human development and capability association

Maitreyee

E-Bulletin of the Human Development & Capability Association
Number 22, June 2013

Maitreyee is a starting point for academics and practitioners who are seeking a brief introduction to research and work in the area of human development and the capability approach. Each issue addresses a different topic.

Collectivity in the Capability Approach

Guest Editor of this issue: Ortrud Leßmann, o.lessmann@web.de
HDCA Education Officer and Editor of the Maitreyee: José Manuel Roche, jose.roche@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Maitreyee*, the bi-annual e-bulletin of the Human Development and Capability Association, takes up the issue of collectivity in the capability approach (CA). The issue is the subject of a long-standing debate that has been summarized by Robeyns (2005: 107–110) and Alkire (2008: 34–41) and evolved further since. By now we can safely say that the CA is not individualistic in any absolute sense since it acknowledges the social influences on individuals. However, the CA adheres to what Robeyns coined "ethical individualism" and Nussbaum (2000) refers to as the "principle of each person as an end". Furthermore, acknowledging social influences is only a small step from strict individualism. Therefore, the question arises how the CA can accommodate collectivities and the role they play in the formation of capabilities. This is our focus in this Maitreyee issue.

While there are many reasons for becoming interested in this subject, our starting point has been a project on how to conceptualize fair sustainable development on the basis of the CA (www.geneca.ufz.de). It has turned out to be a major problem for conceptualizing sustainable development – beyond defining the goal of sustainability in terms of substantive freedoms – that the CA so far does not accommodate collectivities in a systematic way. Sustainability is a problem that belongs to humanity as a whole as Sen (2013: 7) has put it and thus pertains to the largest human collectivity there is. Yet, it is also a problem that relates to people's individual lives and is important to many people. The need to address these issues led to a workshop on "Collective Agency & Institutions, Sustainability and the Capability Approach" at the Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig on September 27-28th 2012 (see report on the workshop at www.geneca.ufz.de). The response to the workshop showed that the topic deserved more attention. To initiate the discussion, this Maitreyee issue collects some of the work recently done on that subject.

Solava Ibrahim argues in favour of using the notion of collective capabilities and provides an overview of the reasons for doing so, the definition, the critiques and the limitations of the concept. Jürgen Volkert – though agreeing with Ibrahim on the necessity to consider collective action in the CA – objects to the notion of collective capabilities since not all members of a collectivity will perceive the group's achievements in the same way and because the ends of collectivities do inherently differ from personal ends. He highlights, however, that the CA allows for instances of non-individual agency and distinguishes various concepts. On a more neutral ground, John Davis presents his idea about how collectives shape a person's identity as an alternative view to addressing social interaction to that of collective capabilities. Davis focuses on collective intentions and the role they play in negotiating one's manifold social identities. Putting these complex issues into practice, Dorothea Kleine first introduces a framework for situating collective action in the CA. She illustrates the use of the choice framework with the example of public procurement policies in Brazil.

As this small collection of essays shows, there is no simple or unambiguous way to accommodate collectivities in the CA. The topic is inherently complex and the variety of approaches to it reflects this complexity. Alkire (2008) has pointed out that the issue of collectivities is typically raised when trying to answer the question of how to expand capabilities – she calls this prospective analysis in contrast to evaluative analysis which focuses on identifying current functionings and capabilities. The motivation for editing this Maitreyee issue – notably sustainable development – seems to be a primary example for her claim. Yet, in evaluative analysis we may also miss something if we do not broaden the conceptual consideration of social interaction in the CA beyond distribution of resources and (social)

conversion factors. The approaches for accommodating collectivities in the CA may further be classified according to two considerations: Firstly, some take the *internal* point of view of the individual as a starting point while others look at collectivities from an *external and descriptive* point of view; secondly, some focus on *well-being* while others are mainly concerned with *agency* aiming at goals beyond individual well-being. This e-bulletin tends to focus on approaches that take the internal point of view as a starting point defining collectivities as the groups people adhere to instead of ascribing group membership to them. While Ibrahim is mainly concerned with the role collectivities play in enhancing individuals' well-being in terms of capabilities, Volkert and Davis both give Sen's concept of commitment a prominent role in their considerations hence focusing on agency. However, the distinction between well-being and agency is notoriously difficult and misty since the CA gives freedom and active choice a crucial role not only in striving for other goals but also in furthering well-being. In practice the areas of well-being and agency are thoroughly intertwined as Kleine's example shows.

The e-bulletin only touches upon external or descriptive approaches which are exemplified by Stewart's (2005) empirical work on horizontal inequality that looks at people's group membership for explaining their well-being and Deneulin's (2008) proposal to integrate Ricoeur's notion of structures of living together into the CA. While these two focus on the well-being aspect, social and relational ontology (Martins 2007, Smith/ Sewart 2009) focuses on the agency aspect in so far as they start from describing collectives as agents.

We wish you an enjoyable read and look forward to receiving your comments and contributions on the issues raised in this e-bulletin. We take the opportunity to invite HDCA members to volunteer as guest editors for future Maitreyee issues.

Guest Editor of this issue:

Ortrud Leßmann
o.lessmann@web.de

HDCA Education Officer
and Editor of the Maitreyee:

José Manuel Roche
jose.roche@qeh.ox.ac.uk

References

Alkire, S. (2008) Using the Capability Approach: Prospective and Evaluative Analyses, in: Comim, Flavio, Qizilbash, Mozafffar; Alkire, Sabina (eds.): *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Application*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26–50.

Deneulin, S. (2008) Beyond Individual Freedom and Agency: Structures of Living Together, in: Comim, Flavio, Qizilbash, Mozafffar; Alkire, Sabina (eds.): *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Application*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.

Martins, N. (2007) Ethics, Ontology and Capabilities, *Review of Political Economy*, 19 (1), 37-53.

Nussbaum, M. (2000) *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robeyns, I. (2005) The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey, *Journal of Human Development* 6 (1), 93-114.

Smith, M. L. and Sewart, C. (2009)The Relational Ontology of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: Incorporating Social and Individual Causes, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 10 (2), 213-236.

Stewart, F. (2005) Groups and Capabilities, *Journal of Human Development* 6(2), 185-204.

