

Supporting but not synonymous: the wellbeing economy and a gender-equal economy

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Executive summary

This paper was prepared as an input to the deliberations of the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy and focusses on areas of relevance to the Commission. It will introduce some of the ideas behind the wellbeing economy movement – including different interpretations of wellbeing and how they place emphasis for change on individuals or on systems. It will reflect on how the current configuration of the economy in the UK and beyond is the root cause of many of the social and ecological crises of today – including the many facets of gender inequality. These multiple and interlocked crises, including that of gender inequality, undermine attainment of collective wellbeing.

It will sketch some of the main pillars of the wellbeing economy agenda and highlight some ways in which they speak to the goal of a gender-equal economy. To give a sense of what a wellbeing economy agenda means in practice, some of the key policy shifts needed to build a wellbeing economy in the UK will be set out, including the potential they have to help underpin pursuit of a gender-equal economy and where possible, examples of such policies being enacted in practice. The paper will conclude by highlighting implications for the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy.

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The views presented here are those of the author alone and do not speak for the membership of WEAll.

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Introduction

The term ‘wellbeing economy’ has been gaining attention across the UK and beyond in recent years. It has been the subject of an ‘own-initiative opinion’ of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and All Party Parliamentary Group meeting² and an Early Day Motion³ in Westminster; supported in local council resolutions⁴; covered by a flurry of media reports⁵; advocated in Prime Ministerial speeches⁶; and championed in a Ted talk by Scotland’s First Minister⁷.

The idea of *wellbeing*, is, of course, not new: its roots stretch back many thousands of years. What the combination of the term “wellbeing” with the “economy” conveys is that our economic systems need to be designed in a way that delivers human and ecological wellbeing. This necessitates a substantial *repurposing* of the economy. This, in turn, demands major transformation in the operation of businesses, the design of infrastructure, the nature of work, decision making, international relations, provision of basic needs and so on. Many aspects of a wellbeing economy and the changes required for a gender-equal economy are mutually reinforcing and often inherently connected: many aspects of the goals of a gender-equal economy are compatible with a wellbeing economy and vice versa. The wellbeing economy agenda is a broad one (with its focus on addressing both socio-economic and environmental crises). Gender equality is a necessary, but not sufficient component of its realisation. Concurrently, since there are dynamics that undermine gender equality (gender-based violence and patriarchal social norms in particular) that will not be attended to by pursuit of economic system change alone, the overlap is perhaps best visualised as partially overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. The two perspectives are mutually supporting, but not synonymous.

Wellbeing: a brief guide

The concept of wellbeing is familiar the world over, even though different terms might be used to describe its key idea: quality of life and flourishing for all people and health of the planet. The vision can be found across a range of texts and sources: in the scripts of many religions,⁸ and contained in worldviews of First Nations communities⁹ and Latin American understandings of ‘the good life’ as better, not bigger.¹⁰ It can be read in ‘development’ scholarship¹¹ and in research about what makes people content.¹² It echoes in

² Gessner, Linda (2020) *Annual General Meeting and Breakfast Briefing, 26 Feb 2020* All Party Parliamentary Group on Limits to Growth event report <https://limits2growth.org.uk/events/annual-general-meeting-and-breakfast-briefing-26-feb-2020/>

³ Lucas, Caroline (2020) *Proposals for a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy* EDM 196, House of Commons <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/54654/proposals-for-a-sustainable-and-inclusive-wellbeing-economy>

⁴ Wellbeing Economy Alliance (2019) *Edinburgh and Glasgow City Councils recognise importance of wellbeing economics* blog post <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/edinburgh-and-glasgow-city-councils-recognise-importance-of-wellbeing-economics>

⁵ See for a selection: <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wellbeing-economy-in-media-headlines-around-the-world-this-week> and <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/scotland-buzzes-with-wellbeing-economy-ideas-media-roundup-after-wealth-of-nations-2-0-event>

⁶ Jakobsdóttir, Katrín (2019) *Iceland and the Wellbeing Economy* Chatham House lecture, 3 December 2019 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/iceland-and-wellbeing-economy>

⁷ Sturgeon, Nicola (2019) *Why governments should prioritize wellbeing* TED talk, Edinburgh https://www.ted.com/talks/nicola_sturgeon_why_governments_should_prioritize_well_being

⁸ See, for example: Pope Francis (2015) *Encyclical letter laudato si’: on care for our common home*, Rome http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

⁹ See, for example: First Nations Health Authority (nd) *First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness* Vancouver <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-and-the-first-nations-health-authority/first-nations-perspective-on-wellness> ; <https://www.tni.org/my/node/14024> ; and van Gelder, Sarah (2009) ‘What Indigenous Culture Can Teach Us About a Fair Economy’ *Yes Magazine*, Summer edition https://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-new-economy/what-indigenous-culture-can-teach-us-about-a-fair-economy-20190208?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=YTW_20190208&utm_content=YTW_20190208+CID_c546296ae6df2b36a24e53c013286437&utm_source=CM&utm_term=What%20Indigenous%20Culture%20Can%20Teach%20Us%20About%20a%20Fair%20Economy

¹⁰ See, for example: Acosta, Alberto (2017) ‘Rethinking the World from the Perspective of Buen Vivir’

In *Degrowth in Bewegung* Leipzig https://www.degrowth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DIM_Buen-Vivir.pdf

¹¹ See, for example: Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: the Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: First Harvard University Press.

