

The Local Conception of Wellbeing in Lao Social Cultural Construction

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Abstract

Although material resources are insufficient, wellbeing becomes a promise concept which leads to an argument that wellbeing is a socially and culturally defined concept. Therefore, wellbeing can be varied with many different perspectives whose definition is challenged. This paper proposes to explore the local notion of wellbeing within the social cultural contexts of Lao PDR. The study adopted a qualitative method, 35 representatives of the households participated in the focus group discussion in Sangthong district, and 15 key informants were in-depth interviewed. The content analysis and triangular technique were employed for data analysis and reviewing. This study argues that to develop the measurement of development should include the wellbeing of social and cultural dimension. The result shows that the notion of wellbeing's meaning in local Lao people conception are comprised of seven dimensions, including family; society; health; education; security, leader and public management; environment; and economic dimension. This finding suggests that the social cultural construction of wellbeing should be considered a form of work to develop the measurement of development in Laos by including the social and cultural wellbeing.

Keywords: Lao PDR, local conception, wellbeing, social cultural construction

1. Introduction

After Second World War (WWII) many Least Developing Countries (LDCs) concentrated their development on economic growth heavily, as it was assumed that it would lead their people to an improvement in quality of life. However, they realized that a significant number of their population still did not acquire the benefits of development and still suffered from poverty, non-sustainable environment, and new public problems after processing the initial term of high growth. Therefore, the mainstream monetary measure of wellbeing attainment cannot be seen as representative indicators. They can even appear to be absurd in the case of a serious economic crisis in which Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data can still increase even though the wellbeing of the majority of the population and communities decreases (Xing & Muchie, 2003). If we agree in that development can lead to the improvement of quality of life which is partly defined by perceptions of their own being, the use of GDP to measure development is therefore will be insufficient. With the recognition of limitation of GDP (Sen, 1988), as well as many other scholars (Xing & Muchie, 2003), there have been concepts to pursue measurements of development, and one of these perceptions comes under the idea of "wellbeing" which the definition remains the area of contention (Dodge et al., 2012).

One important point of moving from seeing development achievement from GDP to wellbeing is that these achievements should be socially and culturally defined. The relevance of society and culture are increasingly recognized in writings on both wellbeing and development. Following to this line of idea, there has been argued that wellbeing is socially and culturally constructed (WeD, 2007). This concept would be enable the development policy meets the need of local people and improves to strengthen the quality of life.

The movement of defining development achievement from “economic growth” to broader concepts of “wellbeing” thus requires our understanding of local notion regarding development and wellbeing. The issue here does not simply to see non-material aspect in oppose to economic growth in development. It is rather how to accommodate both “objective” and “subjective” worlds into the concept of development, suggested by this study, which could be done through exploring local conception of wellbeing.

The inclusion of social cultural notion of wellbeing into development policy is particularly challenging for Laos, for two reasons. Firstly, there are huge diversities of social cultural groups of population. Secondly, the Lao PDR has embarked on “market-led” development since the reform program called “New Economic Mechanism (NEM)” in 1986. The development efforts aim to transform the country from a central planned economy that is relatively isolated and subsistence based to a market economy that is open, production and service oriented (Souvannavong, 2000). Since the introduction of economic reforms under the NEM, considerable changes have been evident in high economic growth, macroeconomic stabilization, and structural adjustments. As the government revenue and international aid increased and expanded, family owned farms were dependent on agriculture, many state enterprises in manufacturing were leased or sold and state-owned agricultural marketing enterprises were disassembled.

Since the start of the reform, economic growth has been changed prominently, particularly in the year of 1990s GDP of the Lao PDR reached 6.3%. In 2000–2012, annual growth rate was on the peak of 7.4%. However, the most number of Lao populations still did not fully and equally get out from poverty and some significant social problems (NSC, 2011). Additionally, there are several critics on development to the focusing on the economic growth. There brings the queries on the new development concept under the NEM whether it would be succeeded for Lao people to achieve the wellbeing or not. To respond to its queries we would need to understand what Lao local conception of wellbeing is.

The subject of this study is the local notion of wellbeing with in social cultural contexts of the Lao PDR. The wellbeing has been widely perceived with many methods to research and there are different perspectives on this concept. This work is on track with the tradition of the social cultural constructionism. In this paper the most important viewpoint is to find out the exact meaning and component of wellbeing in local Lao people conception. The collecting data are centered on the questions of: What are the things Lao people need to have in order to maintain good live (having)?; What would Lao people like to be or which goals/needs that are considered to be highly value for Lao people living (thinking)?; What can Lao people do in order to achieve what they would like to be (doing)? This study argues that to develop the measurement of development should include the wellbeing of social and cultural aspects.