Insights

COLLECTIVE CAPABILITIES: WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Solava Ibrahim (solava.ibrahim@manchester.ac.uk)

Institute for Development Policy and Management (IDPM)

University of Manchester, UK

Introduction

In recent years, a growing body of literature sought to extend the analysis of human capabilities from the individual to the collectivity. Responding to the critique that the 'capability approach is too individualistic', a number of scholars emphasized the importance of social structures, collectivities and groups for the building and expansion of human capabilities. They stressed the interaction between human capabilities and social structures and argued for a new type of capabilities that is generated as a result of this interaction. As a result, a number of new terms were introduced to 'label' this new type of capabilities, such as group capabilities (Stewart 2005); collective capabilities (Evans, 2002; Kabeer, 2003; Ibrahim, 2006; Ballet et al, 2007); relational capabilities (Dubois et al, 2008); and external capabilities (Foster and Handy, 2009).

This paper argues that collectivities have an evaluative and effective importance for human capabilities. It affirms that capabilities can be generated through individual efforts *and* collective processes; and argues that the intrinsic and instrumental importance of collectivities needs to be acknowledged within the capability approach. Not only are collectivities *constitutive* to human values as they have a direct impact on what 'one values and has reason to value', they also play an *effective and transformative* role in helping individuals and communities to reach the lives they aspire to. Given the intrinsic *and* instrumental importance of collectivities for human capabilities, this paper will (1) explore the concept of 'collective capabilities'; (2) explain its contribution to capability analyses; (3) address some of the critiques to the concept; and (4) identify the limitations and conditions under which collective capabilities can/should be generated.

What are Collective Capabilities?

The term 'collective capabilities' was first coined by Peter Evans in his article '*Collective Capabilities, Culture and Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom'* (2002). Evans (2002) mainly argues that our values and individual capabilities depend on collectivities. Collectivities are therefore not only means for pursuing the goals that one values, but are also 'arenas for formulating' these goals. For Stewart (2005), group capabilities are not simply the sum or average of individual capabilities. Collective capabilities thus need to be seen as those capabilities that result from the exercise of collective agency and whose benefits accrue to the individual and the collectivity. They are capabilities that the individual alone would neither have nor be able to achieve (Ibrahim, 2006).

These collective capabilities affect individual capabilities in two ways. First, the act of choosing the life that one 'has reason to value' might be a *collective* rather than an individual act (Evans, 2002). Secondly, these capabilities affect the individual's perception of the good which guides his/her acts of human agency. Collective capabilities are crucial for public reasoning and democratic processes as these are *group*-based phenomena that affect human capabilities (Sen, 2002). Collective capabilities are also instrumentally valuable, especially for the poor, to enhance their bargaining power, encourage resource sharing and create a sense of self-esteem amongst them while encouraging them to participate in local decision-making (Thorp, Stewart, and Heyer, 2005).

Various scholars undertook empirical studies to apply the concept of collective capabilities and explore how the poor collectively expand their capabilities by defending their rights (Kabeer, 2003) and form their self-help groups (Ibrahim, 2008). The concept has also been applied in a variety of areas, such as natural resource management (Pelenc et al, 2013); technology (Fernandez-Baldor et al, 2012); participatory methods (Frediani, 2010) and disability (Dubois and Trani, 2009). These applications demonstrate the contribution that the concept can have to capability analyses.

Why are Collective Capabilities Important?

Sen views individuals as socially embedded agents who interact with their societies and participate in political and social affairs (Sen, 2002). He recognizes the impact of social values on the individual's acts of sympathy and commitment. The former refers to the concern for others that directly affects a person's own welfare, while the latter reflects the concern for others, even if a person's own welfare is not threatened (Sen, 1982). Sen, however, argues that "societal arrangements, […] are investigated in terms of their contribution to enhancing and guaranteeing the substantive freedoms of individuals" (Sen 1999: xiii). The CA thus acknowledges the importance of social structures, however, only so far as they influence *individual* well-being and freedom. It is worth noting though, that social structures are not only instrumentally important for promoting (or restraining) human freedoms and agency, but they are also intrinsically valuable.

The relationship between collective and individual capabilities is mutually reinforcing. Individual capabilities are generated through personal choices and capacities as well as the individual's interaction with social structures (Smith and Seward, 2009). Collective capabilities are also important because "capabilities are also function of people's *primary engagement* in social relationships" (De Herdt and Deneulin, 2007, 180 [emphasis in original]). Collective capabilities and human agency are closely related. Individuals who engage in collective action usually do so to pursue not only their own self-interests, but also goals other than their own – mostly linked to their wider conception of the good. The building of individual capabilities is crucial for the success of any act of collective agency. At the same time the generation of collective capabilities can also alter the pre-existing unequal power relations thus promoting individual and communal wellbeing. Cleaver (2007) points out that "individual human agency shapes and is shaped by social relationships and institutions" (Cleaver, 2007, 224). She adds that people act collectively to negotiate norms, challenge existing inequalities and defend their rights (Cleaver, 2007). The generation of collective capabilities therefore demonstrates how individuals can act together as agents of change, rather than each one of them pursuing his/her choices alone. Capability analyses therefore need to account for the constitutive and instrumental role that collectivities can play in promoting the individual's ability to achieve the life that s/he values.

Critiques of Collective Capabilities

The concept of collective capabilities has been subject to various critiques, even from Sen himself. Sen asserts that ‘‘no individual can think, choose, or act without being influenced […] by the nature and working of the society around him or her’’ (Sen, 2002, 80) and emphasizes the importance of collective processes, such as public reasoning and democratic processes. Nevertheless, he rejects the concept of collective capabilities and prefers to label those capabilities that result from social interaction as ‘socially dependent individual capabilities’. Only those capabilities related to humanity at large, such as drastic reductions in child mortality, can be considered collective capabilities (Sen, 2002, 85). More recently, Sen (2009) affirms his rejection of the concept by explaining that individuals belong to different groups and some of these groups might be repressive to human freedoms. He renews his emphasis on the individual as the main ‘unit of analysis’ and accounts mainly for the *instrumental* role of collectivities and social structures.

