

Quality of Life, Poverty and Inequality in Ethiopia: Some Psychological Observations

(Prepared for the Bath Wellbeing in Developing countries Research Project Workshop)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of quality of life, poverty, inequality and subjective well being are complex, not easily defined (in agreeable terms) and not (much) studied in the Ethiopian context - at least from a social - psychological perspective. I would like to briefly describe some of the social-psychological situation in Ethiopia - focusing on culture and values, education, health and interpersonal relationships. My comments will be based on some empirical data (collected by me and others) and observations. The comments should not be taken as scientific findings, but as experiences and observations.

The presentation and the points I will raise will be in the context of the Bath Wellbeing in Developing countries study/project. From the observations I made on Tuesday's workshop, I think some crude definition of some concepts would be necessary. Hence, I will start with crude definitions which should be refined in due course/through the project phase. I will limit my self to the definition of:

1. Culture
2. Value
3. Poverty
4. Quality of Life/Wellbeing

1. **Culture** - has some 50 definitions. I will take UNESCO's (1998: 26) definition "The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group and encompasses the art, literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, tradition and beliefs." Hence culture is a relatively stable way of life that has been learned, is shared by most members of the society, and plays a significant role in the shaping of human behavior. Culture survives as long as it yields some satisfaction to the dominant members, and is likely to adjust and adopt to changes in the social environment.

Rules and norms that govern interpersonal relations, division of labor (male - female, child -adult, etc), dwelling styles, family relationships and parenting styles are the dictates of the specific culture. Some of the ideas come from Federico, Matsumoto, Triandis, Rokeach etc. work.

2. **Values/Basic**, social, cultural values/ are principles or standards that lead to judgements of either relative or absolute utility, goodness, or importance or that guide choices among alternatives. They refer to goals people aspire to achieve, pass on to others and use as criteria to evaluate own and others' behaviors in various situations. They are desirable actions and goals, are guiding principles and subjective standards. (Williams, Rokeach, Feather, Triandis, Schwartz, Kluckhohn).
3. **Poverty** Refers to low standard of living which lasts long enough to undermine the health, morale and self-respect of the individuals or a group.

As Aklilu and Dessalegne (2000) define it (by the poor themselves) poverty is the situation where one is unable to eat, dress and send children to school. It is the situation where people go hungry, are ill (have poor health), dependent on others, and worry about daily subsistence. Poor are those who are not meeting their basic needs (food, health, care, etc). The landless peasants, the unemployed, daily laborers and the marginalized belong to the poor group.

4. **Quality of Life/Wellbeing** - objective, subjective: wellbeing is the state of being happy, healthy and satisfied. Quality referring to degree of excellence, grade, or distinguishing characteristics.

Usually quality of life measures/indices include per capita income, life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate, adult literacy rate and political and civil liberties.

In the Ethiopian context it mainly refers to the availability of resources/goals/to satisfy basic needs. For Akililu and Dessalegne's study, well being has to do with having farm land, cattle, farm implements and a house in rural settings. It is having some job (employment) or business (some income) in the urban setting. Hence, those without land, ox/cattle, or income are poor and their well being is in jeopardy.

Factors contributing to/related to personal satisfaction and happiness include:

- Economic and material condition - commodities
- Health (state of health)
- Nutritional/Food
- Job, work, employment
- Political situation - Freedom, Human rights and liberties
- Education
- Relationships
- Family
- Religion, beliefs, etc.

I will limit myself to a few issues which were not adequately/not dealt with on Tuesday:

1. Education
2. Health
3. Socio-cultural issues (culture, social relationships)

1. Education:

The MOE states that the 'Education system is characterized by low access and quality, inequitable distribution of educational opportunity, inefficient administration and low expenditure.

Improving equity by narrowing enrollment gaps for girls and boys, for rural and urban population, expanding access to education with emphasis on primary education, achieving universal primary education by 2015, improving quality of education, reducing educational wastage, and increasing the budget of education are the strategies and plans.... Gross primary enrollment (2001/02) was 61.6%, Net primary enrollment in 2001/02 was 52.2%. Gender and regional disparity continues - perhaps getting wider.

2. Health - Low access, only 52% have access.

- Access & quality problems exist.
- Development of healthy environment and increasing access to health service are the Government plans.
- HIV/AIDS - is a pandemic that is affecting all regions and age groups. About 3 million people are living with it.
- Prevention of the spread of the disease requires a multisectorial and serious efforts.

- Malnutrition, malaria, TB... etc are also problems.

3. socio - cultural Issues (My focus area):

A. Parenting styles - affecting WB of children:

1. Corporal punishment is widely practiced
2. Authoritarian parenting style prevails
3. Seeking obedience from children exists
4. Lack of participation in matters affects them
5. The existence of over 100,000 street children
6. 80% of the street children are from the poor strata

B. Vales/Basic - Social values/:

i. *Positive dominant/explicit values include:*

- Helping each other
- Peace
- Education/wisdom
- Familism
- Respectfulness
- Religiosity
- Cooperation (collective notions and works)

ii. *Implicit negative values:*

- Ethnocentrism/Racism
- Superstitiousness
- Low respect for crafts and labor
- Mistrust of others (suspiciousness)
- Fatalism
- Aggressiveness/Violence
- Cleverness, etc

Their roles in poverty, in QOL -- etc. needs to be considered.

C. Violent Behaviors at Various Levels:

i. *Quite a large number of violent behaviors are observed in schools:*

- Physical attack
- Kicking
- Battering
- Pinching
- Harassment
- Intimidation
- Threatening
- Insulting

- Yelling
- Name calling
- Shoving/pushing, etc
- ii. *Domestic Violence/Family violence/wife battering takes place throughout the country:*
 - Slapping
 - Beating on the body
 - Pushing, kicking
 - Dragging
 - Insulting
 - Throwing objects at the persons and various sexual harassment take place.
- iii. *The battered women experience:*
 - Pains and bruises
 - Psychological distress
 - Fear
 - Insomnia
 - Low self-esteem
 - Nightmares
 - Shame, guilt
 - Feeling of inferiority, etc.
- iv. *Causes/Reasons for the wife battering:*
 - Misunderstandings and lack of discussion
 - Behavioral differences
 - Economic hardship
 - Infidelity/adultery - suspension of adultery
 - Financial/resources mismanagement
 - Provocation/insult
 - Jealousy, etc.

All these Social Psychological situations would affect QOL and need to be addressed in the Research project.

Thank you

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