

DEVELOPING A TOOLKIT FOR ASSESSING THE WELLBEING OF SMALLHOLDER ORGANIC FARMERS AND PLANTATION WORKERS

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Abstract

The wellbeing of producers in organic agriculture has historically, if surprisingly, been neglected by the organic movement. Although certification procedures for the verification of organic produce are well established, as EU Regulation 2092/91 and a host of independent labels testify, no such procedures exist to verify the wellbeing of producers. Recently however the question of social standards has begun to be addressed by a range of actors. The author of this paper is currently developing a quality of life toolkit that has meaning in situ for organic producers, yet can feed into work centring on the development of meaningful 'quality of life' criteria that can be attached to organic produce in the form of social labels.

Key words: social certification, organic, quality of life index

Introduction

It can be argued that producers, including smallholders and workers on plantations, must be involved in the debate on social certification in organic agriculture since the concerns that can be considered more or less important can only be defined in a particular social context according to each group's value system (Hubert, pers. comm. 04/01). The challenge is to develop a 'quality of life toolkit' flexible enough to be used anywhere, specific enough to produce unique meaning in a particular situation and yet universal enough for the results to be understood and operationalised by other stakeholders, such as large organic retailers sourcing from small farmers. Such a toolkit should be able to answer the questions: '*Does involvement in producing certified organic goods bring about positive change in the lives of women and men producers? How can we know this?*' In this paper the results of a field study in Madagascar are presented, analysed and the implications for the further development of the toolkit are discussed.

Short overview of quality of life indicators

How can we ascertain quality of life? Over the years there have been many attempts, including measuring GDP, developing genuine progress indicators, a women's empowerment measure and the human development index (see Hamilton 1999; Kabeer 2000; Murray 1991 for comments). Work has also been done at the micro-level. Nazarea et al. (1998) aimed to correct the biases, as they saw it, of most mainstream development projects in the Philippines through measuring the target population's internally defined standards, many of which turned out to be qualitative, non-monetary, non-material and long-term. Gender, age and ethnicity of the respondents significantly structured responses. Eckermann (2000), in a study of the Australian health sector, discusses the seemingly puzzling discrepancies between objective conditions of wellbeing and subjective perceptions. Eating disorders, high rates of suicide and drug abuse among people having all the objective conditions necessary for 'good health' point to the reality of people feeling deeply unhappy with the way the world is organised. She concludes that quality of life indicators need therefore to reflect more accurately people's

lived experience, which can only be achieved by abandoning universalistic assumptions. These and other studies (see Richmond et al. (2000), Ahluwalia (1997), Farlinger (1996), Shepherd (1995)) demonstrate that subjective perceptions of wellbeing sometimes have little to do with the provision of 'objective' conditions of wellbeing.

However there are two frameworks, the functionings framework devised by Sen (1985 in Saith and Harriss-White, 1998) and the capabilities framework devised by Nussbaum (2000) which plead the need to assess basic levels of functioning and capability according to indicators everyone may agree are valid, below which truly human living is not possible. The functionings framework argues that it is not possession of a commodity or the utility it provides that proxies for wellbeing, but rather what the person actually succeeds in doing with that commodity and its characteristics. Saith and Harris-White (1998) use Sen's framework to discuss three basic functionings: being healthy, being nourished and being educated. They assert that in developing countries gender differentials may exist even at the level of such basic functionings. Their assumptions are firstly, that these three functionings are so elementary as to be necessary for wellbeing. Secondly, a differential in any one of these functionings is assumed to result in a differential in wellbeing. The capabilities framework is philosophical in tenor and promotes a cross-cultural normative account of human capabilities. This approach asserts that there should be basic constitutional principles respected and implemented by all governments. Such principles should focus on human capabilities, that is, what people are actually able to do and to be, in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of a human being.

Acknowledging the validity of all these insights made by researchers seeking to understand and measure wellbeing has led to the thought that a quality of life index capable of eliciting subjective perceptions and also levels of basic functioning and capability could be very powerful. The following sections explain the methodological approach and outline the methods used.