Other scholars have also criticised the concept. Alkire (2008), for example, argues that for evaluative purposes the focus of the capability approach should remain the individual. She criticizes the notion of collective capabilities as it assumes that “every member of the group/collectivity who enjoyed those capabilities valued them” (Akire, 2008, 39) and explains that "a claim that a structure or group ‘provided a collective capability’ may overlook some significant dis-benefits or heterogeneities” (ibid, 40). The concept has been criticised due to (1) the potential negative impact of group affiliation; (2) the limitations on group formation among the poor and (3) the exclusionary nature of some groups. While some groups can nurture the sense of affiliation and belonging, others might nurture exploitative exclusionary practices and lead to social conflict (Cleaver, 1999). These exclusionary practices, however, should *not* undermine the *potential* role that collectivities can play in enhancing human capabilities. In addition, the various limitations on collective action and group formation among the poor – such as their lack of assets and resources – can also act as *incentives* for them to enhance their human capabilities through a *collectivity*. There is hence a need to “create an enabling environment to provide the poor with the tools, and the voice, to navigate their way out of poverty" (Rao and Walton, 2004, 361). Such a supportive environment can be provided through the *collectivity*.

Limitations and Determinants of Collective Capabilities

Whilst acknowledging the aforementioned critiques of collective capabilities, they should not discourage us from stressing the valuable instrumental and intrinsic role that collectivities can play in the promotion and generation of human capabilities. Deneulin (2008) asserts that “structures of living together … need to be identified, because they are properties of a collectivity rather than a property of individuals” (Deneulin, 2008, 116). It is essential to note that the formation of collectivities is in itself a major challenge as it depends on a variety of factors such as: group size, the purpose and process of group formation, the motivations for group membership, the objectives of the group, the dynamics and mode of its operation, the nature of group leadership, the role of a supportive ideology and the existence of adequate institutional structures enhancing human capabilities (Olsen, 1965; Alkire and Deneulin, 2002; Thorp, Stewart and Heyer, 2005; Heyer, Stewart and Thorp, 2002).

The question is however NOT whether collective capabilities are important or not – as they are. The question is mainly about the *conditions* under which these capabilities could/should be

generated. No one can claim that collective capabilities are always 'good' or equally beneficial to everyone, however, they are not inherently harmful. There are a number of conditions that need to be fulfilled to ensure that these newly generated capabilities benefit the individual and the collectivity:

1. The generation of collective capabilities needs to be through the *free and voluntary* participation of the collectivity members, rather than through force or coercion. Individuals will *redefine their 'personhood* (Kabeer, 2003) and feel dedicated to the collectivity instead of merely using it to achieve personal goals.
2. The newly generated collective capabilities need not be equally distributed, however, this *should not be due to deliberate exclusionary practices* within the collectivity, but mainly due to the ability of each individual to transform these capabilities into actual functionings. Each individual should have had the same *opportunity* freedom to choose among those newly generated collective capabilities. More policies should ensure that this is possible.

   'Not all collective capabilities' are good; as they are based on the choices that the members make and on *the common conception of the good* that they are pursuing. The generated capabilities should be valued and lead to capability expansion (rather than destruction).

3. The generation of collective capabilities should be based on the *exercise of collective human agency* through which individuals seek to achieve goals they value (Crocker, 2008). This act of collective agency should be 'empowering', i.e. enabling agents to gain *new* capabilities.

4. Collective capabilities are also linked to a *sense of responsibility that individuals* express towards each other in the collectivity (Ballet et al, 2007). In this process, (a) personal freedoms and rights need to be preserved; (b) responsibilities need to be located within the context of social interactions; and (c) changes in collective capability can occur even if individual capabilities remain unchanged as they depend on social interaction, not merely on individual capabilities (Ballet et al, 2007).

5. Retaining the individual as an important 'unit of analysis' is crucial but there is a need to extend the evaluative space of human capabilities to the individual *and* the collectivity. In many developing countries, people do not identify themselves as 'individuals', but instead as members of diverse communities who have multiple identities.

In sum, collective capabilities need to be agent-oriented, free, voluntary and empowering in nature and need to generate benefits accruing to the individual and the collectivity at large; in addition to affecting the individual's perceptions of his/herself and his/her sense of responsibility towards others. The evaluative space of human capabilities therefore needs to be extended from the individual to the collectivity. It is therefore important to analyse how human capabilities are generated at the individual *and* collective levels and to assess their impact on the well-being of individuals *and* the larger community.

References

Alkire, S. (2008) 'Using the Capability Approach: Prospective and Evaluative Analyses', in S. Alkire, F. Comim and M. Qizilbash (eds.) *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Application,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Alkire, S. and Deneulin, S. (2002) 'Individual Motivation, its Nature, Determinants and Consequences for Within-group Behaviour', in J. Heyer, F. Stewart and R. Thorp (eds.), *Group Behaviour and Development: Is Market Destroying Cooperation?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ballet, J., Dubois, J.L. and Mahieu, F. R. (2007) 'Responsibility for Each Other's Freedom: Agency as the Source of Collective Capability', *Journal of Human Development*, 8 (2) pp. 185-201.

Cleaver, F. (2007) 'Understanding Agency in Collective Action', *Journal of Human Development*, 8 (2) pp. 223-244.

Cleaver, F. (1999) 'Paradoxes of Participation: Questioning Participatory Approaches to Development'. *Journal of International Development*, 11, pp. 597-612.

Crocker, D. (2008) *Ethics of global development. Agency, capability and deliberative democracy*. Cambridge University press, Cambridge.

De Herdt, T. and Deneulin, S. (2007) 'Guest Editors' Introduction', *Journal of Human Development*, 8 (2), pp. 179-183.

Deneulin, S. (2008) 'Beyond individual freedom and agency: structures of living together in the capability approach', in S. Alkire, F. Comim and M. Qizilbash (eds.) *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Application*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dubois, J.L., Lompo, K., Giraud, G. and Renouard, C. (2008) The Relational Capability: Theory and Empirical Evidence in Nigeria. Conference paper presented at *HDCA 2008 conference,* New Delhi, Sep. 2008.

Dubois, J. L. and J.F. Trani (2009) Extending the capability paradigm to address the complexity of disability, *European Journal of Disability Research*, 3 (3), pp. 192–218

Evans, P. (2002) 'Collective Capabilities, Culture and Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom' *Studies in Comparative International Development,* 37(2) pp. 54-60.

Frediani, A. A. (2010) Sen's Capability Approach as a framework to the practice of development, *Development in Practice*, 20 (2), pp. 173-187

Fernandez-Baldor, A., A. Hueso and A. Boni (2012) From Individuality to Collectivity: The Challenges for Technology-Oriented Development Projects in Oosterlaken, Ilse; Hoven, Jeroen (Eds.) *The Capability Approach, Technology and Design*, Springer, London.

