.4	98.3	98.5	99.2
I would like to complete university/ college (%)	80.5	62.7	69.7	69.5	72.5	73	67.1
I expect to complete university/ college (%)	95.5	94.5	92.5	95.2	97.5	93.4	96.5
Education would move me up the ladder (%)	25.2	15.	19.5	19.3	19.8	21.3	18
Hard work would move me up the ladder (%)	20.1	23	19.1	22.4	24.7	21.3	22.3
Current position on ladder Mean (sd)	3.84** (1.70)	4.55** (1.92)	3.08** (1.67)	4.40** (1.58)	5.62** (1.88)	4.23 (1.91)	4.29 (1.83)
Position in 4 yrs	5.96 (1.91)	6.24 (2.01)	5.11** (1.91)	6.25** (1.85)	7.30** (1.66)	6.01 (1.93)	6.24 (2.01)

Significance level **p<0.001 *p<0.01

In relation to education there were large differences between rural and urban communities and within communities by socio-economic status for both objective and subjective indicators. For example, in urban areas over 80% of children anticipate that they will go to university, while the equivalent figure in rural areas is 63%. When children were asked what the best things about school were the most common response was 'learning useful skills' (34.1% for the whole sample, ranging from 29.5% to 36.6% for the subgroups mentioned above; the range has been reported to indicate the level of consensus), followed by 'teachers are good' (20.8%, ranging from 17.9% to 24.1%). When asked about the worst things, the overwhelming response was 'nothing' (27.7%, 20.6% to 34.8%) and this response was particularly common among girls (34.8%). The second most common 'worst thing' was 'students fighting' (18.4%, 15.8% to 22.4%). Conversely, in the group activities children, particularly girls, talked at length about shortcomings in the school infrastructure (for example, dirt, the absence of drinking water and toilets), and also about teacher absenteeism and violence. Although these show low frequencies in the survey data on the worst things about school (<5%), the discrepancy may be artefactual as the existence of over 30 survey response categories splits the sample. There are also

some interesting differences between groups, for example, 'lack of toilets' is more of a concern for girls (7.4%) than boys (2.8%), which may reflect the fears about sexual violence in mixed or isolated toilets articulated by girls during a Community Mapping activity (not reported here; see also Tekola, 2009). 'Lack of [drinking] water' is similarly a greater concern in rural (10.4%) than urban areas (5.4%), partly because urban schools are in better repair, but also because in some rural areas children travel up to an hour and a half to attend school so cannot return home if they need water or food during the day.

Children were presented with two hypothetical scenarios where a family in their community has a 12 year old son/daughter who is attending school full-time: 'the family badly needs to increase the household income, one option is to send the son/daughter to work but the son/daughter wants to stay in school. What should the family do?' 93% felt the son/daughter should stay in school and there was relatively little variation in responses according to the gender of the hypothetical child or the background of respondent. Similarly 98.8% of children described formal schooling as 'essential' in their future life, and the range was again very small. These results suggest a normative consensus about the value of education, which is evident in survey responses to (educated) enumerators, but may or may not be reflected in practice. Nonetheless, there are variations in the level of education that children would like to attain, for example, although 70.1% overall would like to complete university, the figure falls to 62.5% for children in rural areas, compared to 80.5% in urban, and 59.4% of poorer children versus 75.6% of richer.

The most striking differences between groups relate to the ladder of life as while the mean scores for current and future position are 4.26 (sd 1.87) and 6.12 (sd 1.97), children who characterise their households as 'average' or richer than others score progressively higher than those who see their households as poor. While this is not an original finding, the extent of the difference is striking, for example, children from rich households are already reporting a higher position on the ladder than the poor children expect to reach in four years time. There were no significant differences between boys and girls, but perhaps unexpectedly, the scores for rural children are significantly higher than urban, which suggests that relative rather than absolute poverty may be a more important influence

(Camfield, 2009). Table 1 also shows that less than a quarter of children were reporting scores above the conventional scale midpoint of 6 (e.g. see WHO HSBC 2001/2).

