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How good is good enough? Differential welfare measures in a humanitarian context
Alexander David Hunns (UNU-MERIT), Franziska Gassmann (Maastricht Graduate School of Governance), Sonja Fransen (Maastricht Graduate School of Governance), Musa Ahmed (Maastricht Graduate School of Governance), Francesco Iacoella (UNU-MERIT)

Measuring and conceptualising welfare or wellbeing has become an essential component in designing and delivering social protection programmes designed to ameliorate the situation of the poor. As the ills of persistent poverty are made clearer, and as social protection programmes come to occupy an ever large portion of GDP [4], there are clear calls to ensure accountability to affected populations and accountability to taxpayers to ensure public funds are allocated effectively to reduce poverty [11, 2]. In pursuit of conceptualising theories of social justice, competing metrics of well-being have been drawn and adapted from different disciplines of welfarism and schools of distributive principles and inter alia: capabilities, utilitarianism, proto-utilitarianism, resources welfarism, each with principles of redistribution. The resourcist measure – wealth or income – has become the dominant measure in development economics. Though Alkire and the pseudo-objective MDI approach represent an increasingly relevant alternative measure of deprivation extending beyond the monetary universe [1].

Many of these measures purport to be universalist – recourcist and capabilities,for example – are universal (or assumed to be)[10]. This appears to be consistent with the human rights approach to development in which there are assumed to be positive, universal minimum thresholds against which all people are to be measured [8]. Other measures appear to favour subjective measures of welfare, though these do not seem to have gained currency in development economics, particularly in the policy evaluation domain. These divergences notwithstanding, each discipline does imply that there is an underlying distribution of welfare in a population which just requires development of an appropriate measurement tool[5,3]. Competing welfare measures consist of competing redistribution principles on the basis of this underlying distribution, each focused on determining the priority to be given to those below a given threshold where all are given a rank placement on the distribution. In social policy design, the dominant methodology is to rank households in the consumption space and provide transfers to those in a defined percentile of the distribution[7]. Perhaps with the exception of wealth-maximisation utilitarianism, most distributive principles

require some kind of redistribution of wealth to the poorest[10]. Depending on the definition of the welfare indicator, the ranking of units, be it countries or individuals, along the distribution may change (e.g. consumption-based indicator versus multidimensional indicator).

Targeting methods aim at identifying the poorest in a given society relies on welfare indicators. The choice of the underlying indicator, the targeting method and the value of the support determine the post-transfer distribution. The effective and efficient allocation of limited resources ideally starts with the poorest, the second poorest, the third poorest, and so on[9]. As a result of this support, all recipients will have a higher level of welfare (yi+c). If allocated consistently, without any rank left out, the ranking would still be the same as before, though ideally moved above a pre-defined acceptable measure in terms of the chosen welfare indicator[7, 2]. The distribution as such would not have changed. However, given that we do not know the true distribution, mistakes are bound to happen leading to changes in ranking as a result of the support received. In this paper we explore the consequences of abandonment of deviation from this process in the context of a humanitarian situation. The case for humanitarian social protection has been made in recent work from UNU-MERIT which calls for the provision of social protection to refugees as part of a framework that should be implemented at the beginning of the displacement journey, with shadowing and integration with national social protection schemes with joint funding a key element of the framework[6]. This study explores the corollary of the situation in which refugees are brought into an area itself beset with poverty, but the delivery of transfers does not consider the distribution of welfare across the refugee and host population and instead provides transfers solely to refugees. In this paper we explore these consequences competing measures of welfare and simulating the distributional effects of transfers using novel data collected in 2017 in Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee camps, Kenya, and among the host community in the surrounding area, which represents one of the most vulnerable populations in the country. We will demonstrate the distributional effects on households using transition matrices and other common distribution analysis tools of different original positions, welfare measures and transfers. We will propose an alternative measure of welfare to be used in humanitarian situations which takes into account the factors which do distinguish refugees from their host community counterparts.

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