Methodological Approach to Developing a Quality of Life Toolkit

The research process is embedded within a soft systems 'Weltanschauung', which necessarily implies a constructionist paradigm. Reality is not taken as a 'given' but rather is actively 'constructed' by people in specific contexts and specific times. According to Jiggins (pers. comm. 04/01) the necessity of *correspondence* that allows survival in a 'domain of existence' between the perceiving organism and its environment requires constructions that are effective in context, and are neither arbitrary nor purely self-willed. With respect to a quality of life index, then, this point implies that concepts of quality of life are invalid unless held to be reasonable by people *in situ*.

The constructionist paradigm further suggests that knowledge is being constantly re-made in the dynamic flux of contingent history, social interaction and changing context (ibid.), in other words knowledge is not static and cannot be captured as an artefact by the researcher. Therefore, rather than seeking to discover enduring and absolute truths the processes of knowledge production are as much a focus of the research activity as the end product. This point has important bearing upon the study framework since it suggests that not only is every quality of life framework limited in space and time, it also suggests that the *means of its making* shapes in crucial ways the end product. It follows therefore that the methodological framework – and the methods used – must be constructed with tremendous care. The author has chosen an action research approach since, according to Checkland et al. (1998) in the process of action research, the researcher enters a real world situation and aims both to improve it and to acquire knowledge.

The Methods Toolkit

Baum (1995 in Eckermann, 2000:41) says, ‘The process of evaluation is about telling the story of the people ... Often there will be more than one story, depending on whose perspective is being considered. These different perspectives should all be reported. (This) requires creative use of methods ... The skill lies in the evaluator’s ability to pull the patchwork of data together to form a coherent picture.’ The challenge was therefore to put together a methods toolbox capable of eliciting many stories, both subjective and normative. Since no previous work had been done with the respondents regarding concepts of wellbeing, the field study sought to elicit baseline data. Gender sensitivity was woven into all stages of the process.

A sampling frame was designed with the objective of canvassing opinion from different groups in each community. The technique chosen was wealth ranking as this can reflect insider views of wealth, notwithstanding certain difficulties with the method, in particular that households often have ‘elusive boundaries’ (Kandiyoti 1993).

Tools to Elicit Subjective Understandings of Wellbeing

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) was devised by Murray (1943 in Nazarea, 1998:161). In its original form cards with ambiguous representations are presented to respondents. The respondent is asked to tell a story about each card and the account is recorded verbatim. The premise lying behind this is that informants identify with some of the figures, revealing own self-concepts and deep wishes in process of story telling. The process, adapted for the Malagasy study, is described in the Box below. The TAT was chosen as it allows for complexity and emergence, key criterion, it is felt, to gaining an insight into how the women and men farmers conceptualise their wellbeing *in situ*.

Box 1: Thematic Apperception Test

- 1) Photos of common local scenes are shown to the respondent
- 2) Respondents are individually asked to ‘tell a story’ about each photo
- 3) The stories are tape recorded, transcribed and translated into French
- 4) These stories are then read by the evaluation team
- 5) Dominant themes emerging from stories relating to contextually sensitive definitions of quality of life are identified
- 6) The themes in each story are then scored by three individuals from different cultures and disciplines
- 7) A score 0-1 is given depending whether a particular theme absent or present in a story
- 8) Thus the maximum score per theme = 10 (according to frequency of citation by respondents, not frequency of repetition by particular respondent)
- 9) Statistical Analysis System is then used to calculate mean and standard deviation of total scores
- 10) Analysis of Variance (General Linear Model Procedure) is carried out to determine statistical differences in score means of themes across gender, ethnicity and age

Source: Adapted by the author from Nazarea et al. (1998)

The main consideration when applying the TAT in the Malagasy study was the number of photos to be used: eight as opposed to the original twenty in the Philippines study were shown in order to save time, to avoid tiring the respondents and to make the data set manageable. The author took the photographs in consultation with research colleagues after several days in the research area. The intent was to capture everyday – yet slightly de-familiarised - scenes in a familiar landscape.

The second tool employed was video. It was hoped video would permit respondents to show us their world and their sense of quality of life in their own words and images.