The main reasons given for moving up the ladder of life are 'education' (19.7%) and 'work harder' (21.8%), with some differences in priority between groups (for example, children in urban areas see education as more influential than those in rural areas: 25.2% versus 15.8%). 'Making less money' or having a 'poor' or 'irregular' job are the three main reasons for moving down the ladder in urban areas (total 51.3%, compared to 29.5% in rural areas), and poor harvest in rural areas (29.9% versus 1.4% in urban areas). Poor education (composite of 'being poorly educated', 'can't improve skills' and 'have to leave education early') is also a more important reason for moving down the ladder in urban areas (21.7%) than rural (12.7%), although there are only minor differences by gender and socioeconomic status. 'Poor health status' is important for children from poor households (22.2%), reflecting the devastating impact of household illness on income and educational opportunities although much less so for those from rich (6.4%) or average ones (10.9%).

Group activities with children

This section analyses data from the Well-being Exercise, which was carried out separately with older boys and girls in the three sites described earlier. It reports both the content of the discussions around good and bad lives or living well or badly, and the ranking of indicators that took place at the end of the activity. Due to the small size of the sample, we have focused on differences between the responses of groups of girls and boys, and groups taking place in rural and urban areas.

Content

While the well-being exercises raised common themes, for example, education, these were specified differently in different sites and by different groups of respondents. In the two rural sites, the main concern was access to education, especially for girls (or boys with no younger siblings to herd cattle) and to a lesser extent educational materials. In the urban site, however, the focus was on educational quality in many different dimensions (teaching, sanitation, class sizes, etc) and there was a lively

debate in the girls' group about the relative merits of private and state-funded schooling. For example, the private school has 'adequate services like tap water and clean toilets and classrooms', and while the government school provides lessons in the evenings as well (enabling working children to attend) children are sent home during the frequent power cuts. In the boy's group Bekele described how 'a child that is doing well [...] goes to a school that has a field and equipment for kids to play on such as a *shertete* (slide), *jiwajiwe* (swing), and merry-go-round. The school is not far [from his home], it has good classrooms and clean toilets for boys and girls separately; and it also has a library'. Both boys and girls in the urban site ranked educational materials second only to education, for example, according to one boy any child with a good life had to have a school bag, although for another this was clearly beyond the bounds of possibility: 'does living well means being rich? No, living well does not mean being rich'. Educational materials were seen as symbolising parents' care for their children, in the same way as clean clothes and oiled hair in the rural sites (having hair that wasn't 'big', 'dry', or 'dreadlocked') was important to both male and female respondents as it demonstrates that parents have either cattle for butter or cash income to purchase hair oil.

Children's behaviour was also a common theme (for example, being obedient, not fighting) and their comments were highly moral in tone, for example, the description of the destitute child who has a bad life because he 'lives by wandering from house to house to steal' and after a period of imprisonment '[becomes] rich because of theft' (*Afework, Angar*). In *Debre* comments related mainly to how a child's behaviour might affect their interactions with others. For example, Addisu described a child who had no one to buy him polish to shine shoes, or vouch for his poverty status to the Kebele [local administrative unit] as 'he is not liked by his neighbours; he has no relatives, [and] he cannot keep his personal hygiene well so that people ostracise him'. Berhanu also described how if he fought with his parents a boy would not be supported in continuing his education, or even if he became sick; 'his parents do not pay school fees for him because they don't like him; it is not because they don't have the money but because of lack of good family relations'. Relationships outside the family were also valued and in the urban site important for social mobility, for example, many children emphasised the importance of having friends from school, rather than the local area; 'his friends are from his

surroundings and have bad behaviour. His friends are not clever so he is not clever too. [...] He and his friends are lazy in their education' (Bekele, *Debre*).

Other common indicators of well-being were having a good appearance ('[having] no clothes means, it becomes difficult to go out of home and cannot go anywhere for work', well-being ranking by boys from *Debre*), work and its relation to education, food, shelter, and access to healthcare. Having a biological relationship with your caregivers was also mentioned as this was seen as giving a child '[the] right to get what she wants from her guardians' (Abebe, *Debre*). Children's material ambitions seemed to be higher in the urban site, for example, 'a table full of a variety of food like a buffet' rather than simply 'sufficient food'. Goods such as cars and DVDs were also mentioned, which were not part of the aspirations of rural children or visible in the rural sites. Interestingly, the aspirations of respondents in rural areas related more to productive assets such as irrigated land or cattle, and in the near rural site, a boat for fishing. While all respondents were aware of status differentiations, the urban children seemed to feel this more keenly and described situations with great insight: "[while] a girl who is not doing well may join the private school but she can not get what she needs like her well being friends since her family is poor economically so they can only afford her school fee. But the well-being girl can get what she wants to have [the same] as her friends" Abebe, *Debre*.

