Theme: Value Judgements and Multidimensional Poverty Measurement

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Introduction from the Editors

We are pleased to share with you the latest issue of the Maitreyee e-bulletin. We would like to start this introduction by thanking Séverine Deneulin for her dedication as Editor of the Maitreyee since its creation, and wish her well as she moves on to new challenges, now as Secretary of the HDCA.

This issue focuses on the question of normative value judgements that are implicit or explicit in the construction of multidimensional poverty indices. This issue follows a workshop on the same topic that was organised by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in the University of Oxford on June 28-29th 2012. The workshop brought together specialists from a range of different disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, political theory and economics, with the aim of providing a genuine cross-disciplinary reflection on questions where methodological and technical issues are intertwined with normative and theoretical considerations.

Resolving the outstanding normative issues involved in the measurement of capabilities, and integrating them into a coherent theoretical framework linked to the methodological and technical concepts used by economists and other social scientists in the construction of indices and measurement of welfare, is key to the long-term success of the capability approach. These questions are relevant now more than ever as the world looks for new ways to assess progress in development and the consultation process for the post 2015 MDGs is underway.

This e-bulletin provides an overview of these challenges from a theoretical as well as practical perspective. It starts with a note from Sabina Alkire which provides a summary of some of the key points that were discussed during the workshop in Oxford. We then present a summary of an article by Ingrid Robeyns which discusses how to put the capability approach into practice. The summary of Robeyns’ article in this issue focuses mainly on the discussion on value judgements required in empirical applications of the capability approach while the original article expands further with a review of existing empirical studies that apply the capability approach. Next, Sebastian Silva-Leander provides a taxonomy on normative approaches in multidimensional poverty measurement which was presented in a background paper produced in preparation for the workshop. The ‘In practice’ section starts with an overview of the methodology followed by the Equality Measurement Framework to develop a capability list to monitor equality among groups in the UK by Polly Vizard and Tania Burchardt. Next, Andrea Rigon, a Participate, Policy and Advocacy Advisor and CAFOD COMPASS 2015 Research Coordinator presents a new project which aims to provide high quality evidence on the reality of poverty into the post-2015 debate by bringing the perspectives of the poorest.

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.

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Insights

VALUE JUDGEMENTS IN MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY MEASUREMENT DESIGN: SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP AND CLOSING REMARKS

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This is a summary of a workshop on value judgements and multidimensional poverty which was held at OPHI on the 28th to 29th of June 2012. The workshop brought together philosophers and social scientists working on conceptual issues with those who are actively designing and implementing multidimensional poverty measures.

To ensure in-depth engagement, the workshop opened with a presentation of the focal methodology, the Alkire-Foster method for multidimensional poverty measurement (Alkire and Foster 2011), and its implementation in the multidimensional poverty index or MPI (Alkire and Santos, 2010; Alkire et al., 2011b; UNDP, 2010). This was followed by a presentation of the literature review, which mapped various ways that value judgments were made in the capability approach (See Silva-Leander’s summary in this Maitreyee). In the remaining sessions, participants were taken through the normative judgements required at each step of the construction of a multidimensional poverty index, including the choice of dimensions, indicators, deprivation cut-offs, poverty cut-off, and weights/values. The following sections provide a summary of some of the key points that were discussed:

How should the purpose of a national measure be defined?

- Throughout the design of a multidimensional poverty measures it would be useful to think through issues of authority. Who sets up the purpose of the measure and if it is modified who has the authority to do so?
- The purposes should be made explicit and transparent so that if people disagreed with them, they would be able to scrutinize them, be able to challenge them and propose additional purposes.
- Multidimensional measures could and perhaps should have multiple purposes (e.g. reflecting changes of policy and giving input into policy design)
- Measures might be intentionally designed to ensure ownership and legitimacy, not only among government actors but also among poor people and social movements who might be leaders in confronting systemic injustice.

1 This is an extract of a summary of the workshop by Sabina Alkire. It has been condensed by José Manuel Roche and Sebastian Silva-Leander for the Maitreyee.
A final observation was that if the measure is multidimensional, part of its purpose should be to clarify (self-critically) what information it brings that a monetary measure does not.

The question of whether and to what extent additional indicators add value to multidimensional measures should be tested empirically by comparing purpose-built surveys containing ideal functionings indicators, with standard surveys that use inexpensive proxies.

**How to choose the dimensions?**

- The choice of dimensions will depend largely on the definition of poverty we use. One participant argued (controversially) that it was important to limit the definition of poverty to material deprivations – broadly defined such as including for example education, health and mental health – and to exclude systematically and a priori issues of political voice and participation.
- Some argued that poor people’s understanding of poverty should be sought first and in an undirected way - even if their definitions include dimensions that are novel.
- A second discussion was in speaking about dimensions, should those who design measures be proposing the content of dimensions (for example, Nussbaum’s list) or should we be choosing a process by which dimensions are to be selected for different purposes and in different contexts.
- The definition of the dimensions of capability poverty should be specific and substantive. For instance, it is not sufficient to say that ill-health is a dimension of poverty. Ill-health should be defined, and the capabilities and specific indicators that pertain to health identified, by some legitimate process.