¹² Shaw, I., & Taplin, S. (2007). Happiness and mental health policy: A sociological critique. *Journal of Mental Health*, 16, 359–373 and Michaelson, J., Abdallah, S., Steuer, N., Thompson, S., & Marcs, N. (2009). *National Accounts of Well-being: Bringing Real Wealth onto the Balance Sheet*. (New Economics Foundation, Ed.). London. <http://www.nationalaccountsowellbeing.org/learn/download-report.html>

psychology¹³ and epidemiology about what makes people healthy¹⁴ and in findings from neuroscience about what makes our brains react in positive ways.¹⁵ Perhaps most importantly, strong messages can be heard in deliberative conversations with people all over the world about what really matters to them in their lives.¹⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly for such a multifaceted concept, as civil society and academics have advocated for politics to embrace wellbeing as an explicit goal, different emphases in the meaning of wellbeing have come to the fore.¹⁷ The suite of different understandings and emphasis is mirrored in a range of measures that each purport to capture an aspect of wellbeing. However, it is possible to broadly (and thus crudely) cluster them in as, on the one hand, definitions that emphasise self-reported wellbeing (SWB), and collective and multidimensional wellbeing on the other.

Self-reported wellbeing and collective wellbeing

Proponents of SWB often argue that individuals are the best judges of their own satisfaction – and hence SWB is a worthy preeminent policy goal. SWB itself has variations – for example, across hedonic, eudemonic and evaluative lines. Hedonic wellbeing, for example, is often described as ‘happiness’ and data about it obtained by asking individuals to report their own happiness. Evaluative wellbeing is about how someone perceives their life overall, and eudemonic wellbeing pertains to sense of accomplishment and flourishing. One way of illustrating the implications of the different aspects of SWB is seen in the following divergence: one of the strongest contributors to the evaluative/ sense of purpose aspect of SWB is having a child you want¹⁸, whereas hedonic – happiness – conceptions are U-shaped with age¹⁹: at their lowest when people are of child-rearing age.

A focus on narrow understandings of wellbeing as happiness is, as Middlemass (citing Ahmed) explains, rife with potential for gender oppression:

happiness has been used to promote a range of unsavory agendas in the past, including the subjugation of women (“Women are happy being in caring roles”)...[Ahmed] points out that if happiness becomes an aim, it also becomes a duty, and then to be unhappy is to be “causing trouble.” In the context of feminism, this means the unhappy woman, the feminist, is a “killjoy,” when another framing might cast her as the freedom fighter²⁰

Broadening SWB to a wider set of considerations is possible via multidimensional wellbeing measures.²¹ Since these cast light on more than simply what an individual reports, this perspective focuses on what might

¹³ See for example, Deci, Edward, Ryan, Richard 2008 ‘Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health’, *Canadian Psychology* Vol. 49, No. 3, 182–185

¹⁴ Wilkinson, Richard & Pickett, Kate (2018) *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone’s Well-being* Allen Lane: London

¹⁵ See, for example: Michaelson, J., Abdallah, S., Steuer, N., Thompson, S., & Marcs, N. (2009). *National Accounts of Well-being: Bringing Real Wealth onto the Balance Sheet*. (N. E. Foundation, Ed.). London. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalaccountsowellbeing.org/learn/download-report.html> (downloaded February 16, 2010); Zak PJ, Stanton AA, Ahmadi S (2007) ‘Oxytocin Increases Generosity in Humans’. *PLoS ONE* 2(11): e1128; and Esch, Tobias & Stefano, George (2005) ‘The Neurobiology of Love’ in *Neuroendocrinology Letters* 26: 3

¹⁶ See, for example, Dunlop, Stewart & Trebeck, Katherine (2012) ‘The Oxfam Humankind Index for Scotland: First results’ Oxfam GB, Oxford; Balestra, Carlotta, Boarini, Romina and Tosetto, Elena (2018) ‘What matters the most to people? Evidence from the OECD Better Life Index users’ responses’ in *OECD Statistics Working Papers*: Paris https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/what-matters-the-most-to-people_edf9a89a-en; and Melamed, Claire (2015) *My World: January 2013 to September 2015* United Nations <https://www.odi.org/projects/2638-my-world>

¹⁷ See Wallace, Jennifer (2019) *Wellbeing and Devolution: Reframing the Role of Government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, Palgrave Pivot: London <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030022297> for a useful discussion of these differences.

¹⁸ Shaw, I., & Taplin, S. (2007). Happiness and mental health policy: A sociological critique. *Journal of Mental Health*, 16, 359–373.

¹⁹ Blanchflower, D. (2009). ‘International Evidence on Wellbeing’. in A. Krueger (Ed.), *National Bureau of Economic Research: Measuring the Subjective Wellbeing of Nationals: National Accounts of Time Use and Wellbeing* University of Chicago Press: Chicago

²⁰ Middlemiss, Lucie (2017) ‘Commentary on ‘Sustainability and Well-Being: A Happy Synergy’’ in *Great Transition Initiative*, <http://www.greattransition.org/commentary/lucie-middlemiss-sustainability-well-being-chris-barrington-leigh> for a strong critique of the use of narrow happiness measures of wellbeing.

²¹ See, for example, OECD (2020), *How’s Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en>.

be termed societal or collective wellbeing. Some proponents cite concerns about adaptive preferences²² that make SWB problematic or caution against an overly individualistic and even anthropocentric (privileging people over nature) focus that might result from looking at SWB alone.²³ This wider approach has had currency in the UK's devolved governments²⁴ – for example, Scotland's National Performance Framework sets out a broad suite of measures deemed important to Scotland's progress (beyond both SWB and conventional economic measures). The Welsh Wellbeing of Future Generations Act takes a similarly broad understanding of wellbeing and has led to the Future Generations Commissioner scrutinising proposals according to their environmental impact, for example.