The paper is organized to begin with setting out a framework of “Wellbeing” in term of the theoretical conception of wellbeing. Then, it provides a short introduction to the Lao context, the field sites themselves, and the research methods employed, followed by the presentation of the empirical results. The last substantive section of the paper relates these results back to the conceptual framework, and drawing the paper to a conclusion.

2. Theoretical Conception of Wellbeing

There has been generally argued that the development is a concept to impose from outside, so that local conception of development or progress is denied. Recently the study of the development is turning more to local knowledge indigenous development that it will focus mainly on the linkage of people wellbeing. Therefore, if wellbeing is perceived as a concept of development, the study of its meaning is hence a process to be operated together with the development.

The wellbeing is a multi-varied and dynamic phenomenon. There is a concept under the family’s quality of life, subjective wellbeing or happiness, welfare, life satisfaction and human development. There are many different perspectives of wellbeing but in numerous dimensions they are coincide each other (McGillivray, 2007). Some scholars like Easterlin (2001) conceived that it could be exchanged, and used as proxies. However, all concepts having mentioned here point out that wellbeing has different meaning which cannot be refused that those are linked and being portions of wellbeing.

As far as the concept of wellbeing has been originated from Aristotle and the teaching of the Buddha or from other major philosophies (McGregor, 2008), the word of wellbeing is not a new concept then. However, most founding religions have defined the concept of wellbeing to be more vivid and offer moral direction for life. As modern social sciences Jeremy Bentham has argued that the utilitarian conception of wellbeing remains current in economics (Collard, 2003). Wellbeing in this concept means “Satisfaction with life”. Presently, it is also

popular to identify Adam Smith's concern with wellbeing in his "Theory of Moral Sentiment" as well as in "The Wealth of Nations" (McGregor, 2008).

Amartya Sen's (1999) has challenged the term wellbeing to the utilitarianism of mainstream welfare economics recently. His disputes with Martha Nussbaum, who is guarded of the term precisely since its utilitarian baggage, and the imaginative and brighten work of many of their discussants, have improved the recent development literature (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Alkire, 2002; Gasper, 2004). There are also other remarkable presents of the concept to be more comprehensible including Partha Dasgupta's "Inquiry into Human Wellbeing and Destitution" (Dasgupta, 1993); and some of the writing of Robert Chambers on the notion of "responsible wellbeing" (Chambers, 2004).

Amartya Sen states that the ultimate effect from the development is making individual success on their needs, and the individuals have freedom on chosen goal by themselves. In other words, this concept considers an individual's life as a joining of diverse "Functioning" that is freely chosen called "Capabilities". The income is not just only a tool, but also the trail leading to success (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2008). However, Sen has been criticized that the idea is highly abstract (Promphakping, 2006).

The emergence of positive psychology, the work of Nobel prize-winner Daniel Kahneman and others debating the virtues of pleasure and understandings of wellbeing (Kahneman et al., 1999; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006; McGregor, 2008) is another discussion in the social sciences that have also raised the profile of the notion in academic and policy circles. This strengthening work has found much significance in coexistent social sciences and policy circles. However, wellbeing is a growing area of research, yet the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered (Dodge et al., 2012).

To conduct the research that is summarized in this paper it is crucial to develop a precise and practical definition of wellbeing. The conception of wellbeing used in this paper synthesizes contributions from three broad traditions in the social sciences which argue that each must be comprehended if we are to develop a more holistic concept of wellbeing. There are four major thoughts from these three traditions that have been drawn upon to develop wellbeing concept. These are those concerned with theories of human needs, as exemplified by Doyal and Gough (1991); the work of Sen on capabilities, functioning and freedom (Sen, 1999), combined with the resource profiles approach (Gough, McGregor, & Camfield, 2007). This is a livelihood type framework that allows exploration of the ways in which different combinations of resources support or obstructs the capacity to act meaningfully; and the work on subjective wellbeing, life quality satisfaction. Thus, the concept and methodology of wellbeing that has been modified by the Research Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WeSD) will be employed. The concept includes (1) What the needs and resources that people have "Having"; (2) What satisfaction with life of people would like to be "Thinking"; and (3) What they do to achieve the things that they satisfy "Doing" or "trying to achieve/satisfy". Consequently, the meaning of wellbeing should depend on situations that humans are able to achieve their goals by using the thing they have and the way that they do. It can be an objective and a subjective wellbeing. The hypothesis is to use wellbeing indicators as a best tool to measure the result of the development, because it reflects subjective and objective wellbeing which is not just what people have, but what they think, what and why they do. Moreover, it also reflects the relationship between people and others (Mee-Udon, 2009).