Foster, J. and Handy, C. (2009) 'External Capabilities' in K. Basu and R. Kanbur (Eds) *Arguments for a Better World: Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Heyer, J., Stewart, F. and Thorp, R. (2002) *Group Behaviour and Development: Is Market Destroying Cooperation?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ibrahim, S. (2006) 'From Individual to Collective Capabilities: the Capability Approach as a Conceptual Framework for Self-help', *Journal of Human Development,* 7 (3) pp. 398-416.

Ibrahim S. (2008) Collective agency: wider freedoms and new capabilities through self-help in P. Bakhshi A. Brouillet, C. Duray-Soundron and J.L Dubois (Eds) *Repenser L'Action collective: Une approche par les capabilités [Rethinking Collective Action through the Capabilities Approach]*. Paris: Réseau Impact, Ethique Economique.

Kabeer, N. (2003) 'Making rights work for the poor: Nijera Kori and the Construction of Collective Capabilities in rural Bangladesh', *IDS Working Paper 2000*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Olson, M. (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups,* Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press.

Pelenc, J., M. K. Lompo, J. Ballet & J.-L. Dubois (2013) Sustainable Human Development and the Capability Approach: Integrating Environment, Responsibility and Collective Agency, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 14 (1), pp. 77-94.

Rao, V. and Walton, M. (2004) (eds.) *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Sen, A. K. (1982) *Choice, Welfare and Measurement*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Sen, A. K. (1999) *Development as Freedom,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Sen, A.K. (2002) 'Response to Commentaries', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 37 (2) pp. 78-86.

Sen, A. K. (2009) *The Idea of Justice*, Penguin Group, London.

Smith, L. & C. Seward (2009) The Relational Ontology of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: Incorporating Social and Individual Causes, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 10(2), pp. 213-235

Stewart, F. (2005) 'Groups and Capabilities', *Journal of Human Development*, 6 (2) pp.185-204.

Thorp, R., Stewart, F. and Heyer, J. (2005) 'When and How Far is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?' *World Development*, 33 (6) pp. 907-920.

CONCEPTS OF AGENCY, SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (SHD) AND COLLECTIVE ABILITIES

Jürgen Volkert (juergen.volkert@hs-pforzheim.de)

Pforzheim University, Germany

'Human Development' aims at expanding people's freedoms and capabilities to realize the beings and doings they value and have reason to value. Based on this and going beyond the Brundtland Report perception, Sustainable Human Development (SHD) has been defined as "the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously comprising those of future generations" (UNDP 2011: 2). Therefore, the CA focuses on Sustainable *Human* Development which ensures that personal freedoms and individual capability sets are enhanced. This is much more than just durable development over time and requires people to become agents who deliberate about and shape development in accordance with their own values and objectives (Sen 2009; Crocker and Robeyns 2010). Sen (1999: 18-19) understands the concept of an agent as "someone who acts and brings about change." As such, individual agency is a constitutive precondition for SHD. However, in some cases fostering SHD may overburden individuals. Therefore, an assessment of agency and SHD needs to consider the role groups can play for sustainably realizing what their individual members value and have reason to value.

In the CA, individual agency is not exclusively motivated by well-being goals oriented to one's own life and to other-regarding goals that are driven by sympathy (or antipathy). Rather, the CA extends the motivational assumptions by introducing commitments which break the links between individual self-interest and individual or collective actions, possibly as a result of social and behavioral norms. They can bring about the pursuit of goals that have no impact on our personal well-being and may imply "generosity" for others at the expense of our own well-being (Sen 2009: 188-193). This extension of motivational assumptions is essential for capturing the full scope of motives and actions that are possible and necessary to act sustainably. For instance, non-relational commitments provide explanations why some may care for distant people, generations or species that they do not and will never know (Sen 2009: 248-252). However, when societies and market economies are mainly driven by self-interest, individual commitments may be too weak and fail to compensate for lack of individual interest and resulting market failures that are widespread in SHD.[1] Therefore, 'collectivities' (Evans 2002; Ibrahim 2006) can be indispensable to ensure SHD commitments in a way that people have reason to value when individuals fail to bring about SHD.

In an ideal world of economics, the state as a very large collectivity is supposed to provide all prerequisites of agency such as assets and personal, social or environmental conversion factors (Robeyns 2005) to sufficiently empower individuals. It will also use its monopoly of power to establish an opportunity structure that prevents power asymmetries among social actors who will gain equal effective power. In doing so, the state will ensure individuals' "realized agency success" (Sen 1992: 58) in the sense of a consistency of what the state provides with what individuals would like to achieve as agents. In the best case, even without direct individual

[1] For empirical evidence on this for Germany see: Volkert, Krumm and Seckler (2013).

participation and control, public policy will foster SHD and enhance the individuals' freedom to lead the life they *would* choose. Hence, 'realized agency success' increases the individuals' effective freedom – but not their 'freedom of direct control' (Sen 1992: 65-66). This can be helpful when power asymmetries exist so that the state aims at enhancing individuals' effective freedom without more (unequal) individual control. Sen (2009: 202-203) argues further that such a concept which requires 'everyone following rules of behavior' is adequate to restrain from snatching 'a little gain at the cost of making things worse for others'. He mentions environmental sustainability and the preservation of shared natural resources as examples. Sen's concept of "realized agency success" is very important because it reminds us of the role of institutions and other people in bringing about our SHD goals (Crocker and Robeyns 2010: 77). For instance, by overcoming market failures, they can avoid overburdening individuals. However, what Sen coined "realized agency success" is realized by the agency of others and of institutions or circumstances, but it is *not* the result of our own individual agency.

Individual agency comprises direct and indirect agency. Indirect agency, inter alia, stands for individual citizens' public reasoning envisioning a 'government by discussion' (Sen 2009: 324). This allows influencing and indirectly controlling social actors and institutions, e.g. the parliament to pass laws fostering SHD (Crocker and Robeyns 2010: 78). However, in practice, benefitting from or indirectly controlling institutions may not be sufficient. Direct agency can be necessary, e.g. because the state cannot regulate all SHD issues that people fail to achieve individually.[2] Other governments are probably unable to adequately fulfill the tasks mentioned above and some may even abuse their monopoly of power. Under these and similar circumstances it is helpful that direct agency encompasses individuals' direct control of decisions and actions but also effective power (Alkire 2009). Often, groups aim at helping people achieve direct control and effective power to realize what they value.