Historically, feminists have shown that when policy focuses on the collective level, instead of the individual, the needs and experiences of women can be subsumed by those of the collective; their voices silenced or talked over when the collective is represented; and that analysis at the collective, or household level can mask poverty, financial control and other forms of violence and abuse.

Such inequalities would be an indication of lack of societal wellbeing if measured robustly, and disaggregated appropriately. For example, any assessment of collective wellbeing should take account of inequalities to the extent that if certain groups fall behind this is an overall failure (such a sentiment is espoused by the Sustainable Development Goals' 'no one left behind'). Rather than masking such inequalities, the benefit of considering wellbeing as more than simply SWB is, in part, about recognising the possibility that individuals could report high personal happiness in a context of structural inequalities or environmental breakdown.²⁵ Collective wellbeing would thus encompass a wider suite of objective measures (education outcomes, financial security, for example), complementing SWB with other goals.²⁶ Analysis of both needs to entail gender disaggregation – for example, is women's SWB higher or lower than that of men's? Is women's education or financial security different to that of men?

To further complicate matters, across both objective and subjective measures, statistical findings do not necessarily ring true with the lived experience of women. For example, women's life expectancy and literacy has been improving in recent decades (examples of objective measures of wellbeing). Research shows that women report higher SWB than men – in the UK and globally.²⁷ Yet the world is hardly a good place for women, with gender-based violence still widespread, with care work still undervalued, with labour markets a long way from delivering gender parity, and so on. In other aspects of SWB, women in the UK report lower wellbeing than men: women are twice as likely to experience anxiety (one in four will require treatment for depression at some time compared to one in ten men).²⁸ Hence the need to move beyond both any single SWB or any isolated objective measure. As flagged below, measures that are developed by inclusive deliberative conversations might generate better, if not definitive, measures of collective wellbeing.

²² Adaptive preferences describe the process of adjusting to one's circumstances – making do, if you like with the current state of affairs rather than aspiring for change unlikely to be forthcoming. See Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: the Human Development Approach*: First Harvard University Press: Cambridge and Khader, Serene (2011) *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment*, Oxford University Press: Oxford

²³ See, for example, Gough, Ian 2017 *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham: 3

²⁴ Wallace, Jennifer (2019) *Wellbeing and Devolution: Reframing the Role of Government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, Palgrave Pivot: London <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030022297>

²⁵ Shaw, I., & Taplin, S. (2007). Happiness and mental health policy: A sociological critique. *Journal of Mental Health*, 16, 359–373; Gough, Ian 2017 *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham: 39, 40; Middlemiss, Lucie (2017) "Commentary on 'Sustainability and Well-Being: A Happy Synergy'" in *Great Transition Initiative*, <http://www.greattransition.org/commentary/lucie-middlemiss-sustainability-well-being-chris-barrington-leigh> for a strong critique of the use of narrow happiness measures of wellbeing

²⁶ See OECD (2020), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en>.

²⁷ See, for example, Graham, Carol & Chattopadhyay, Soumya (2012) *Gender and Well-Being around the World* The Brookings Institution: Washington <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/08-gender-and-well-being-graham.pdf>; Tabor, David & Stockley, Lauren (2018) *Personal well-being in the UK: October 2016 to September 2017*. Office of National Statistics: Newport

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/measuringnationalwellbeing/october2016toseptember2017#women-report-higher-levels-of-personal-well-being-than-men>; Blanchflower, D. (2009). 'International Evidence on Wellbeing'. in A. Krueger (Ed.), *National Bureau of Economic Research: Measuring the Subjective Wellbeing of Nationals: National Accounts of Time Use and Wellbeing* University of Chicago Press: Chicago

²⁸ Dorling, D. (2010). *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Persists*. The Policy Press: Bristol: 271

Beyond survival and coping to system change?

Often differences between respective conceptualisations of wellbeing are more about where to situate political responsibility and policy focus. For example, analysis of the drivers of SWB reveals the importance of quality jobs and relationships – two areas which would feature in most robust frameworks of the multiple dimensions of collective wellbeing. Clearly, these are areas influenced by structural arrangements in economies and societies.

Often the call from advocates of SWB measures is for immediate support for individuals suffering stress and anxiety – often in the form of investment in mental health support to help people survive and cope with current circumstances. For example, New Zealand’s wellbeing budget boosted investment in mental health services. A recent Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group report calling for more attention on wellbeing has as its main policy recommendation more investment in mental health services, but very little to say on the causes of much mental ill-health.²⁹ Another example is the flourishing of mindfulness classes and apps utilised by people whose work lives or financial insecurity is causing them stress (Serge LaTouche describes as ‘consolation goods’ the products and services purchased to console oneself from a stressed and alienated life³⁰). While such classes and apps might help individuals cope with their current circumstances, looking upstream to the causes of this stress would demand attention to labour market structures, gender inequalities, social protection and so on. A similar critique might be levelled at a government appointing a ‘Minister for Loneliness’³¹ while presiding over cuts to the very services that help head off isolation – loneliness support groups, council services and so on.

In contrast, advocates for the ‘system change’ conceptions of wellbeing, while strongly supporting the vital importance of helping people survive and cope with current circumstances, would point to the need to *also* pay attention to those circumstances themselves, i.e. the drivers of stress and anxiety, rather than merely treatment for those who experience them.

This is where the wellbeing economy agenda comes in: with an explicit call for system change.