The issue to be addressed here on the idea of wellbeing is on how people might live well together in society and have good change in development. While it is necessary to focus on the wellbeing of the person; this definition is nevertheless equally concerned with notions of "the good society" and "the common good" (Deneulin & Townshend, 2007). The ability of the person to achieve wellbeing is dependent largely on society being structured as to make this possible. Therefore, wellbeing of the person can not be perceived without understanding the role that wider social collectivities play in creating the conditions that support to achieve wellbeing (McGregor, 2008). Moreover, wellbeing here encompasses the notion of happiness but cannot directly be equated with it as a person who is happy yet unwillingly suffers from malnutrition cannot be regarded as experiencing wellbeing. While suffering various privations in terms of freedoms or material needs, it is possible to be happy. But this cannot be taken into account as an adequate indicator of a more comprehensive notion of a person's wellbeing, nor can this conception be equated with wealth. Because being materially wealthy but miserable about the quality of life does not add up to wellbeing. As recent experience from more opulent societies indicates that wealth can also translate into declines in wellbeing, for example, through obesity or increased mental dissatisfaction due to destructive status competition. Thus, the study of such meaning of wellbeing in Lao society is very important for supporting the development in Laos, as the social cultural constructed wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a crucial achievement to indicate the potentiality of people living. Wellbeing is different between countries, because it involves closely to the physical and mental state of family members and society. In order to be able achieving wellbeing and make this possible for a person depends largely on structured society. In addition, the intensity of such an increase in wellbeing differs across countries in the sense that least developed countries have converged among them whereas medium developed countries have converged toward highly developed nations (Jordá & Sarabia, 2014). Hence, to study the concept of human wellbeing in Laos it should rely on the context of Lao people.

At the present no wellbeing's measurement in Laos, even the Lao government has afore-mentioned concept of wellbeing since the 7th of National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSC, 2011). The Lao government has pursued the principle of development indicators to enterprate the situation of poverty, development, quality of life, and livelihood of its people. These are all important parts of wellbeing, namely The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Human Development Index (HDI), Poverty Vulnerability Index (PVI), and the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS). However, in such diversity of cultural settings, to develop a standard set of measurement of wellbeing is more needed.

Furthermore, there are some questions to be answered: What we call the "development" leading us to the right direction? What are the goals that human beings want to achieve? Which process would lead them to their goals? Thus, these studies are interested in what the wellbeing is in terms of Lao people conception, and what the components are that could make the clear knowledge about the concept in their perspective.

As mentioned-above, this research is adopted the tradition of the social cultural constructionism from the theoretical perspective. An initial important factor which is vital to have in account is that the social cultural constructionism has different theoretical roots (Stam, 2002), and it is possible to recognize these roots from the work of Giam-battista Vico (Lock Strong, 2010) though it was very long time ago. Vico indicates that "worlds are artificially constructed by people, as people change their constructions they transform their worlds, and in doing so change themselves" (Hosking & Morley, 2004, pp. 1-14). This statement is central in the social cultural constructionism theory.

Another important characteristic of the social cultural constructionism theory is about the language which is not only a means to know the meanings, but it co-constitutes reality that is a part in the epistemological and ontological constitution of the reality (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002). If the reality is a social cultural construction, how this was born then. The answer is the social interaction process, and more specifically in the relationship between the different social actors (Gergen, 1985). Additionally, important implications for the social cultural constructionism perspective are about how the scientific knowledge in social science must be constituted, and what specific methods are suitable for this scientific enterprise. Nevertheless, the same conception can not be used both in social and physical sciences because concepts like objectivity or measurement have very different meaning (Luckmann, 2008). Furthermore, another important dimension of people capacity to be in contact with the world is emotion which is the first level of the sensible and concrete dimension in wellbeing such as fear, anger, joy, compassion or sorrow (Kitayama et al., 2000). Therefore, the questions raising here are: What is about the nature of the emotions? Can the emotions be social cultural constructions? The answer for the social cultural constructionists is that the emotions are a socio cultural phenomenon (Armon-Jones, 1986).

Concisely, in this research the social cultural constructionism describes the social reality as the interplay between the social actors and their historical and cultural contexts which aims to find out the meaning of wellbeing conception for Lao people in which they are living. Also the objective of this paper is to explore the concept of wellbeing based on theories and the conceptions in a more specific way of Lao people that is developed in the tradition of the social cultural constructionism. A field study was conducted in Sangthong district and qualitative methods were adopted in this study.

3. Laos Context and Field Sites

Compare to other countries in Asia, Lao PDR is among the smallest one. After the reform, particularly after 1986, the Lao government introduced their reformation known as *jin-ta-na-kan mai* (*New Imagination*), the economic growth has played a crucial role in development, and the wellbeing is more defined by GDP. The introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) or market economic mechanism system was considered as far-reaching reform in order to achieve sustainable economic growth in Laos (Anderson et al., 2007).