Tools to Elicit Normative Understandings of Wellbeing

The toolkit also contained a range of participatory methods well-known to the Malagasy research team. These aimed to elicit spatial and temporal data (for example transects, mapping, daily activity diagrams and seasonal calendars) and relate these to wellbeing. An access and control profile was also applied. The thought here was that quite simple, easy to use tools could create a complex picture if used flexibly and imaginatively.

The Quality of Life Index in Practice

The following sections provide an overview of the research sites and present some of the findings. A preliminary analysis of these is then offered. These two elements are covered in some depth in order to give an impression of how the index functioned in practice and to enable the reader to make sense of the discussion which follows.

The Research Sites

Both research sites, Plantation MonDésir and Brickaville, lie on Madagascar's rainy and agriculturally rich east coast.

Plantation MonDésir (PMD) is managed organically under Malagasy/European ownership with about 7 ha from 40 ha currently producing black pepper and various essential oils for export to South Africa and Europe. It is situated close to a major highway, small urban centres and popular tourist destinations. There are 35 plantation workers (7 women), of whom 12 (3 women) have permanent employment. Working hours are 07.30-11.30 and 13.00-16.30 during the week, Saturday being a half-day. Punctuality is a condition of employment. Daily workers receive 5000 FMG/day (approx. 0.75 Euro) and permanent workers 7500 FMG/day (approx. 1.25 Euro) as well as some holidays, payment of school fees for their children and occasional payment of medical costs.

The smallholder farmers in Brickaville live in a secondary forest belt adjacent to primary forest. Living from a blend of subsistence and cash crops, they have been encouraged to harvest the plentiful self-sown cinnamon in the secondary forest, or to establish cinnamon plantations, by the development agency USAID (operating as Landscape Development Interventions – LDI). The aim is to hinder tree felling in the primary forest by rendering the buffer zone profitable. These smallholders live in scattered dwellings at the end of tracks accessible only on foot some 20 kms from an urban centre where the marketing of their other produce is possible. Working through a small organic Malagasy-owned business, Phaelflor, LDI has helped set up simple distilleries in the area for first-order processing of cinnamon leaves and bark. After further refinement the essential oils, certified as organic by Ecocert, are exported by Phaelflor to the USA and Europe.

Research Findings

Bitty pieces of information coalesced into broad themes as fieldwork progressed. These thematic clusters were brought together by the author and Malagasy research team, following nightly discussions on the day's work (reporting, cross-checking, identifying information shortfalls and areas of translation difficulty) and regular 'time-outs' to synthesize the findings. An overview of site-specific definitions of wellbeing is provided here, followed by some of the thematic findings. The results of the participatory methods and the TATs are combined.

Plantation Mondésir

The men at PMD defined well-being as a lack of jealousy, whether in the community or among wives. They argued that rich people should share their knowledge of how to acquire

wealth as well as financially assist poorer people. Whilst it might appear desirable to marry several women, in practice it was best to opt for one wife since ‘women are not like zebu which can be kept in the same pen.’ Moreover it was necessary to work hard to attract a wife. Children were seen as essential for several reasons and ‘togetherness’ in a family, symbolised by working together at harvest for instance, was important. The women workers considered help around the home, a good harvest and children as contributing towards a sense of wellbeing. Jewellery and cash form a woman’s bride price, which she personally determines. Zebu cattle and land are seen by men and women workers as the core physical assets underpinning wellbeing. They consider both as long term investments which can be passed onto children. Zebu can assist with agricultural work and be sold for conversion into other assets; ownership was seen as conferring ‘honour’. Paddy not only can provide rice for consumption and sale but also soil for house building and a range of products like fish and plant products from the canals. However not a sole worker owned either of these assets.

Brickaville

Definitions of wellbeing in Brickaville were rather ambivalent. Poor people are defined as those having to seek food on a daily basis, having to work for others and as having many children. Their poverty is attributed to ‘laziness’ or alternatively poor time management. Middle-income people are thought to have a ‘perfect’ understanding of crop rotation, as having some cooking equipment but no cutlery or crockery, as aspiring to wealth but far more likely to lapse into poverty. Rich people have many cattle and much land and do not help others, even family. Very few ‘local’ people are wealthy, with immigrants to the area ‘working hard’ to accumulate (unlike local people who become rich through an ‘act of God’). Women in all categories were viewed as children until marriage, and single women sought remarriage as quickly as possible in order to succeed in farming. Fluidity of status is therefore the essence of these people’s lives, with uncertainty the hand governing their sense of wellbeing.