The wellbeing exercise generated a lively debate which demonstrated participants critical sensibility and attention to detail and showed clear ideas about what was appropriate to children of different ages and statuses, for example, 'the child of rich family should learn in private school where everything is fulfilled', while 'even a child of 12 years should not play with small play materials like *jiwajiwe* (swings); he should play with football and bigger children'.

Ranking

Once children had generated indicators of well-being or ill-being from the discussions described above, they were asked to rank these in order of importance. The ranking was recorded by the notetaker, who also noted any differences in opinion (for example, in the urban site where respondents could agree on the five most important indicators, but not the order in which they should

be placed). Unlike the other two communities, in *Bale* education is only mentioned once as an indicator of well-being (by girls) and is ranked sixth after land, livestock, donkey, corrugated iron house, etc. There are few differences between girls' and boys' indicators, although girls also mention having a separate kitchen, which would reduce eye irritation caused by cooking over wood in a poorly ventilated room, sufficient clothes, and access to means of communication such as television, radio, and the telephone.

Although girls and boys in *Angar* agree on the importance of good clothing, attending school and cleanliness as indicators of well-being and ill-being, there is a greater divergence in their views of a good life than in other communities. This suggests differentiated trajectories for girls and boys with associated differences in concerns, for example, girls mention getting sufficient food (for example, not having to go to school without breakfast), being encouraged to study, having time to play, and being asked their opinion and shown respect as signs of a good life, which may indicate that these things are absent. Boys are more concerned about good behaviour (for example, not stealing, fighting, being 'foolish' or disobedient), health, and having a loving and peaceful family.

Education appears to be a more important component of a good life in *Debre* than in the others as both boys and girls rank it as the main indicator of well-being or ill-being. Girls also mention access to educational materials and one girl ranked 'having to attend a government school' as the second most important indicator of ill-being (she had been removed from the private school she was attending after her mother lost her job; a poignant example of the influence of individual biographies on understandings of well-being). Boys and girls mention being an orphan, which seems to be a particular concern of boys, and having sufficient food, and girls also mention shelter. As in *Angar*, boys mention not getting advice or 'follow up' from their families, which is implicitly linked to having good or bad behaviour.

Discussion

The paper explores how understandings of a good life and what is needed to achieve this differ between different types of community and children from different backgrounds within those

communities. It indicates what data on understandings of well-being can add to what we already know about poor children's lives, and suggests some policy questions arising from the data presented.

In relation to education we have described large differences in aspirations between rural and urban communities and poorer and richer children with those communities. For example, in urban areas over 80 per cent of children anticipate that they will go to university, while the equivalent figure in rural areas is 63 per cent. These figures do not reflect the reality of how many will go to university - the tertiary gross enrolment rate (GER) was 2.4 per cent in 2006, less than 10 per cent of those who were enrolled in secondary education ('Ed-stats', World Bank 2008). But they do indicate how children perceive the future and the possibilities for positive change as in Ethiopia further education is an important route to social mobility (Mains 2007; Abebe 2008). Similarly, in urban areas, a quarter of the sample reported 'education' as the main reason for 'moving up' the ladder, but this was less common in rural areas (16%), reflecting the barriers to education beyond grade six of primary school and the lack of employment opportunities for children who overcome these.

This indication of how children in rural areas might lower their future aspirations to match their present reality, either through 'adaptation' or a realistic assessment of the quality of local education and employment opportunities, is important information for policymakers aiming to break the poverty cycle. However, a further question is whether education, which is seen by all respondents as symbolising a better future, can fulfil its promise as the 'means for accessing social mobility' which 'virtually guarantee[s] one a position as an administrator or a teacher' (Mains 2007: 663) in a context of reduced public sector employment through neo-liberal economic policies.

Analysis of scores on the ladder of life used in *Young Lives* survey to represent children's subjective experiences and aspirations suggests that both within Ethiopia and in comparison with other countries, children are on 'different rungs'. For example, while the mean scores indicate that almost all children believe their lives will be better in the future, even children from rich households are currently reporting scores that are below the conventional mid-point of the scale. The use of the ladder as a measure of children's subjective wellbeing illustrates one of the limitations of the study, which is that *Young Lives* Child Questionnaire was designed without reference to the large body of literature on