It is this system change interpretation that is arguably most aligned with a gender-equal economy. For example, feminist literature has long highlighted how no economic activity – let alone human flourishing – is possible without care. Whereas the current economic system and its associated measures disregard this work, a wellbeing economy would support and nurture it. Paying attention to the quality of jobs – equality of pay, sufficiency of income, suitability of hours, remuneration aligned with social value and so on – is a core tenet of the wellbeing economy agenda, just as it is an explicit requirement for a gender-equal economy.

Looking upstream: the economy as a root cause of multiple crises?

The current economic system is:

- Dependent on the pursuit of growth as measured by GDP, despite this failing to capture socially beneficial work beyond the market, and despite the fact it records as positive the costs of dealing with social and environmental damage
- One in which benefits accrue to those who have most control over resources³²
- Prone to shifting onto third parties (‘externalising’) the costs of the social and environmental harm certain modes of production and consumption create.³³

The extent to which wide-scale change is necessary is apparent in the suggestion that the current economy simply needs to be made greener or ‘cleaner’. This not only ignores the inequality and poverty created by the

²⁹ See, for example, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics (2019) *Spending Review To Increase Wellbeing An open letter to the Chancellor*, What Works Centre for Wellbeing: London <https://wellbeingeconomics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Spending-review-to-increase-wellbeing-APPG-2019.pdf>

³⁰ Latouche, S. (2009). *Farewell to Growth*. Polity Press: Cambridge

³¹ Walker, Peter (2018) ‘May appoints minister to tackle loneliness issues raised by Jo Cox’, *The Guardian* newspaper January 16, 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/16/may-appoints-minister-tackle-loneliness-issues-raised-jo-cox>

³² Meadows, Donella (2008). *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Chelsea Green Publishing: White River Junction

³³ Trebeck, Katherine & Williams, Jeremy (2019) *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown-Up Economy*, Policy Press: Bristol and Costanza, Robert (2006) ‘Thinking Broadly About Costs and Benefits in Ecological Management’, *Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management*, 2: 2, pp. 166–173

current economic set-up, it relies on separating (what is known as ‘decoupling’) the growth of an economy from environmental impact to an extent that is practically impossible.³⁴ On the social side is the suggestion that making growth is more ‘inclusive’ is sufficient, yet this ignores the environment.

In response to the mounting critiques of GDP as a measure of success – let alone critiques of a growth-based economy – a suite of ‘beyond GDP’ measures have been created. All seek, in their different ways, to better measure wider dimensions of wellbeing than narrow economic measures. Two of the most prominent – the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) and the Social Progress Index (SPI) – illustrate the declining relevance of GDP growth in delivering various aspects of wellbeing in GDP-rich countries. This is termed ‘diminishing marginal returns’ – essentially, less bang for your buck.

For example, the GPI draws on a range of factors, not just output of marketable commodities, to measure human welfare.³⁵ These are converted into monetary units and compiled into a single index to contrast with GDP. It is used by several US states and has been measured across the globe, revealing that genuine progress stopped rising ‘around 1978’.³⁶ What happened since then is that any benefits from GDP growth are outweighed by rising inequality of income and increases in costs.

A more recent initiative is the SPI, which aggregates over fifty social and environmental indicators of basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity.³⁷ Scandinavian countries rank higher than the US, despite lower GDP per capita. Attainment of social progress slows as GDP per capita reaches middle-income levels: diminishing marginal returns set in and gains are offset by challenges, many of which feed demand for more expenditure. This can be termed ‘failure demand’ (or ‘defensive expenditures’).³⁸

Denying or embracing embeddedness

The GPI, SPI and reams of other evidence show that the patterns of growth which the latter part of the 20th century bequeathed us depended on gender and class inequalities and have pushed the planet to breaking point. For decades, many scholars and activists have highlighted the misalignment between the vision of a wellbeing economy and the outcome of the current economy. Feminist economists in particular have been highlighting how the economy pays women less than men, often compels them to work in jobs with poorer conditions and less dignity³⁹, and functions on the back of unpaid and unrecognised care work.

Reams of evidence also points to the market economy’s embeddedness in society, with both the economy and society embedded in nature. As ecological economists warn: ‘we cannot understand or manage our economy without understanding the whole, interconnected system’.⁴⁰ As explained by Himmelweit: ‘The economy also needs people, as both workers and consumers, to be born, grow and flourish. For that to happen...people also need to be cared for over their life course’.⁴¹ A true wellbeing economy recognises that

³⁴ Hickel, Jason & Kallis, Giorgos (2019) ‘Is Green Growth Possible?’ *New Political Economy* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964> and Parrique T & Barth J et al (2019). *Decoupling debunked: Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability*. European Environmental Bureau. <https://mk0eeborgicuyvctuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Decoupling-Debunked-FULL-for-ONLINE.pdf>. See also Hickel, Jason & Kallis, Giorgos (2019) ‘Is Green Growth Possible?’ *New Political Economy* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964>

³⁵ In its construction, the GPI effectively takes account of impacts that are otherwise disregarded (externalities). For example, it encompasses crime, GHG emissions, pollution and resource extraction. When families spend their money on filters and bottled water this is deemed a cost because it is a defensive expenditure. In contrast, wetlands, rivers, lakes are valued as a positive impact.

³⁶ Kubiszewski, I., Costanza, R., Franco, C., Lawn, P., Talberth, J., Jackson, T., & Aylme, C. (2013). ‘Beyond GDP: Measuring and achieving global genuine progress’ *Ecological Economics*, 93: 57–68.