The contribution of organic cinnamon harvesting to farmer wellbeing was assessed. Farmers do not harvest wild cinnamon regularly because they find the work clearing the weeds around the cinnamon very strenuous. However since they are able to sell the products at any time to the distilleries, they harvest cinnamon when they need instant income for the purchase of small items like tobacco or to pay labour during the rice harvest. Only men are involved in cutting, transporting and selling. Although they lack knowledge of world prices, they believe the price paid for cinnamon to be low (approx. 0.20 euros/ 20 kgs of leaves) and argue also that men with many children do not have much time to work on cinnamon (max 2 hours/day) since food production must come first. Unlike most crops in the area cinnamon is not dual purpose (food/cash), leading to reluctance in establishing dedicated plantations. Men have been trained to work the distilleries.

Thematic findings

Self-sufficiency in food crops is central for both the smallholders at Brickaville and the workers at PMD. The latter rent land to ensure this need is met, growing a range of food and cash crops. The smallholders find that food self-sufficiency confers autonomy and treasured independence from wage labour, as well as a sense of pride.

The immediate environment of workers and smallholders was discussed. In Brickaville land is intensively and extensively cultivated, the latter under a light hand (wood lots) until such time when labour bottlenecks are solved through the acquisition of machinery or the children inherit. Some privately owned land is turned over to communal use. Increasingly outsiders are buying up land lying fallow. Villagers feel unable to refuse a request from ‘absentee

landlords.’ At PMD the women and men produced radically different interpretations of their environment – none of which they ‘own’ in the way farmers in Brickaville do. The men’s map was so large they sought to move cars out of the way, distant towns were indicated and roads stretched open-ended into infinity. The women’s map was enclosed and bounded by local roads and paths into a rough square. PMD lay at its heart. When asked to indicate how they would like to change their immediate environment, women said they wanted a clinic, school (also for adult literacy classes) and shop on the territory of PMD. Men wanted a range of income-generation and leisure facilities in the neighbourhood and also at PMD, as well as a school and clinic nearby.

With respect to time management, all workers at PMD are expected to ‘follow the clock’, and absolute punctuality over a period of at least 6 months is a pre-condition for consideration for permanent worker status. Only one third of workers have achieved this target. Permanent workers observe that ‘clock time’ limits their ability to do other activities. Women in particular, with responsibility for almost all household tasks including shopping and childcare as well as agricultural work together with their menfolk on their own agricultural plots find during the week that they ‘run against the clock.’ Women work together in the same group at the plant nursery, in the company of their pre-school children. Men are allocated to different tasks on a daily basis. Regarding leisure, women converse with neighbours whilst engaging in household tasks and chat on their way to market. Men participate in a range of organised leisure activities including football, walking with male friends and visiting video salons. *Fady* (taboos) regulate the non-plantation working week (i.e. mornings and evenings for permanent workers), with work on paddy forbidden on Tuesdays and Fridays. These days are allocated to work on other crops, market day and rest. Work on their own (rented) fields is highly seasonal for both genders.

The workers at PMD define health as an absence of illness and feeling good. They consider that their mental and physical state of health has deteriorated since the 1970s, attributing this decline to a complex mesh of factors. Natural disasters like cyclones (thought to be increasingly common) have damaged key cash crops like lychees, which are slow to recover, creating financial difficulty. Cyclone damage is coupled with the worry each rainy season that another cyclone may come, and there is helplessness when one does. The collapse in world prices for coffee and other commodities has hit hard. Also, they must pay for modern health care, which used to be free. Women workers commented in particular on their reproductive health. They suffer many miscarriages and stillborns and reported great sadness at each loss. A hospital birth costs 50,000 FMG, the equivalent of two weeks wages. Children suffer high death rates in 0-5 group and fall prey to seasonal diseases. Treatment of all illnesses is commonly based on self-diagnosis with remedies consisting of a combination of single purchases of modern drugs from local shops, self-medication through plants and consultation of traditional healers and as a last resort consultation and treatment at local clinic. Workers generally would prefer clinical diagnosis and treatment but find this too costly.