measuring children and young people's wellbeing, profiled in special issues of *Social Indicators Research* in 2004 and 2007 (volumes 66:1-2, 83:1, and 84:3). For this reason some of the quantitative data relating to children's attitudes and aspirations are difficult to interpret without accompanying qualitative data. Similarly, even though the Wellbeing Exercise endeavoured to combine individual reflection with group discussion, the data was not as rich in relation to individual children as it would have been if the method had been used individually. This would have enabled exploration of where children's ideas about a good life came from and how these related to their own experiences. Both examples illustrate the value of a mixed and multi-method approach where methods are sequenced in a way to enable subsequent reflection on data produced during earlier interactions (e.g. during a group exercise earlier in the week, or even during the administration of the survey one year earlier) and allow the respondent to work in a medium they feel comfortable with (Crivello, Camfield, and Woodhead 2009). Another limitation of the study was the specificity of the five qualitative sites sampled, which makes it more difficult to generalise. For example, *Aksum* (not described here) could be characterised as a remote site as it is over four hours by car from the nearest large town, however, it is also on the edge of a small town and a busy asphalt road that carries all the traffic crossing the Amhara plains.

As the qualitative data captured both the indicators and the discussion during their development and ranking it gave a fuller and more contextualised picture of children's priorities than is usually possible in participatory ranking exercises. The themes of access to and quality of education were much stronger here than in the other studies reviewed (table 1), and this was also the case for basic needs such as food and shelter, with the exception of Harpham et al (2005). The data confirms the intrinsic and instrumental value of relationships, for example, the link between good relationships with parents and access to schooling, and the importance of material resources in supporting social participation, for example, having the time, and in urban areas the resources to play.

The paper argues that exploring what children living in poverty see as well-being or a good life for themselves and their households makes sense of the sacrifices they make to preserve this. For this reason transitions such as joining or leaving school should not only be seen in terms of their effect

on the well-being of children and their households but also contextualised within individual and collective visions of good lives. We saw from the literature review and the group exercises that bad lives were characterised by having no-one rather than nothing, but that relationships *and* material resources were important for achieving well-being. Further exploration of their relationship involves setting particular case studies in a broader context and continuing to explore children's experiences and their understandings of these over time - for the older children participating in *Young Lives* the next eight years may provide some answers.

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Appendix

Table 1: Summary of aspects of well-being identified by studies cited in the literature review

Study	Context	Aspects of wellbeing
Fattore et al. 2007	Australia	<i>feeling valued and secure in relationships, being a 'moral actor' in relation to oneself and others, and being able to make choices and exert influence in everyday situations</i>
Bamba 2007	Western Japan	<i>feeling relaxed, calm and enjoying comfort and openness within relationships.</i>
Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2006	Eire	<i>'people I love the most friends', 'activities', 'food and drink' and 'animals/pets'.</i>
Children's Society 2007	UK	<i>quality of young people's relationships - love, support, fair treatment and respect; safety - at home, at school and in the community, and freedom - in what they think, say and do</i>
Hill et al. 1996	UK	<i>emotional impact of arguments with friends and peers, or between parents, and threats from the environment</i>
Van der Hoek 2005 & Ridge 2002	Netherlands and UK, respectively	<i>social exclusion associated with lack of money for clothing, celebrations, or excursions, emotional pressure of protecting parents</i>
Johnson 2006	Peru	<i>presence and quality of family relationships</i>
Harpham et al. 2005	Vietnam	<i>Basic needs fish or meat everyday, access to education, good relationships</i>
Percy 2003	USA	<i>'feeling loved', 'having friends to count on,' and 'taking care of myself'</i>
Crivello et al. 2008	Peru, India, Ethiopia, Vietnam	<i>family support, education, recreation, good social relationships, and good behaviour</i>
Boyden et al. 2003	Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone	<i>clothing and shoes, cleanliness, and having enough money to participate in recreational activities absence of which made children vulnerable to teasing, bullying and exclusion</i>
de Berry et al. 2003	Kabul, Afghanistan	<i>children's behaviour manners, quality of their relationships with others</i>
Armstrong et al. 2004:44-45	Sri Lanka	<i>socially valued behaviours for example, 'being loving or kind', anbu, good interpersonal qualities, educational outcomes, health and fitness, and paying attention to manners and personal care</i>
Bhatnagar and Gupta 2007	India	<i>health, affiliation and achievement</i>
September et al. 2007	Western Cape, South Africa	<i>'feeling valued and secure', 'basic need deprivation'</i>
Tafere 2007	Urban Ethiopia	<i>social relationships, personal characteristics, engagement with environment, and spirituality</i>
Continicini et al. 2005	Ethiopia	<i>Education, respect, representation, and rights</i>