³⁷ See <https://www.socialprogress.org/>

³⁸ Trebeck, Katherine & Williams, Jeremy (2019) *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown-Up Economy*, Policy Press: Bristol

³⁹ Himmelweit, Susan (2018) ‘Transforming Care’ in Macfarlane, Laurie (ed) *New Thinking for the British Economy*, Open Democracy: London

⁴⁰ Costanza, Robert & Alperovitz, Gar et al (2013) *Building a Sustainable and Desirable Economy-in-Society-in-Nature* ANU E Press: Canberra <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hg253> and Fred Block in Polanyi, K. (1944: this edition 2001). *The Great Transformation - The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press: Boston: xxiv

⁴¹ Himmelweit, Susan (2018) ‘Transforming Care’ in Macfarlane, Laurie (ed) *New Thinking for the British Economy*, Open Democracy: London

it is the care economy that provides the resources that the market economy depends on – the social reproduction that commercial production cannot do without.⁴²

From these perspectives, both feminist and ecological, the current economy is revealed as one which undermines what it stands on.⁴³

A wellbeing economy

Redesigning the economy demands substantial transformation – not least repurposing its very goal away from economic growth towards the goal of equitable human and ecological wellbeing.⁴⁴ Reorienting goals and expectations for business, politics and society, will help create a wellbeing economy: explicitly focused on social justice – across its dimensions, not least encompassing gender. A wellbeing economy does not harm people and the environment, and so avoids expensive down-stream intervention to fix damage caused by an economic model fixated on growth.

WEAll Needs

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) has ‘crowd sourced’⁴⁵ from its members⁴⁶ the core needs that a wellbeing economy must deliver. This yielded five areas:

- **Dignity:** Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness. This speaks to provision of basic needs – both in terms of physical and psychological needs.
- **Nature:** A restored and safe natural world for all life. This recognises that nature is essential for the life support system it provides to humanity, and also acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature for all life.
- **Connection:** A sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good. This upholds the importance of relationships to wellbeing, includes aligning institutions with the goal of human wellbeing, and prioritises collaboration at all levels.
- **Fairness:** Justice in all its dimensions at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest greatly reduced. This embraces a broad understanding of fairness to encompass attending to inequalities of wealth and income (with attending to reducing extremes at both ends of the spectrum), and also horizontal dimensions such as race and gender.
- **Participation:** Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies. This speaks to the role of agency as a vital aspect of human wellbeing and the need for rich, robust democracies – in particular ensuring women’s equal participation in and interests are served by these processes. It is also about economies that *build up and with* communities rather than economies that extract from communities.

These have clear commonalities to fundamental needs as set out by scholars such as Gough⁴⁷ and Max-Neef⁴⁸, and speak to the functions and capabilities frame offered by Sen and Nussbaum. Such needs and capabilities require care: provision of care directly and care as an approach to others and nature. Care in all its dimensions thus needs to be celebrated and conditions made conducive to it: a far cry from the current extractive economy where care is undervalued, underpaid and invariably ignored.

⁴² Gough, Ian 2017 *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham: 182. See also Pouw, N & McGregor, A. (2014) *An Economics of Wellbeing. What Would Economics Look Like if it were Focused on Human Wellbeing?* IDS Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies: Brighton

⁴³ Himmelweit, Susan (2018) ‘Transforming Care’ in Macfarlane, Laurie (ed) *New Thinking for the British Economy*, Open Democracy: London

⁴⁴ See <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/oldwaynewway> for examples of the sort of changes a wellbeing economy would entail.

⁴⁵ See Sommer, Claire (2019) ‘Telling the story of what we all need’ blog for WEAll <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/telling-the-story-of-what-we-all-need-blog-by-claire-sommer> for the process that gave rise to this suite of needs.

⁴⁶ WEAll members are over 100 organisations and over 60 scholars who work in various aspects of a wellbeing economy – they are very varied in terms of focus, location, strategy and so on, but are united by the shared goal of economic system change. See: <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/weall-members> for the list of organisations

⁴⁷ Gough, Ian 2017 *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham

⁴⁸ Max-Neef, Manfred (1991) *Human Scale Development* The Apex Press: New York

Overlap with a gender-equal economy

The wellbeing economy agenda is a broad one (with its focus on addressing both socio-economic and environmental crisis).⁴⁹ The emphasis on social justice and tackling unfairness in all its dimensions positions achieving gender equality at the heart of a wellbeing economy. Gender equality is a necessary, but not sufficient component of its realisation.

From the other perspective, moving to a wellbeing economy that rewards social value (such as care) and promotes activities beneficial for people and planet, will be an enabling context for a gender-equal economy. Specifically, a wellbeing economy will be one which measures in a way that better reflects not just environmental impact but better accounts for social input. This links to Diane Elson's 'three Rs'⁵⁰ to reduce the burden of care borne by women: Recognise⁵¹, Reduce⁵², and Redistribute.⁵³

Moreover, a wellbeing economy will be built on recognition that humans are driven by more than competitiveness and pursuit of more; that sense of purpose flows from more than consumption but from relationships and agency; and that diversity in meeting universal human needs⁵⁴ is essential for a flourishing society. These speak to the Commission's emphasis on moving away from assumptions of male norms (and the mythical 'homo economicus' that still informs so much mainstream economic thinking) and the call for accommodation of difference. A wellbeing economy would underscore the Commission's emphasis on progressive taxation to redistribute wealth, to fund provision of social protection⁵⁵ and to change incentives for activities conducive to building a wellbeing economy.

Since, however, there are dynamics that undermine gender equality (gender-based violence and patriarchy in particular) that will not be attended to by pursuit of a wellbeing economy alone, we can conclude that the two perspectives are *mutually supporting, but not synonymous*.