In contrast, the smallholders at Brickaville report excellent mental and physical health, finding that their water was clear, the air clean, that there was no pollution and their home-grown food had no additives. Stress was not a problem since their society was not heavily regulated. There is a ‘lack of rules’, no night-time rowdiness and neighbours live quite far apart. Medical care is based on medicinal plants with hospital treatment seen as a last resort because of expense and distance. Some want a clinic to be established in the vicinity.

External observers such as health care workers contend that health indicators in both areas are extremely poor for both genders, adults and children. The underlying cause of ill-health was attributed to malnutrition, a factor never mentioned by farmers or workers.

The workers at PMD believe that a school education improves one’s ability to manage a business, that it helps to develop one’s ‘mind’ and that it enables escape from the ‘misery’ of

a hard agricultural life. Through attaining a well-paid job school graduates gain social recognition. Moreover, education (i.e. understanding French) permits one to understand foreigners. Women workers also wanted basic literacy classes for themselves. In Brickaville – where no children actually attend school - most smallholders felt that basic literacy was however very important in order to avoid exploitation by literate people and some desired a university-level education for their children. One external commentator observed that considerable mistrust affects the farmers' dealings with Ecocert, the organic certifier in Madagascar. This agency requires a large sheaf of documents including diaries to be completed in French, a language most respondents neither speak nor write. In general the farmers said they would not expect all children to go to school since family togetherness was important and so was work on the land. Schools are few in the area because of lack of government funds to rebuild those lost through cyclone GERALDA in 1994 and to pay teacher salaries.

Despite the aspirations of the workers at PMD, the drop out rate of children who do attend school is incredibly high. According to educationalists in the PMD area, where schools are plenty, the reasons are: poverty; the fact that children prefer other activities; successful pupils are viewed with jealousy by their contemporaries; teenage pregnancies; a lack of role models in the area to show you what you could become; a general lack of job openings for educated pupils and finally, though parents want their children to go to school, they do not encourage their children put in the work necessary.

Preliminary Analysis of Findings

Unsurprisingly the findings do not resolve themselves neatly into a clear pattern. However distinct - sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory - themes emerged as fieldwork progressed. The clusters outlined here arise from the author's own analysis. They are: security/ insecurity, upward mobility, entitlements, affirmation of values and managing complexity.

Security and insecurity

The plantation workers and the smallholders constantly confront sources of 'unknownness', both natural and man-made. These include cyclones – which might or might not come, documents which they cannot read yet may be required to sign, and a lack of knowledge regarding the 'true' price of commodities on the world market. The respondents currently do not have access to the means to make these sources of insecurity manageable.

Important actual or longed-for sources of security in peoples' lives are self-sufficiency in food production, land ownership and zebu. These assets ensure one can *choose* whether to work for others, and that money – or the lack of it – does not govern lives. This resistance to incorporation into the money economy is significant because it implies that financial reward is not the most important incentive. This is interesting given that fair trade initiatives tend to concentrate on fair pricing.

Upward Mobility

Dissatisfaction with current status is particularly evident at PMD. Upward mobility is considered a goal by many in order to gain the respect of others and to ensure material improvements. School education is viewed as the key to another life, proffering skills not to be won in agriculture which are nevertheless necessary to run a business or gain a salaried post. The men's map is particularly aspirational, showing as it does a world seemingly without boundaries.

Entitlements

Linked to the view that education is a key factor able to dissolve the binds that restrain one to a social status and position allocated at birth is the notion of entitlements. The workers at PMD, living in a world far more cosmopolitan than the farmers at Brickaville, feel they have a right to education and modern health care facilities. The fact that access remains in the main barred is a source of frustration and dis-ease. The workers do not have enough money to support their children adequately through the schooling years and hospital treatment can easily cost a couple of weeks wages. The high rate of teenage pregnancy may reflect not (only) disempowerment but the desire of young women to determine their own status, in a society which views them as girls until marriage.