In the past, the Lao economy followed a centrally planned system. Since the introduction of NEM in 1986, the country has been transitioning to a more open-market economy. This has led to the liberalization of prices and markets, including opening up of the economy to foreign investment and trade, and implementing reforms in the

legal, regulatory, and financial sectors. Moreover, as Lao PDR became a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and the ASEAN Free Trade Area, this is considered one of the most important foreign policy objectives of the country. As believed that it allows for the creation of a more secure, stable and mutually beneficial relationship with its neighbors in the region. Lao PDR has also put in a request to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), and has officially become a full member of the WTO on February 2, 2013. In addition, the national priority target aiming to reduce poverty, make wellbeing of people, and to shed the country's status from a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the year 2020. However, having high growth in the initial period, the great number of Lao people still did not fully and equally reap the benefits of development and still suffered from some social problems and quality of life such as poverty, health and environment problems.

Sangthong district, the study area, is mountainous and most remote area of nine district of Vientiane Capital. Its total area is of 752.7 square kilometer with unique culture, fresh air and rich of natural and mineral resources such as gold, copper, coal and some others. Apart from that, the district also has various rivers namely Tone, Sang and Mekong rivers which can be used as a source of production and livelihood of local people. There are 37 villages, five village groups that are different in the development levels. There are 5417 households out of 27 683 population, female 13 628, including 92.98% of low land group, Khamu 7% and Hmong 0.02%. Sangthong is one of the base districts for revolution, people are patriotic and nationalists, and strengthen solidarity. 95% of population is active agriculture in producing the crops (Sangthong District Office [SDO], 2012). They have good culture and live in the prosperous natural resources such as soil, forest, air, mineral and rivers which are suitable for the sustainable economic development in the future. After the independence on 2 December 1975, Sangthong is one of the selected development districts as others. Sangthong is also connected with the National High Way No.11 which links the main road with all villages and the villages group. Sangthong has the standard of electricity, public telephone, radio, school, hospital, and some others, which are located in the central of district as it facilitates the social and economic development.

However, from the determination of Lao government, Sangthong is one of the poorest districts in 47 poor districts in the Lao PDR (NSC, 2011). It is also found that there are many challenges for the economic and social development. For instance, the livelihood of people are based on the natural conditions, it hardly adapts the status while the development has been changing. There are no sufficient infrastructures such as road are damaged in the wet season, and human resources are not enough for the advocacy campaign for the development from government and private sectors. In addition, Sangthong is limited in education and culture, particularly in female population. Otherwise, the government sector has initiated to increase the role of women and this brings the general development to be better than in the past.

Moreover, as mentioned, Sangthong has traditionally the poorest district (SDO, 2012). Most of the populations living in villages do the farming. To meet household needs, however, they have, for some decades, moved to other more prosperous parts of the country and crossed border to Thailand. The reason is for circular labor migrants, remitting a portion of their income to sustain livelihoods in settlements. In recent years factories have launched in Sangthong, which improved transportation infrastructure and lower costs. This has advantages for many families to return for farming and shrinking land holdings, while meeting rising needs and growing expectations. At the present, regarding to the government's report, in 2014 Sangthong district will be announced to be the "development district". It means Sangthong will be out of the poorest district which can be a good example for the development in the Lao PDR.

4. Methods

The study employs qualitative research. Fieldwork was conducted during 2012–2013. To primarily understood the concept of wellbeing in local Lao people perspective by taking social phenomenon under phenomenology into critical consideration (Creswell, 2008).

The procedure of the study, start with reviewing relevant documents as well as the research data from field work, which focused on household and community level. Then, the focus group discussions with 35 household representatives were employed. Participants in the target groups were selected by purposive sampling in five villages. There involved various issues relating to the development and wellbeing in Lao local society, implementation at the local level such as seniors or chiefs of village who have responsibility for political, economic, social, and environmental aspects. Follow by in-depth interviews were employed by using the interview guidelines that can get from the reviewed relevant documents step, for the key informants from public and private organizations. Interviewees include 15 people whose involved in policy development at the local, provincial, and central levels. These include chiefs of village or seniors in amount of 5 persons by selecting from five villages in

target areas, 2 from the district levels, 2 from the provincial levels, 4 at the central level (from the Prime Minister's Office), and 2 representatives from the private sector. All techniques used to collect the data are centered on the questions: What are the things Lao people need to have in order to maintain good live (having)? What would Lao people like to be; or which goals/needs that are considered to be highly value for Lao people living (thinking)? What can Lao people do in order to achieve what they would like to be (doing)?

After collection, the acquired data was processed and analyzed. Content analysis was conducted for discrimination, interpretation and comparison for investigation of relationship and patterns in phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This study was based on theory and the data was processed using analysis for finding the meaning and the components of wellbeing for Lao people.