Therefore, groups are of high importance for agency and SHD. Their collective outcome can be intrinsically important for human capabilities.[3] For some members, the collective potential or outcome may enhance their valued capabilities of being accepted, others will intrinsically value the participation and contribution to the life of communities. For further members the collective outcome may even violate what they intrinsically value, e.g. when disrespectful treatment by other group members impairs their capability to be respected. As such, the same collective process and outcome may be intrinsically important for the capabilities of some and intrinsically irrelevant or even detrimental for other group members (cf. Alkire 2008). Therefore, collectivities do not constitute a common '*collective'* capability for an entire membership; rather group outcomes are of high importance for SHD because they can provide socially dependent *individual* capabilities (Sen 2002: 85) which are intrinsically valuable in the life of some members. Nevertheless, even for those who do not intrinsically value group abilities or outcomes, it may be necessary to join groups because of the instrumental value that a collectivity can provide. For instance, collective action can help establishing social and environmental conversion factors and instrumental freedoms (e.g. access to social networks, to education, to political decision making, ecological security etc.),[4] that are decisive for SHD.

In short, groups are highly important for SHD but they do not provide a common '*collective'* capability for their entire membership. Therefore, the term "collective ability" is proposed here to distinguish human capabilities of individual members from the potentials and outcomes that groups provide. Collective abilities also comprise positive and negative collective potentials

[2] Volkert, Krumm and Seckler (2013) provide an empirical analysis of these obstacles for Germany.
[3] Ibrahim (2006: 406) and Evans (2002: 56-57).
[4] Sen (1999) and Robeyns (2005).

that are beyond any individual's capability. Examples are the collective abilities to kill the entire population by nuclear bombing or to cut global child mortality.[5] The distinction of collective abilities from human capabilities is particularly important for the CA because a group agent comes into existence only when and because the group's attitudes come apart from the attitudes of its individual members. As such, the existence of group agency bears on the autonomy of groups as agents on their own rights and with minds of their own (List and Pettit 2011: 75-78). Thus, if we want to consistently maintain the CA's normative focus on capabilities as *human* ends, we must not confuse these with the collective abilities that groups provide because the latter are inherently different and can even violate human capabilities.[6]

Collective abilities also help generating and providing power as a means to achieve what is valued (Drydyk 2008: 243). This is very important for realizing SHD through direct and indirect agency. Collectivities have the ability to overcome people's lack of effective power which establishes effective power as a constitutive element of direct agency. They also counteract disempowering processes that may prevent people from acting or from bringing about change. For instance, civil society groups often establish a countervailing power against vested interests, transnational corporations or corrupt state officials. States as very large collectives also have the task to foster empowerment by education, access to information and other means of empowerment. In doing so, the state can strengthen people's indirect agency, control and public reasoning as a prerequisite for SHD through "democracy by discussion". Furthermore, by empowering their citizens, states also contribute to bringing collective abilities of smaller groups closer to what their members value. Therefore effective power and 'durable empowerment'[7] by small groups and by large collectivities like the state are prerequisites for direct and indirect agency to foster SHD.

We can conclude that human agency is decisive for pursuing SHD. The CA's rich motivational concept of agency that includes commitments is essential to assess SHD of distant people, generations and species. The importance of Sen's concept of 'realized agency success', though not based on the agency of the benefitted person, lies in its emphasis on the major role of institutions and other people for SHD. "Realized agency success" will only reflect what the people value when they use their indirect agency and participate in public reasoning and discussions. However, governments can never completely regulate SHD. When they fail to adequately fulfill their tasks, abuse their monopoly of power or in other cases of power asymmetries, direct agency, control *and* effective power are necessary. Direct agency can be provided in civil society groups' which can achieve outcomes that are of intrinsic and of instrumental value. However, collectivities do not establish common "collective" capabilities for their entire membership. Instead, individual values and evaluations determine whether a certain group outcome is of intrinsic value, irrelevant or even detrimental to one's intrinsic values (Sen 2002). Therefore, to maintain the CA's consistency and normative emphasis on *human* ends it is recommendable to use different terms to distinguish human capabilities from *inherently* different collective abilities. This is also necessary as long as the CA focuses on capabilities that do not result in just 'some' sustainable development but in *enhanced* Sustainable *Human* Development.

[5] Sen (2002:85) has provided these examples and originally called them "collective capabilities".
[6] In settings of social inequality or power asymmetries a person who exercises his or her capabilities may also violate others' capability sets. However, this calls for strengthening the CA analysis of power and influence (on others) and not for reinventing this theoretical weakness by the introduction of a concept of 'collective capabilities'.
[7] According to the concept of 'durable empowerment' "people are durably empowered to the extent that they exercise enhanced decision-making and influence over strategic life-choices and barriers to agency and well-being freedom." It also requires that people's capacity has to be improved to an extent that they can make these gains prevail, given the capabilities and assets they have and control and taking account of the opportunity structure in which they act; Drydyk (2008: 241-242).

The concept of agency has to be enriched with the idea of 'durable empowerment' to capture the ability of people to become agents who decide and act but who also have the real freedom to bring about the changes that are necessary to foster and preserve SHD. Empowering people as democratic citizens and as members of smaller groups contributes to indirect and direct agency to foster SHD. An improved analysis of empowerment and effective power will also strengthen CA assessments of responsibilities for SHD because responsibilities and obligations are based on an actor's ability and power (Sen 2009: 271).

References

Alkire, S. (2008) Using the Capability Approach: Prospective and Evaluative Analyses, in: Comim, F., Qizilbash, M.; Alkire, S. (eds.): *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Applications*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26–50.

Alkire, S. (2009) 'Concepts and Measures of Agency', in: K. Basu und S. M. R. Kanbur (eds.): *Arguments for a better world. Essays in honor of Amartya Sen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 455–474.

Crocker, D. A.; Robeyns, I. (2010) 'Capability and Agency'. In: C. W. Morris (ed.): *Amartya Sen*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 60–90.

Drydyk, J. (2008) 'Durable Empowerment', *Journal of Global Ethics*, 4 (3), pp. 231-245.

Evans, P. (2002) 'Collective Capabilities, Culture and Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 37 (2), pp. 54-60.