⁴⁹ Hough-Stewart, Lisa & Trebeck, Katherine et al (2019) *What is a wellbeing economy? Different ways to understand the vision of an economy that serves people and planet* WEAll <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/A-WE-Is-WEAll-Ideas-Little-Summaries-of-Big-Issues-4-Dec-2019.pdf>

⁵⁰ Elson, Diane (2017) 'Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute Unpaid Care Work: How to Close the Gender Gap' *New Labor Forum* <https://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2017/03/03/recognize-reduce-redistribute-unpaid-care-work-how-to-close-the-gender-gap/>

⁵¹ Recognise it exists, and is work, and might be for love, but still work, and measurable.

⁵² Reduce the amount of unpaid care, care services key, transport matters, connectivity, free time from care and time to care, balance matters.

⁵³ Redistribute between women and men re undertaking unpaid care, parental leave for both parents, hours of work organisation and help men play a bigger role in unpaid care.

⁵⁴ See for example, Gough, Ian 2017 *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*, Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham

⁵⁵ Women's Budget Group (nd) 'Call for evidence: Social Security and Taxation' Gender-Equal Economy Commission <https://wbg.org.uk/commission/calls-for-evidence/call-for-evidence-social-security/>

Priority policy shifts needed at UK level to build a WE in the UK: in principle and in practice

Building a wellbeing economy requires a plethora of policy shifts at all levels of activity – too many to set out here in any comprehensive way. This table⁵⁶ sets out a few possible ‘leverage points’ that enable other changes. There is a lot happening that points to its possibility.⁵⁷ Other necessary steps have not yet been taken so it is hard to ascertain their impact in practice. An indication is given as to their potential to benefit the goals of a gender-equal economy: whether this is direct or via creating a more socially just and sustainable context.

<i>Change</i>	<i>Intended impact</i>	<i>Likely gender benefit of selected example: direct or contextual?</i>	<i>Examples of relevant policy instrument in practice with reflection on possible gender equality impact</i>
<p>A new and publicly supported measure of progress closer to what matters most to people and planet to hold government to account. Ideally constructed by robust and inclusive deliberative dialogue that puts marginalised voices, including those of women, to the fore.</p> <p>Complement with whole-of-government budget and frameworks in service of this goal rather than GDP.</p>	<p>Shift government priorities away from incremental GDP growth to better align policies with human and ecological wellbeing.</p> <p>Will also encourage prevention, rather than counting spending on cleaning up, treating and healing as a ‘good thing’, the way GDP does.</p>	<p>Direct benefit is dependent on measures chosen, whether the measures are explicitly gender-disaggregated and if care is valued in the measures’ domains and indicators.</p> <p>Indicators of progress which encompass time use – such as Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness – have more potential to present a more accurate picture of gender equality.</p>	<p>Scotland’s National Performance Framework has as its core purpose ‘<i>to increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland; create sustainable and inclusive growth; reduce inequalities; and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress</i>’.⁵⁸ It could go further to encompass a gendered analysis of growth, to better measure gaps in equalities, and track violence against women, societal power gaps, unpaid work or part-time employment.⁵⁹</p> <p>Scotland is joining with countries such as Iceland and New Zealand in the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership⁶⁰ that enables civil servants to collaborate and share lessons in putting collective wellbeing at the heart of economic policy. They meet annually for policy labs that cover topics such as wellbeing frameworks, wellbeing budgeting, taxation for wellbeing economy, and natural asset preservation – but have yet to make gender a focus (despite the female leadership of all three governments).</p> <p>New Zealand is allocating budget resources according to cross-departmental plans and wellbeing benefit⁶¹ – this is a useful first step in that it encourages cross-departmental collaboration and compels departments to embrace their role in delivering five national goals more aligned to wellbeing than simply GDP growth. The New Zealand wellbeing budget has directed record levels of funding to tackle</p>

⁵⁶ Please note this is for illustrative purposes only to give a sense of the sort of policies a wellbeing economy requires. A comprehensive analysis of any of the policies (including from a gender perspective) is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵⁷ For further examples see Trebeck, Katherine & Williams, Jeremy (2019) *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown-Up Economy*, Policy Press: Bristol

⁵⁸ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/what-it>

⁵⁹ Engender (2017) ‘Women’s Rights And Fair Economy’, in *Gender Matters: Roadmap Towards Women’s Equality in Scotland* Edinburgh <https://gendermatters.engender.org.uk/content/womens-rights/> (NB this gender review of the NPF was in relation to a previous iteration of the NPF, but the critiques noted here seem to remain relevant).

⁶⁰ See, for a section of blogs about WEGo: <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/tag/wego>

⁶¹ New Zealand Government (2019) The Wellbeing Budget, Wellington <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/b19-wellbeing-budget.pdf>