The selection of research area was based on: (1) one of the poorest districts in 47 poor districts in Lao PDR (NSC, 2011); (2) locations under government and private sector development projects (i.e., mining exploration, agricultural development, hydropower); (3) communities near urban areas or affected by present or future projects; (4) rural communities unaffected by urban development; (5) areas designated by the Lao government for social and economic development; (6) the development levels are difference between villages in the area (villages with high levels of income disparity); and (7) the people in the community are including both poor and non-poor people.

5. Results and Discussion

In the term of "Development", it is a value or normative concept. It is considered to define the value by person, location, and timing fundamental. The interpretation of its meaning of the development would differ from each other, local, and time contexts. As well as the "Wellbeing" is largely used for scholars and policy makers, this is different aspect in a particular area. Thus, the development of wellbeing indicator has to begin from those meaning of the regional or local aspects (Promphakping, 2006).

According to the local context of Lao society, there are varieties of wellbeing's meanings. The word of "Wellbeing" would mean "being opulent and being happy (som-boun poun-souk) or being well and being strong (yu-dee mee-hang)", which is common found in Lao language. When giving blessing it is usual said "wishing you being well and being strong (khor hai chao yu-dee mee-hang der)", when greeting other by saying "are you being well and being strong or being good (chao yu-dee mee-hang bor)?" Those words are the same meaning of being opulent and being happy or being well and being strong.

In Lao language the basic meaning of those words for communication usually means the human health being. If we split its components we could be able to divide into two main parts: "being well/being opulent" and "being strong/being happy". The being well/being opulent means the physical, environment, economy and society which are substantial such as the natural resources, shelter, food, medicine and utilities materials to reflect the human opulence for individual and household levels. Those words mean in English as "being well", but for the word being strong/being happy are related to the health on both physical and mental or the sensational meaning of satisfaction, or in English meaning of "feeling well". If we consider this meaning we would find that being well and being strong could replace the meaning of being opulent and being happy or wellbeing in the local context.

As the concept of wellbeing would means differently in each local. To construct wellbeing measurement to be well suited for the Lao PDR, it needs to make understanding for the wellbeing meaning in Lao people perspective. From data collection in local Lao context, the "*Being well*" means to live in the best environment (both from natural and human made), economic, social and cultural. "*Being strong*" means to live with happiness mentally and physically such as good health, having good and safe food, having regular exercise and good emotion. Therefore, according to the research process, the framework for the meaning of wellbeing in Lao people conception means the capability of living in a happy and warm family, good society and community, spirit/belief religion and culture, security in life and property, good physical and mental health, good knowledge and education, good leader and public management, freedom to participation, good environment, and enough of living economy. There are seven dimensions of wellbeing conception for Lao local people showing in the example of local Lao people who express their opinions and define the meaning for each dimension as follows:

5.1 Good Family Dimension

Refers to the state of happiness from understanding and helping each other while living together in family, warm family, disagreement avoiding in family, good offspring, success of family members, family members do not involved temptation, and single family (one husband one wife); as shown in their statements as follow:

“Living together with all family members, having meals together regularly thus brings about the great happiness in the family.” (Female, aged 32).

“Our children obey the parents, avoid playing with drug and alcohol, complete their studies and are successful in having jobs.” (Female, aged 52).

“Having a warm family, one man and wife with harmonious family and support each other in solving difficulties is the most happiness.” (Male, aged 44).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.2 Good Society Dimension

Refers to the happy state from understanding and helping each other between members in the community, having a very high spirit, realizing all the truth, being less selfish, living in the fair, and good relationship society, inherit and participation in cultural, social, religious, and traditional activities; as shown in their statements as follow:

“Actually, our life is nothing much to concern, just be happy everyday and the most important is that we are living in the society with honor and love.” (Female, aged 59).

“Religion, good custom and culture of nation are the most preservative, we must conserve to prevent the social problems, and those are related to the wellbeing of people.” (Male, aged 55).

“Some people do not respect the law, but scare of illusion things such as ghosts, Gods and souls, and the punishment from the community. This shows that religion, custom and culture are able to solve the social problems and be affected on the happiness of people in the community.” (Female, aged 64).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.3 Good Health Dimension

In this dimension “wellbeing” means good health, both mentally and physically. Health can be cured and cared while illness with good caring by family, doctor, nurse and community with equity and equality, with regularly exercise in the good facility provided. There are (1) *Physical condition* is the state of having a strong body, good taste, clean and nourished food, consuming clean water, having good sleep as the body needs, seeing good view, fresh breathing, being strong to move around, not overweighting, having normal and regular relationship activity with couples, having massage, normal excretory system, exercising regularly, staying far from diseases, and getting impressive health services. (2) *Mental condition* involves a state of happiness with a kind and strong mental willing for having life without libidinous desires, good emotional and cheerful, no miserable feeling, no other bias (jealousy), be respected from others, be participated with community activities such as pray a merit at the temple, doing most favorite activities: reading, watching movies, working and doing the favorite need, and going to the most favorite and appropriate requirements. (3) *Health care center* means to have the happy state of having good quality and equality of health service. (4) *Health knowledge* is the happy state of providing prevention the disease and gets the basic treatment when getting sick; as shown in statements bellow:

“Having tough mentally and physically, consuming healthy food with regular exercise and be able to work every day is the happiest life.” (Male, aged 54).