Ibrahim, S. (2006) 'From Individual to Collective Capabilities: the capability approach as a conceptual framework for self-help', *Journal of Human Development*, 7 (3), pp. 398-416.

List, C.; Pettit, P. (2011): *Group agency. The possibility, design, and status of corporate agents*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (2009) *The Idea of Justice*. London: Penguin.

Sen, A. (2002) 'Response to Commentaries' *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 37 (2), pp. 78-86.

Sen, A. K. (1999): *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. K. (1992) *Inequality Re-examined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

UNDP (2011) United Nations Development Programme 'Human Development. Report Sustainability and Equity: a better Future for all', New York .

Volkert, J.; Krumm, R.; Seckler, M. (2013): Sustainability, Public Choice and the Capability Approach: an actor based theoretical and empirical assessment, forthcoming.

COMMITMENT, IDENTITY, AND COLLECTIVE INTENTIONS

John B. Davis (john.davis@marquette.edu)

Marquette University, US and University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

There are different ways in which the capability approach can address social interaction and people's sociality. One way is by using Sen's concept of commitment to explain individuals' social group relationships. Sen's original "Rational Fools" understanding of commitment distinguishes it from welfare-increasing sympathy, thus driving "a wedge between personal choice and personal welfare" (Sen, 1977, p. 329). His "Goals, Commitment, and Identity" (1985) extends the concept by associating commitment with individuals' identification with social groups (Davis, 2007). Here commitment is tied to Sen's " fourth aspect of the self" and his new emphasis on "reasoning and self-scrutiny" (Sen, 2002a, p. 36). The difference between the first three aspects of the self (self-centered welfare, self-welfare goal, and self-goal choice) and the reasoning and self-scrutinizing aspect of the self is the difference between being instrumentally rational and non-instrumentally rational. Identification with others (whether groups or individuals) is non-instrumentally rational because one makes a commitment to them irrespective of payoffs. In effect, one becomes 'socially embedded' in those groups to which one makes commitments, thereby having a set of social identities as well as a personal identity.

"We all have many identities, and being 'just me' is not the only way we see ourselves" (Sen, 2002a, p. 215).

But this analysis creates an apparent paradox. If identification with others 'socially embeds' a person, is one then no longer a 'me' at all? Sen speaks of "socially dependent individual capabilities" when he emphasizes people's social interactions with others (Sen, 2002b, p. 85), so clearly he believes people can identify with others and remain individuals. He also offers a way of thinking about how this occurs in associating social identity with first person plural speech. "The nature of our language often underlines the forces of our wider identity. 'We' demand things; 'our' actions reflect 'our' concerns; 'we' protest at injustice done to 'us'" (Sen, 2002a, p. 215; also cf. p. 41). By nature, first person plural speech both socially embeds people and distinguishes them as the individuals who express it. So we can discharge the apparent commitment-social identity paradox if we can provide a systematic account of how commitment operates in terms of first person plural speech.

Searle offers a reasons-based account of commitment that is close to Sen's original treatment of commitment (2001, pp. 167ff), and has also developed an analysis of first person plural speech in terms of collective intentions (1990, 1995). Intentions reflect people's purposes, and collective intentions reflect their purposes in combination with others. There is an extensive literature on collective intentions – e.g., Michael Bratman (1993, 1999), Margaret Gilbert (1989, 1996), and Raimo Tuomela (1992, 1995) – which seeks to explain collective action in terms of collective intentions. So this is indeed one way in which the capability approach can address social interaction and people's sociality.

To further develop this framework in connection with people having social identities, we need to recognize the different ways in which people socially identify with others in social groups. Psychology's social identity theory distinguishes people's relational social identities, which are "(i) those that derive from interpersonal relationships and interdependence with specific others," and their categorical social identities, which are "(ii) those that derive from membership in larger, more impersonal collectives or social categories" (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Relational social identities are associated with a person's roles and responsibilities in the group, and categorical social identities are associated with a person's attachment to the group as a whole. People thus make commitments to others both across the different social groups with which they identify and within these different social groups according to their different role relationships to others. Accordingly they can be said to develop both relational and categorical social identity capabilities.

But this suggests that should capability theorists make commitment and social identity central to their thinking about social interaction and sociality they might need to formulate their thinking in terms of complex systems and adaptive behavior. Complex adaptive systems are networks of heterogeneous agents exhibiting nonlinear patterns of interaction that give rise to emergent behavior and phenomena (cf. e.g., Arthur, 1999). The capability approach, of course, emphasizes human heterogeneity. And it is not difficult to see that people's relational and categorical social identities can be cross-cutting and conflict in complex ways. Broadly speaking, their commitments to different categorical social identities can conflict, their commitments to different role relational social identities within any given social group can conflict, their commitments to different role relational social identities across groups they belong to can conflict, and their role relational social identities can conflict with their categorical social identities. These sorts of conflicts are nicely illustrated in Uyan-Semerici's (2007) interview-based collective intentions analysis of the circumstances of migrant women in squatter settlements in Istanbul, where special attention is given to conflicts between women's

relational social identity capabilities. How do these migrant women, it is fair to ask, negotiate their complex social circumstances? Arguably they proceed adaptively, doing the best they can to balance their different role commitments, while living in social environments that as a whole exhibit emergence and transformation.

There are now a variety of formal models available to explain adaptive behavior and learning in complex social systems (cf. Kirman, 2011). But note that Uyan-Semerici's method of analysis is particularly well-suited to Sen's "reasoning and self-scrutiny" fourth aspect of the self, since it relies on women's own narratives about their lives which relate how they deliberate over and scrutinize how to balance their different commitments to others. Elsewhere along these lines I develop this capability approach to social identity as a complex structure, and make personal identity self-narratives a central human capability that individuals exercise to negotiate their lives (Davis, 2011).

There are other ways in which the capability approach can address social interaction and people's sociality that take different routes, for example, by investigating the concept of collective capabilities. Other contributions to this issue of Maitreyee explore those possibilities.

References

Arthur, W. Brian (1999) "Complexity and the Economy," *Science* 284 (April): 107-9.

Bratman, Michael (1993) "Shared Intention," *Ethics* 104: 97-113.

Brewer, Marilynn and Wendi Gardner (1996) "Who is this 'we'? Levels of collective identity and self representations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71: 83-93.