			<p>family and sexual violence. There is scope to more robustly focus on root causes of wellbeing inequalities.</p> <p>Wales has a Future Generations Commissioner tasked with scrutinising policy according to its likely impact on human and ecological wellbeing. Has called out gender inequality in political spaces and championed efforts to tackle gender pay gaps and violence against women and girls through its policy advocacy.</p> <p>Ecuador and Bolivia have incorporated notions of the ‘good life’ into their constitutions and national development plans, following indigenous notions of <i>buen vivir</i>.⁶² However, the <i>buen vivir</i> agendas have been critiqued as lacking a strong enough approach to gender equality.⁶³</p>
<p>Restructure the tax system to a) reward activities needed for a wellbeing economy b) discourage activities harmful to a wellbeing economy</p>	<p>Utilisation of fiscal incentives to drive increased activities supportive of a wellbeing economy and reduce those counter to it – for example, it would be good to see taxes shift away from cost per worker to cost per hour worked. This would incentivise</p>	<p>It can be hoped better work-life balance for all genders will bring a rebalancing of care responsibilities (though of course this is dependent on other shifts in the home/ society).</p> <p>Better economic equality has been shown to be associated with higher gender equality.⁶⁴</p> <p>The environmental crisis harms women more than</p>	<p>In 2016 the US city of Portland, Oregon, agreed to levy a tax on CEOs who earn 100 times more than their staff. Portland proposed to use the revenue to pay for services for homeless people. Israel has taken a similar step and pegged CEOs’ salaries to those of their lowest-paid workers: for those firms that pay their CEOs more than 44 times what they pay their lowest employee, there are punitive taxes.</p> <p>In an area ripe for change, the UK currently taxes capital gains at a lower rate than income – and are subject to exemptions and avoidance – implicitly encouraging rent seeking behaviours. This approach is regressive and favours men, as they have higher incomes and are much more likely to receive capital gains.⁶⁶ Land value tax is a good example of a lever to shift the balance.</p> <p>Sweden has reduced Value Added Tax on repair services⁶⁷ to encourage people to fix possessions such as clothes or gadgets rather than disposing of them and purchasing another.</p>

⁶² See, for example, Acosta, Alberto (2017) ‘Rethinking the World from the Perspective of Buen Vivir’

In *Degrowth in Bewegung* Leipzig https://www.degrowth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DIM_Buen-Vivir.pdf

⁶³ See, for example, Lind, Amy (2012) ‘Contradictions that Endure: Family Norms, Social Reproduction, and Rafael Correa’s Citizen Revolution in Ecuador’ *Politics & Gender* 8: 2: 254-261 and Lanza, Martha (2012) ‘Buen Vivir: An introduction from a women’s rights perspective in Bolivia’ in *Feminist Perspectives Towards Transforming Economic Power* Topic 3, Association for Women’s Rights in Development: Toronto

⁶⁴ See for example, Gonzales, Christian & Jain-Chandra, Sonali et al (2015) *Catalyst for Change: Empowering Women and Tackling Income Inequality*, Staff Discussion Note, International Monetary Fund: Washington

⁶⁶ Palmer, R. (2020). ‘Wealth, tax and gender: A paper for the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy’. <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Paper-2-Wealth-tax-and-gender.pdf>

⁶⁷ Starritt, Alexander (2016) ‘Sweden is paying people to fix their belongings instead of throwing them away’ WEF Agenda 27 Oct 2016 www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/sweden-is-tackling-its-throwaway-culture-with-tax-breaks-on-repairs-will-it-work/

	<p>retention of more people rather than fewer workers working longer hours.</p> <p>Tax unearned income ('rent') more than earned income to rebalance returns away from those with already great resources.</p> <p>Tax unsustainable activities such as polluting and wasting resources.</p>	<p>men so addressing it has potential to benefit women.⁶⁵</p>	
<p>Ensure prices capture full costs and so do not falsely encourage purchases counter to a wellbeing economy.</p>	<p>There are social and environmental dimensions to this. Socially, many goods and services are artificially cheap because they are delivered by businesses which do not pay living wages, which do not offer decent</p>	<p>To the extent the price of goods and services properly reflect the cost of all inputs they will not only pay living wages, they will recognise the care input associated with their creation and delivery.</p> <p>Using price mechanisms to encourage true cost accounting might raise the price of certain items. It</p>	<p>The European Union has a range of Extended Producer Responsibility policies whereby producers are responsible for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products.⁶⁸ It is likely one of the benefits of this is that producers will design products for re-use, but will also ensure the cost associated with taking better care of materials is reflected in the price to consumers.</p>

⁶⁵ See, for example, Castañeda-Carney, I & Sabater, L et al (2029) *Gender-based violence and environment linkages: the violence of inequality* IUCN Global Programme on Governance and Rights: Gland <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/48969> and Irish Aid (nd) *Environment and Gender Equality* Irish Aid Key Sheet #13 <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/environment-keysheet-13-gender-equality.pdf>

⁶⁸ See, The European Organization for Packaging and the Environment (nd) 'Extended Producer Responsibility' Brussels <https://europen-packaging.eu/policy/9-extended-producer-responsibility.html>

	<p>conditions, let alone value the care input in the home and community that is so vital to their creation.</p> <p>From an environmental perspective, this will also encourage better use of resources via repair, sharing, co-ownership and so on.</p>	<p>might also encourage investment in others – for example, locally produced items that do not entail substantial transport costs.</p> <p>There will be distributional impacts from any price changes. Since women are more likely to be on low income than men they will be impacted by price rises of items they purchase. Rather than of itself constituting a reason not to better account for environmental impacts, this necessitates other shifts to attend to their low income.</p>	
<p>Incentivise business models and practices which are based on wellbeing economy goals and are designed with these in mind</p>	<p>Create an economy made up of an increased proportion of businesses using commercial activities to deliver social benefits – such as worker- or</p>	<p>Despite their stakeholder orientation bringing considerable potential to reduce economic inequalities, cooperatives face the same risks of excluding women’s voices and needs as other decision-making forums,</p>	<p>The range of business models incorporating wider benefits than simply shareholder value is considerable – from incremental improvements (such as B Corps⁷⁰) to wholesale transformation of business purpose (such as the Economy for the Common Good⁷¹ and radical change in business models⁷²).</p> <p>The World Fair Trade Organisation has found that through deliberate governance, management and profit reinvestment models business models can be designed to focus on benefiting society and the planet.⁷³</p>