“For me having the respect and being loved from family and community members are the most happiness.” (Male, aged 45).

“Whatever we have sadness or happiness it depends on ourselves, it depends on our adaption to live with it.” (Female, aged 47).

“Our wellbeing is the way to use our sense of living and happiness for ourselves, family and community.” (Male, aged 43).

“I’m feeling painful all of my body and difficult to live my life. It is better to have a doctor staying regularly in our village.” (Female, aged 60).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.4 Good Education Dimension

Refers to the happy state of having equality and quality education; as shown in statements bellow:

“If we have sufficient schools and teachers in our village, our children will not move to far away school and they can effort to improve themselves for better life.” (Female, aged 50).

“It will be the best if we have good quality for education, sufficiency and equality between our community and the district, because it is related to the future of our children.” (Male, aged 53).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.5 Good Security, Leader and Public Management Dimension

Refers to the happy state of having security in life and assets, having wisdom, equity, good and transparency leader, effective public management, and providing the community participation for the development policy and planning; as shown in statements as follow:

“Nowadays, there are many problems in the society such as snatching, robbery and drug usage in many areas...these are so terrified that make us feel sleepless and unhappy.” (Female, aged 50).

“Apart from the Government’s support, I think a community could take responsibility for taking care of social orders and regulations in the society to make people trust and live their normal life safely to reach the happiness.” (Male, aged 58).

“If the authorities and people in the community are working actively for the mutual benefits and development of the country, thus, it will bring the better life for us.” (Male, aged 49).

“The selection of good leaders with ethics is the most essential for the development to create wellbeing for our people.” (Male, aged 55).

“The participation in the community activities is the most essential for the development, because the goal of the development is for the community as a whole. Therefore, every activity which involves to the community is essential to have the agreement from the people in the community.” (Female, aged 53).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.6 Good Environment Dimension

Refers to the happy state from cleanness of natural and non-natural environment, rich of natural resources especially the forest, without pollutions from chemical substances, waste, chemical fertilizers, sufficient clean water, fresh air, no risk from natural disaster; as shown in statements as follow:

“Natural disaster is the most devastated, because the destruction and change of environment can affect the wellbeing of people in the community.” (Female, aged 65).

“In our village, managed of rubbish and pollution should be in concern.” (Male, aged 47).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

5.7 Good Economic Dimension

refers to the happy state from having enough and various food, well-built and safety house, having own land for farming, sufficient rice through the year, pleasant work and security, sufficiency and permanent earnings for living costs, less expenses, no risk, less/no debts, more savings; as shown in statements as follow:

“Without debt is the most important for better life and happiness of family” (Female, aged 37).

“If our products are more valuable, our life would be better and happiness.” (Male, aged 49).

“Remember, saving will lead to the wellbeing of our family.” (Female, aged 37).

(Informant interview, 2012–2013)

The concept of wellbeing for Lao people in this study is synthesis base on the framework of social and cultural construction of local Lao people which we call the insider perspectives. There has been shown that the livelihoods of Lao people in deed are all related to the significant of social and natural factors. As a whole Lao people and community have been generous, dependent, and considered a sincere family and society is the most influence for the livelihood which is long lasting with Lao people from the ancient times. This study has found that the meaning of wellbeing can be classified into seven dimensions including both materials (objective) and non-materials (subjective) categories. There is consistent with the study of Forgeard et al. (2011), who believed that wellbeing is best understood as a multifaceted phenomenon which can be assessed by measuring a wide array of subjective and objective constructs. As mentioned, this wellbeing conception of local Lao people synthesized from the framework of “What the needs and resources that Lao people have (having)? What satisfaction with life that Lao people would like to be (thinking)? What they do to achieve the things that they satisfy (doing)”, as showed in Figure 1.