Bratman, Michael (1999) *Faces of Intention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davis, John (2007) "Identity and Commitment: Sen's Fourth Aspect of the Self," in F. Peter and H. B. Schmid, eds., *Rationality and Commitment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, John (2011) *Individuals and Identity in Economics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, Margaret (1989) *On Social Facts*, New York: Routledge.

Gilbert, Margaret (1996) *Living Together*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kirman, Alan (2011) *Complex Economics: Individual and Collective Rationality*, London: Routledge.

Sen, Amartya (1977) "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6: 317-344.

Sen, Amartya (1985) "Goals, Commitment, and Identity," *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization* 1 (2): 206-224. Republished in Sen 2002: 206-224.

Sen, Amartya (2002a) *Rationality and Freedom,* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Sen, Amartya (2002b) "Response to Commentaries," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37 (2): 78-86.

Searle, John (1990) "Collective Intentions and Actions," in *Intentions in Communication*, P. Cohen, J. Morgan, and M.E. Pollack, eds. Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, MIT press.

Searle, John (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York, N.Y.: Free Press.

Searle, John (2001) *Rationality in Action*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Tuomela, Raimo (1992) "Group Beliefs," *Synthese* 91: 285-318.

Tuomela, Raimo (1995) *The Importance of Us*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Uyan-Semerci, Pinar (2007) "A Relational Account of Nussbaum's List of Capabilities" *Journal of Human Development* 8 (2): 203-221.

In practice

USING THE CHOICE FRAMEWORK TO SITUATE CASES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CAPABILITIES THINKING: THE EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Dorothea Kleine (Dorothea.Kleine@rhul.ac.uk)

ICT4D Centre and Centre for Research into Sustainability,

Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

As this issue of *Maitreyee* aptly shows, there is an ongoing debate how notions of collectivity, collective action, or even collective capabilities might successfully be incorporated in capabilities thinking. Amartya Sen's (1999) formulation of the capability approach, whilst being recognised as one of the most important contributions to development theory in decades, has been described as being, amongst other things, a) a challenge to operationalize and b) not entirely clear on how individual and collective actions can lead to an expansion of capabilities.

This short piece offers the choice framework as a tool to operationalize the capabilities approach, and then applies it to public procurement, which is read as an expression of collective choice. The choice framework is explained more fully in my book *Technologies of Choice? ICTs, development and the capabilities approach* (MIT Press 2013).

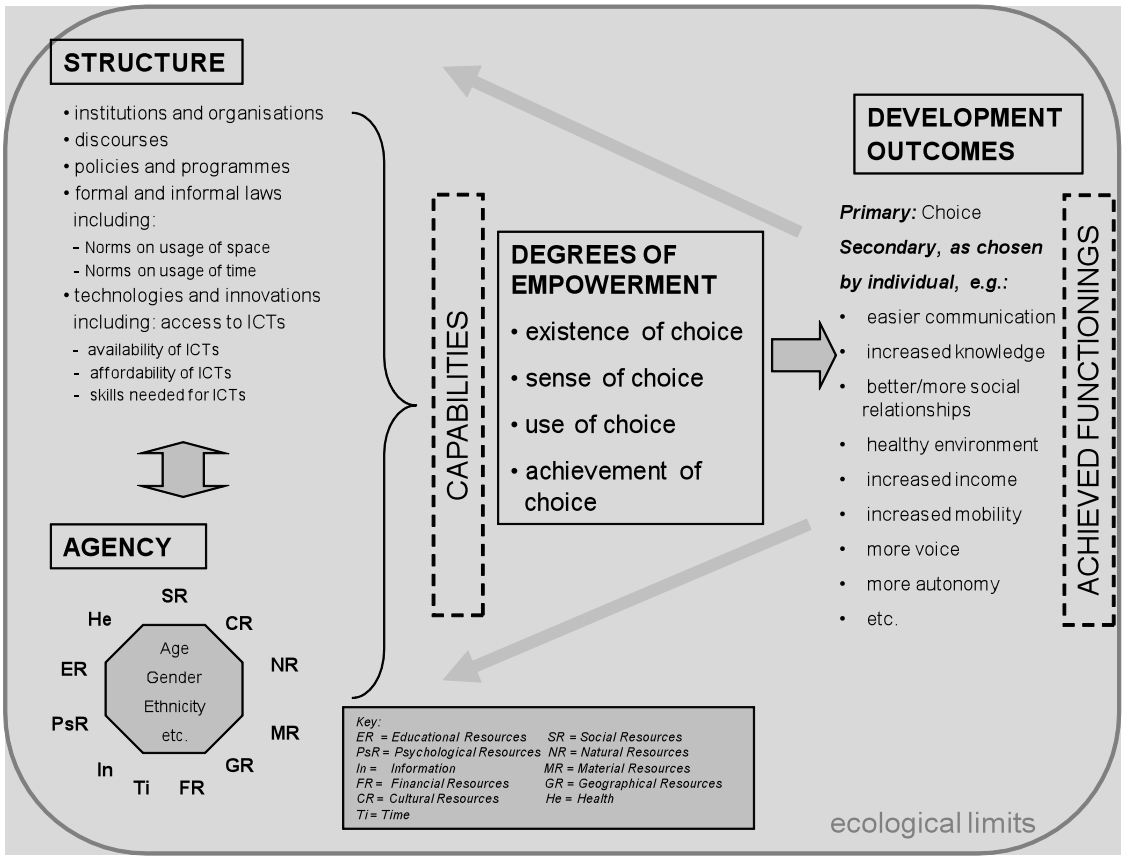
Operationalising the capability approach through the Choice Framework

The choice framework is one contribution to both the extensive field of work around operationalising the capabilities approach, and to the research area connecting the capabilities approach with the field of information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D). The following section offers a very brief introduction to the choice framework - (a full recognition of other scholars' work in this area, further explanation of the framework and an application of it to the concrete development policies in Chile can be found in my book). The choice framework draws on previous frameworks: the empowerment framework by Alsop & Heinsohn (2005) and the sustainable livelihood framework (SLF - DFID, 1999). Duncombe (2006) has applied the SLF in the context of ICT4D and microentrepreneurs, and Gigler (2004) has linked the livelihood framework, CA and ICT4D.