⁷⁰ See for a critique of the limits of the B Corp model: The Transnational Institute (2020) *Charming Psychopaths The Modern Corporation: An Interview with Joel Bakan* <https://longreads.tni.org/charming-psychopaths-the-modern-corporation/>

⁷¹ See for more explanation <https://www.ecogood.org/en/>

⁷² See, for many case studies, Doherty, Bob & Haugh, Helen et al (2020) *Creating the new economy: business models that put people and planet first*, World Fair Trade Organisation: Culemborg <https://wfto.com/article/new-report-unveils-key-insights-business-models-put-people-and-planet-first>

⁷³ Doherty, Bob & Haugh, Helen et al (2020) *Creating the new economy: business models that put people and planet first*, World Fair Trade Organisation: Culemborg <https://wfto.com/article/new-report-unveils-key-insights-business-models-put-people-and-planet-first>

	<p>producer-owned cooperatives and social enterprises. Crucial here is that they are changing the governance, ownership and purpose of their core business – not seeking to mitigate damage caused by core business. Cooperatives, for example, reduce economic inequality by ensuring that the value created by workers is retained rather than extracted to remote shareholders.⁶⁹</p>	<p>unless concerted effort is made to attend to these.</p> <p>The gender potential of community owned renewable energy comes from its potential to enhance their influence in community decision making (for example, via equal ownership that translates to say in how funds are spent in the community). If community ownership delivers more affordable energy this is likely to also benefit women who are more likely to be low incomes.</p>	<p>Scotland’s Cooperative Development Scotland is a government agency tasked with supporting the creation of employee owned and collaborative business models.⁷⁴</p> <p>Denmark’s community owned energy generation demonstrates the possibility of moving away from large, top down provision for profit.⁷⁵</p> <p>Scotland has a Business Pledge to promote businesses with more positive social impact. Its elements include: paying the real Living Wage, no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts, action to address the gender pay gap, and investing in a skilled and diverse workforce. The Business Pledge has been criticised as lacking ‘teeth’ and so its potential is latent – but it has arguably sent a message of the importance of businesses attending to these objectives. Its elevation of the gender pay gap and the real Living Wage are of direct benefit to women when they are implemented.</p>
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⁶⁹ See, for example, Erdal, D. (2011). *Beyond the Corporation – Humanity Working*. The Bodley Head: London

⁷⁴ See <https://www.scottish-enterprise.com/our-organisation/about-us/who-we-work-with/co-operative-development-scotland>

⁷⁵ Cumbers, A (2012). *Reclaiming Public Ownership: Making Space for Economic Democracy*. Zed: London

Conclusion: implications for the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy

By way of conclusion, some brief thoughts arising from the experience of advocating and mobilising for a wellbeing economy that are likely to be relevant for the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy are offered:

- Note the potentially contradictory implications of the respective conceptualisations of wellbeing in terms of where they focus attention and out the onus of action. For example, a SWB focus can risk expecting individuals to change their mindsets or become more resilient to what are socio-economic inequalities. This may be relatively politically palatable (indeed there is growing cross-party support for such ‘treatment’ agendas). But political palatability does not necessarily (in fact rarely!) align with necessary long-term system change.
- The wellbeing economy agenda is a deliberately broad one in order to be inclusive, but that can be deemed too abstract and not sufficiently prescriptive. The same dilemma is likely to face the strategic deliberations of the Commission: either stay broad to mobilise a wide enough group of stakeholders to garner momentum and hence impact *or* focus on more incisive positions that have more specific audiences and obvious and immediately feasible next steps?
- There are likely to be clear fiscal benefits from building a wellbeing economy (for example, better quality work with decent pay will necessitate less need for income support such as in-work tax credits and other poverty ameliorating measures, whereas a regenerated natural environment will see less costs in terms of cleaning up after environmental damage). There will be similar fiscal benefits from attainment of a gender-equal economy. While these will appeal to audiences and targets less likely to be moved by the justice arguments on their own, their emphasis risks relying on the ‘business case’ for such shifts and hence is in danger of reinforcing goals of the current paradigm (such as economic efficiency, productivity and growth).
- The manner and process of transition away from the current entrenched economic system matters – not least the gender equality impacts as economic change so often impacts women more heavily than men. Both the sequencing of changes (some rely on previous shifts) and shifting costs (not least attending to the livelihoods of those currently dependent on the current paradigm) need to be acknowledged and dealt with.
 - For example, in terms of sequencing: it is problematic to expect people to stop using cars until transport systems are local, affordable, connected and safe. There is both an instrumental and a moral aspect of this. The instrumental one arises from the resistance likely to be exerted by interests currently (perhaps in perception only) well-served by the economic system of today. The moral one arises from recognising that ‘stranded communities’ – for example a town whose main source of economic activity is linked to fossil fuel industries – would violate the social justice agenda at the core of a wellbeing economy.
 - Working with communities, building on their ideas and aspirations, ensuring public services are part of the process of transition (for example, retraining and income protection if needed) is non-negotiable in ensuring otherwise ‘stranded communities’ are part of the transition.
- System change – going beyond tweaking the current system – is a whole-of-government task requiring a ‘surfing of the silos’ in the form of cross-departmental working, diagonal budgeting and recognising that success is likely to be attained via the contribution of a suite of actors rather than directly and exclusively by any actor alone.

The overlapping goals of the wellbeing economy agenda and the gender-equal economy agenda make the two mutually supporting, albeit not completely synonymous. They also make for a powerful coalition. Both have their sights trained on economic system change: a goal only attainable through collaboration. It is hoped this paper has contributed to fruitful shared endeavours in the future.