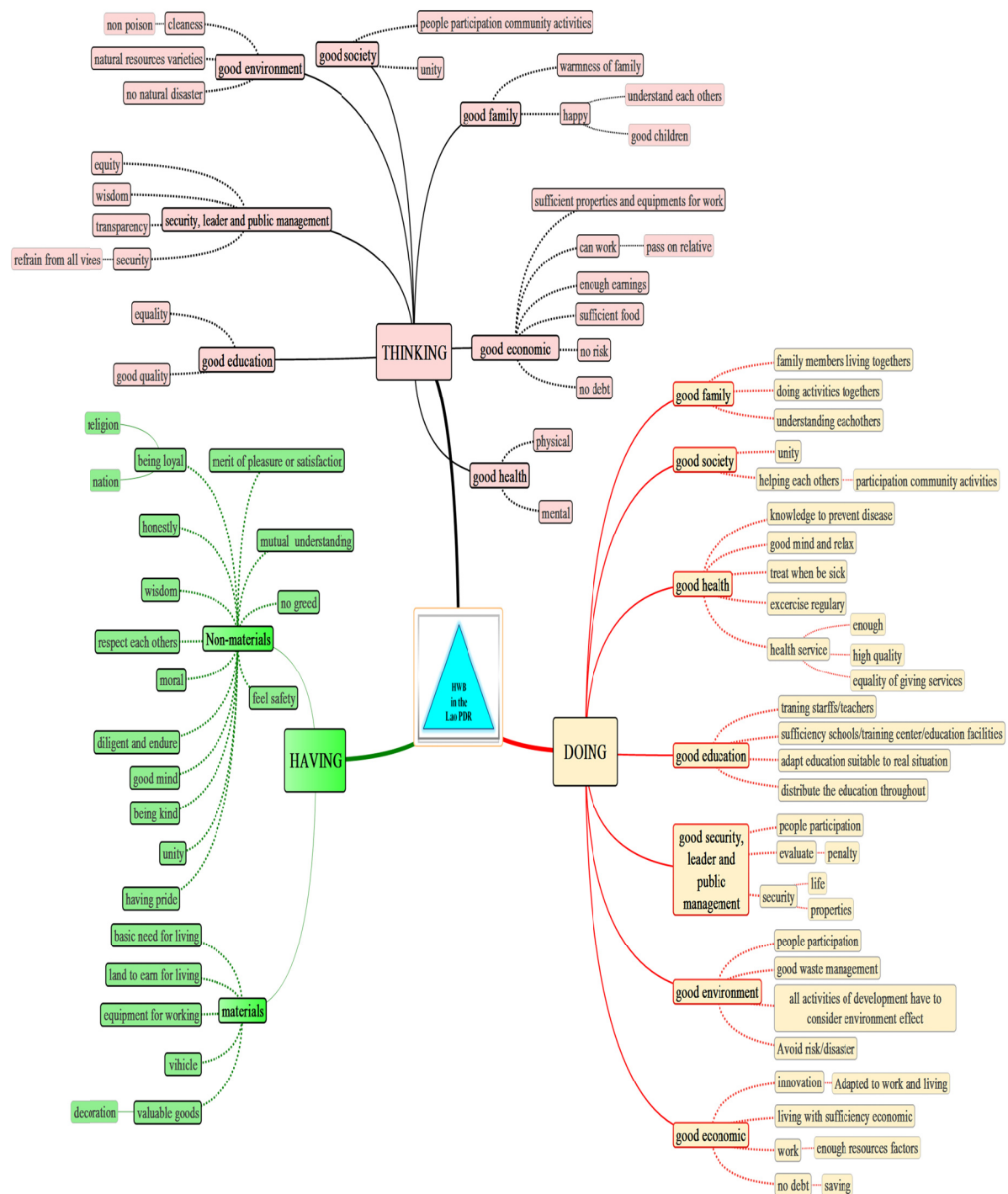


Figure 1. Mind mapping of the local Lao people's wellbeing under the three dimensions of observation

For Lao people's "needs and resources" or "Having", it can be classified into two categories, materials and non-materials. *The materials* include concrete items such as natural resource, shelter, clothes, food, medicine, farm-land, valuable and durable properties like accessories, vehicle, technology equipment, household stuff, working equipment, labor, domestic animals, and food. *The non-materials* are consciousness, wisdom, honesty, warmth of family, respect each other, no greeding, good mind, moral, feeling safe, united community, mutual understanding, having pride, good culture, and being loyal to religion and nation. These needs and resources are the foundation for Lao people's wellbeing. They will use the resources to do whatever they satisfy for their

wellbeing. Moreover, the “satisfaction in Lao people life” does not only relate to the resources that Lao people have but it also refers to what they would like to be or “*Thinking*” and how to lead their lives to achieve what they would like to be or “*Doing*”. Eventhough they have a lot of resources, they still would like to get something else that they do not have or they are not satisfied with what they have. This situation means that Lao people have not achieved their wellbeing. This study has found that the valuation or wellbeing of Lao people from their perspective includes *three* characteristics.