Affirmation of Values

At Brickaville on the other hand the concept of entitlements seems less clearly defined. Rather, a strategy to manage the – objectively seen – high levels of disease and profound financial poverty would appear to be affirmation of their own lifestyle and values, in particular *independence* and *self-sufficiency*. Above all it would seem that their society remains subject to internal rules and regulations which are deeply internalised. The smallholders are anxious to retain their tightly bounded world, rejecting integration into an ‘entrepreneurial’ way of being. Familial ‘togetherness’ is treasured in both Brickaville and PMD and this value may militate against the view that upward mobility should be a goal.

Is social cohesiveness gained at the expense of choice? The smallholders to date have tended to reject values and privileges allocated by outsiders, for instance ‘model farmer’ status. Financial wealth carries with it a host of social obligations to kin and those who neglect or reject their duties are viewed with hostility by the rest of society.

Managing Complexity

The clearest source of tension at PMD is the obligation of workers to adhere to ‘clock time’. Arguably two sorts of time conflict here. The one is ‘owned’ and imposed by the management of PMD in order to assure that certain tasks are achieved within a planned timetable. Production targets need to be met which requires in turn worker discipline. The other sort of time is one infinitely more flexible and attuned to a society in which multiple polycyclic rhythms are at play and not necessarily in harmony. The agricultural year, pregnancy, festivals, seasonality of disease, market days and daily maintenance work all need to be accommodated. Although several part-time workers at PMD said they would like to achieve permanent status due to the range of privileges it attracts they were clearly unable to accommodate themselves to a timetable which left them so little space to manage the complexity of their lives. Women in particular need to multi-task constantly.

By applying this insight the women’s map might be understood in two ways: on the one hand it seems to portray a small and limited existence taking place within a few square kilometres. Quite unlike the men’s map, women’s aspirations would seem to be clearly delimited and to signify the nature of prevailing gender relations. The fact that the women located all of their ‘wish-list’ items on the terrain of PMD demonstrates their sense of agency and how to employ their agency most effectively. Rather than work through their own society to achieve their goals the women may believe the ‘external’ management of PMD to be more susceptible to change. On the other hand it can be argued that although all this may be true, the women’s map is also a profoundly ‘felt’ map depicting a known and felt environment extending as far as one can walk. The clear boundaries placed around it, and the wish to locate a clinic, school and shop next to their work place may be understood as a further expression of their need and desire to manage and simplify the complexity of their lives within their current capabilities.

Discussion of the Quality of Life Index

This section is divided into two parts, covering a discussion of the methods and then analysis, which looks at how indicators of well-being might be derived from the findings.

Methods

During fieldwork a tension emerged between the necessity of explaining each participatory method, e.g. mapping, clearly enough for the process to be understood, yet vaguely enough to permit a range of potential outcomes. In a sense this conundrum is embedded within the approach: a method is designed to simplify 'reality' and capture a particular genre of data, for instance temporal or spatial. The mask thus placed upon a complex situation snips off threads in the web of meaning – ironically it could be argued that to arrive at a simple picture a coherent situation is forcibly rendered incoherent.

How did the TAT activity fare, given that it was specifically selected for its potential to surprise? It is in fact a structured way of permitting and guiding emergence. Work in the field showed that it demanded particular skills of the respondent. Importantly, they needed to be 'image-literate'. Although the images chosen were ones the respondents encountered everyday, some had difficulty reading the image, interpreting a heap of *fady* boulders' at PMD as bungalows for instance. Naturally an interesting story ensued and the data can be said to be valuable. Nevertheless if all respondents had correctly interpreted a particular image as, for example, being about a school, the divergence in the stories would have been a source of potentially greater interest. The respondents also needed to talk rather uninhibitedly about each image on their own for some time, not always an easy task. Indeed one old man, fretting at the method, said, 'Stories are created through dialogue with present and past generations'. Finally, on a more pedantic note the translators into French found the strong local dialects very hard to contend with.