Figure 1 shows the choice framework. It maps the process of development within a system framed by ecological limits. Within it, individuals can, with the help of their resource portfolios which form the basis of their agency, negotiate a social structure. They do this in order to achieve, by means of their active choices, the development outcomes to which they aspire. There are four key elements to the choice framework: agency and structure (which are co-constituting), dimensions of choice (degrees of empowerment) and outcomes (a space where many capabilities become visible in achieved functionings). The choice framework is a systemic, open-ended tool for analysis. It is not a model as such, but a simplified picture of reality, like a map, which attempts to be comprehensive, but is also open for new, unexpected

elements to be recognised. The concepts are broadly defined in order to render the framework culturally and interdisciplinarily adaptable.

Figure 1: The Choice Framework (Kleine 2007, 2010, 2012, based on DFID 1999 and Alsop and Heinsohn 2005)



In my application of the choice framework so far, I have mainly analysed resources as linked to individuals, but conceptually it is clear that collective action rests on the resources of the many combined. Structures of course are experienced collectively by many individuals, but not necessarily in the same way by each individual, so another complex relationship with notions of the collective emerges. Choices can be made on behalf of, and affecting, the one, the few or the many. Related outcomes can again be enjoyed or suffered individually, collectively or both, often even by groups or individuals who were not the ones making the choices. The choice framework is conceptually flexible enough to cope with individual and collective choice, although more work needs to be done to apply this in practice.

Sustainable public procurement as an arena for collective choice

We are currently considering the case of sustainable public procurement as a policy arena of collective choice in our ESRC-DFID Choices project (www.sustainablechoices.info). Public procurement is the way in which the state buys goods and services in the name of citizens and taxpayers. Public procurement is commonly guided by criteria, and key criteria have traditionally been quality and economic cost (price) of the product.

However, there is a long-standing tradition of countries using public procurement to support industrial and social policy. For example, since 1953, the USA have used legislation to support

small businesses in public procurement, while in South Africa, procurement laws are designed to support employment for and improve the living conditions of black South Africans (McCrudden 2004). In Brazil, social criteria allow public servants to use public procurement to support companies who have policies to support women, *Afrodescendentes*, and people with a disability (Bartholo et al. 2012). Internationally, there is an ongoing policy trend which increasingly introduces environmental criteria such as energy & water efficiency, carbon emissions, use of renewable energy, use of recycled and recyclable products, waste management and traceability of products as criteria into public procurement.

To map this policy change onto the choice framework, public procurement is an occasion where a choice – about the criteria to apply when buying a particular good or service in the name of the public – is made on behalf of the collective. The pool of the collectively held *financial resources*, but also potentially other resources which are collectively held, such as *natural resources*, or for example in the case of pollution, *health* in the community, will be affected by these buying decisions. Changes in collectively constructed *discourses* on social and environmental responsibility, climate change and sustainability may affect how these resources are viewed. The shift in procurement policies represents a change in the *policy* element of the framework. A change in *technologies* means that through a shift of procurement to e-procurement buying decisions become more easily visible and thus more transparent to the public. The changes in policy and discourse, leading to a re-evaluation of natural resources and health alongside financial resources, mean that the public servant acting on behalf of the collective has more criteria (social and environmental as well as economic) to consider when making buying decisions. He or she is called to make buying decisions which support the lives people have reason to value. With the expanded criteria comes an expansion of *de facto existing choices*, and ideally of a *sense of choice, use* and *achievement of choice*. Hopefully the *outcomes* are in line with the lives people have reason to value, such as for example a financially, socially and environmentally sustainable local economy in which people can develop their livelihoods.

Immediately it becomes clear that if, as Lessmann and Rauschmayer (2013) point out, it is unfair to place full responsibility for researching the complex systemic consequences of consumption decisions on the individual, it is even more unfair to expect the individual public servant to conduct this complex deliberation process by themselves. Lessmann and Rauschmayer call for "developing heuristics for sustainable living on a societal level" (2013: 109) and indeed what is needed is the kind of participatory public deliberation process which Sen envisions for collective decision making. The trend toward sustainable procurement policies is halfway there: it is correct to expand the canon of criteria to expand the space for sustainable collective choices. However, policy officials need to go further and help develop mechanisms for public deliberations that can deal with the complexity of this arena - full as it is of varying visions of the good life for current and future generations, and tradeoffs between different social, environmental and economic issues. One model might be for example the participatory budgeting exercises demonstrated in cities in Brazil and elsewhere, giving citizens a more direct say in how public funds are spent.

Conclusion

To summarise, the choice framework offers one way of translating the capability approach for concrete development analysis. This is work in progress, and the choice framework has the conceptual flexibility to integrate notions of both individual and collective agency, structure, capabilities and choices, and indeed importantly, an understanding of how they are inseparable.

Sustainable public procurement was introduced as an area where individual choice meets collective choice. It is thus a theoretically rich case study to map onto the choice framework and more broadly, to consider from a capabilities perspective. If we accept that developing a more just and sustainable way of life is the single largest collective challenge humans face today to ensure their and future generations' capabilities, then we need to make progress fast. Key to such progress will be to understand ways in which individuals with diverse views can come together in collective deliberation processes leading to collective action.

References

Alsop, R. and N. Heinsohn (2005) *Measuring Empowerment in Practice - Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators*, Washington, D.C., World Bank

Bartholo, R., R. Afonso, and I.Pereira (2012) *Compras Públicas Sustentáveis no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, LTDS/ COPPE, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

DFID (1999) *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets*. London, Department for International Development

Duncombe, R. (2006) Using the Livelihoods Framework to Analyze ICT Applications for Poverty Reduction through Microenterprise, *Information Technologies and International Development*, 3, 81-100

Gigler, B.-S. (2004) Including the Excluded - Can ICTs Empower Poor Communities? Towards an Alternative Evaluation Framework Based on the Capability Approach. Fourth International Conference on the Capability Approach, HDCA, Pavia, Italy

Kleine, D. (2007) *Empowerment and the Limits of Choice: Microentrepreneurs, Information and Communication Technologies and State Policies in Chile* (PhD Thesis) Department of Geography and Environment, London, London School of Economics and Political Science

Kleine, D. (2013) Technologies of Choice? ICTs, Development and the Capabilities Approach, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press

Lessmann, O. and Rauschmayer F. (2013) Re-conceptualizing Sustainable Development on the Basis of the Capability Approach: A Model and Its Difficulties, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 14 (1), 95-114.

McCrudden, C. (2004) Using Public Procurement to Achieve Social Outcomes. *Natural Resources Forum*, 28, 257-267

Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press