The first feature reflects objective values (Objective wellbeing - OWB) including (1) *variety, cleanness and goodness in the natural resources and environment*. At present, in the Lao PDR the natural resources are limited; the environments are damaged, and have many environmental problems (UNDP, 2013). This situation effects the livelihood of Lao people, as their lives rely on the natural resources which makes the environmental burden leading to diseases (Reig-Martinez, 2013); (2) *having good and strong physical health*, physical health is very important for people in working, because participation in the workforce is also an important activity which can provide income, social relationship, status, daily routine, and life satisfaction (Campen & Cardol, 2009; Cramm et al., 2013), and higher levels of wellbeing (Lehto et al., 2009; Meltzer et al., 2009). Also they can earn for their living, support their families which will not be a burden for their living; (3) *having enough and equality of income or economics*, as people need and should be concerned about objective inequality, they want their society to move toward (Beja, 2013) by having land and home ownership (Hu, 2013); no debt. Lao people especially most farmers in rural areas are critical in debt both legal and illegal (NSC, 2011), because they need money for their farming or buying their farming equipments. Some farmers are in debt because they do not yield good cultivation or face the problem of drought or flood. However, most farmers believe that they can pay their debt as long as they still can work and businesses are still in process; (4) *high knowledge and high education*, the education is very important condition for people to get a good job and examine the human wellbeing (Haq & Zia, 2013). They can apply their knowledge in their living, and their working place even the farmers who can also work in the farm field.

The second feature refers to the mental aspect that is the most valuable one (Subjective wellbeing - SWB). Wellbeing is not only limited in terms of material or physical needs but also relates to other needs that are subjective in nature (Lyndon et al., 2013). It is now recognized that mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness, but also the presence of the subjective wellbeing (Keyes, 2005; Bak-Klimek, 2013). Mental health includes seeing their children grow up and succeed, spirits of the Lao people who are happy in their occupation, living in the safe environment, having good leader and public management, proud and satisfied with their living, meriting and doing religion's activities. Especially for religion it is an important dimension of human experience which is positive relation with wellbeing (Graham & Crown, 2014).

The third feature of wellbeing also reflects the relationship between people and others. Therefore, the most important aspect in this sense is significantly related to the warmness of family, attending and participating in communities' activities, and cultural values. There is consistent with the study of Trung (2013), who believed that cultural value positively affects people happiness and satisfaction especially in East Asia. Moreover, it is also consistent to the study of Ruchiwit (2013) which mentioned that one of the factors predicting the wellbeing of Laotians has been their attitudes toward their society and its cultural values. However, the values can change due to time and situations. Additionally, this wellbeing's meaning also depends on the process of wellbeing creation which is considered from the effort to achieve their satisfaction that is not necessary to use only one way.

In summary, the concept of wellbeing in local Lao people conception is comprised of three perspectives: (1) What are the needs and resources that the Lao people have “having”? (2) What satisfaction with life of Lao people would like to be “thinking”? (3) Their effort “doing” called “the processes” of achieving that satisfaction of Lao people under the frame of wellbeing that is suitable for Lao society. The meaning of wellbeing can classify into seven dimensions including three characteristic: “Objective wellbeing”; “Subjective wellbeing”; and “Relationship between people”. The concepts of wellbeing are different in each society because it depends on the social cultural construction of the society. Therefore, the objective and subjective wellbeing measures are needed in unison or the relationship to understand human quality of life in each society and to make informed policy decisions (Haq & Zia, 2013).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the results of this research it investigates the possibility in different levels of analysis. First of all the multidimensionality of the wellbeing concept is raised up and it uses the different methods from the studied groups to show the concepts of wellbeing formed the social and cultural construction which is the insider perspective that comes from local Lao people.

There are three features of the wellbeing for Lao people. One is objective wellbeing visible from several aspects that are concrete and can touch, namely having their own basic needs such as shelter, clothes, food, medicine, farmland, equipment, vehicles, valuable and non-valuable goods, and natural resources. Second is subjective wellbeing that is abstract and cannot touch resulting from people's thoughts and feeling, namely having warmth of family, feeling safety, going to the temple for listening to dharma, having loyalty to the nation, religions and the merit, good mind, united, mutual understanding, and having pride. Third, wellbeing of Lao people is a social cultural construction, reflected the relationship between people and others, which refers to wellbeing as family, relatives, community, education, religion and culture, health, natural resources, and environment. However, this social cultural construction of wellbeing is not separately from economic wellbeing, it still has the connection as a means to acquiring quality of life. This finding suggested for developing the measurement of development that should include the social and cultural wellbeing. In addition, it is also closely related to the economic indicators with the social, cultural and environmental aspects. The implication of this study recommends policy makers to implement the policy as a priority by taking into consideration the needs of the local people, the social context, the culture and knowledge system itself. As a matter of fact, future research should capture the relationship between the views of wellbeing that is conceptualized in this study with the world-view of the wellbeing in the empirical of the local community level.

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