All the same the TATs provided riveting and highly divergent data in a way that no other method succeeded in doing. Each photo stirred a very different flow of consciousness in each respondent. For instance a market scene led a young man to muse as follows: money is vital to purchase jewellery to please a woman, a man needs a wife to gain the respect of others, it is important to take good care of one's wife and so a man needs to work, the wife should help the man. The same photo led an older woman to comment on the beauty of the village, the pleasure of strolling with friends, tourism, the distance of the market from home and finally the fact that low prices signalled a national election.

Despite the provisos outlined, there is no doubt that a particular strength of the TAT was the oral nature of the activity. Indeed, the fieldwork in general demonstrated that lengthy discussion of all the visual activities was essential and that sometimes it was better just to talk (though of course visual methods also provided a means of structuring many discussions). Importantly, some respondents actually feared the visual methods, feeling they might be 'signing away their land' by placing a symbol like a cross on paper. This is a salutary reminder to people working in highly literate societies what a peculiar jumble of symbols some participatory methods produce, and how pen and paper can symbolise exploitation, not freedom.

Analysis

It was argued above that methods dissemble 'reality'. The analytic stage needs therefore to reconstruct 'reality' in terms acceptable to the respondents and also to others, given that the aim of the activity is to produce a quality of life index to which other stakeholders might agree to be beholden, for instance retailers sourcing from smallholders. The analytic stage is

particularly sensitive since it will generate indicators and from thence an action plan to operationalise these.

One may posit the need for creative lateral thinking when interpreting the results of fieldwork and trying to derive indicators. Lateral thinking would be a way to reveal or indeed create 'surprise'. This approach is potentially useful not only to the researcher but also to the respondents because it is a way of 'alienating' the information they have provided and in so doing 're-newing' thoughts they may have regarding their wellbeing. This would help provide the distance necessary to formulate indicators and action plans. Such analysis would of course need to be done in the field.

Clearly the toolkit did not only serve to make visible well-known or latent views of wellbeing among the target population, though some respondents said that the mere fact of discussing health, for example, made them learn new things about themselves. The respondents also had particular agendas which they hoped to realise through the research project – for instance the women workers at PMD seized the chance to argue for an adult literacy programme, clinic and shop at the workplace. Thus a complex iterative interaction of agency with the method was set up making a kind of double thinking necessary at the analysis stage. It could be argued that the respondents' second-guessing and manipulation skewed the data set; however it would be more fruitful to argue that this process revealed many truths about respondent views on wellbeing and also each group's relational power. Such 'data-skewing' is inevitable and so great care needs to be taken at the sampling stage to ensure that a kind of 'counter-skewing' takes place in the selection of respondents. Some authors argue, indeed, that data-sets need to be weighted in favour of those known to more powerless in a given situation: 'We should and can weave into our analysis of indicators of sustainability and quality of life issues of internal differentiation ... i.e. asymmetric relations with reference to class, gender, and ethnicity – differences all too readily swept under the gender and scale neutrality assumptions that continue to stymie development projects to this day' (Nazarea et al. 1998: 166-7, see also Ahluwalia 1997).

Another conundrum to be addressed is the marriage between internal and external viewpoints on well-being. In the introductory sections it was argued that a quality of life index needs to combine both of these. However the results show that some internal viewpoints on the state of respondent education and health most certainly do not coincide with the assessments of external observers regarding education, health and nutrition. Thus the criteria set by Sen, Saith and Harris-White, and Nussbaum regarding basic functionings and capabilities would not appear to be recognised within the internal viewpoint. It would therefore be difficult to elaborate indicators relating to basic functionings meaningful to the respondents at the current time. Indeed, Madagascar is a country where 'education campaigns' on such issues by development agencies are seen to have largely failed. Given that external observers may continue to consider the meeting of basic functionings criteria to be essential, another approach needs to be devised.

Conclusion

The findings and analyses outlined here will be taken on into work with German consumers with the aim of discovering how they might 'add value' to organic products in the form of social labels. Through helping create a more transparent production to consumption chain, this work might enable 'more than purely price' values to be rewarded in the market place. Work will also continue on revising and streamlining the quality of life index itself.

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