**How to choose indicators:**

- It was agreed that if a multidimensional poverty measure intends to reflect people’s functionings or capabilities, then the indicators which reflect resources or utility should be justified as proxies for functionings, not as direct measures.
- It was broadly agreed that given the difficulty of measuring functionings it was justifiable to use resource and output measures (water, housing, sanitation) as proxies for functionings in multidimensional poverty measures. However, this should be done with care and should not preclude efforts to improve the availability of data on functionings.
- There was disagreement on whether the selection of indicators was a strong value judgement. Some felt that perhaps what was needed was not philosophical input but simply to discuss with experts to try to identify what were the best indicators for a particular capability. However, it was understood that it is usually impossible to obtain indicators that reflect all possible aspects of health or education or living standards. So choices have to be made in order to arrive at adequate and workable characterisations of the functionings we seek to measure.
- Participants proposed generating a series of principles outlining the qualities that an indicator selection process should have. For example, first to define the relevant dimension or capability fully to try to understand exactly what capability poverty in education means, then to articulate the part of it that is being measured very explicitly, and the parts of it that
are not being measured. Within some dimensions, statistical methods may be used (transparently) to proxy a ‘latent’ functioning. Then to put this out to public discussion so that the limits of the measure itself as well as its strengths are articulated.

✓ The standing problem which requires further work is that there may (often) be a conflict between ‘statistical’ logic and ‘normative’ logic in the justification of indicators (for example, ‘having a car’ is an indicator in the material deprivation index that is statistically justified/defended, but [unsuccessfully] normatively challenged), and how this conflict can best be addressed is not clear.

How to choose deprivation cut-offs and poverty cut-offs?

✓ Who decides the deprivation cut-offs, how much is enough, is a key question. Another is to what extent should these deprivation cut-offs be uniformly applied to all citizens of a country. Technically it is possible for different cut-offs to be selected for different regions of the country, for different age groups, for rural and urban settings, for different cultural or religious or indigenous groups. It could be an interesting research project to compare group-specific cutoffs to national ones.

✓ Some thought that specific indicators and cutoffs could be chosen by village processes and participatory methods to identify who is poor, to test how much the variation between these more local and more textured value judgements would change national poverty results.

✓ On the cross-dimensional poverty cut-off there was a similar emphasis on participatory processes. Some thought that poor people could very well articulate who is poor.

✓ Because any poverty line is arbitrary, perhaps the identification of ‘who is poor’ is truly a value judgement - and perhaps one that should be made separately by poor people and by wider society and by policy makers, to see what level of poverty each of these distinctive groups understood there to be in the society. The question remains who has the authority for setting the poverty line, informed by these potentially divergent value judgements, and how it can be justified given value conflicts.

How to set up weights?

✓ The session began with a presentation which shared Sen’s position that in the end any multidimensional poverty measure should be robust to a range of plausible weights because people will disagree on weights. So the aim is not to find a perfect vector of weights but to find a range of plausible weights that are held in a society, and to design a measure whose key analyses are robust to this range.

✓ There was an acknowledgement that while weights could be set by experts, by the public or by people with a particular condition, inevitably people will not agree about weights, so our aim should be to find the key range of weights.

✓ Some participants highlighted the risk that poor people’s preferences could be adaptive and cautioned against an excessive reliance on participatory exercises and survey data. Some suggested that human rights based approaches might be less liable to adaptive preference biases, due to their reliance on a process of inter-rational validation.
✓ Others recounted that the adaptive preferences did not actually seem to appear in some of the studies of subjective well-being.
✓ A participant also distinguished two purposes that weights serve. One is epistemological, as they help those designing poverty measures to understand the relative values that communities place on these different kinds of deprivations. The other that they legitimize the final measure in public space.

Dealing with adaptive preferences

✓ FemPov found differences in how people valued dimensions depending on age and gender. One constructive way to assess people’s perception of the common good was to ask them to think of the importance not just to themselves but to the society. Another process involved asking respondents whether they would be willing to defend their values in public.
✓ One participant advocated for the use of reflective practices that trigger deliberation. Such exercises can provide a space for creative reflection and help to verify whether values are deeply held.
✓ The session concluded with an intervention that questioned the relevance of the concept of adaptive preferences. In a way, all preferences could be considered adaptive in the sense that they are influenced or manipulated or constrained by lack of information or knowledge. The word adaptive preferences is often used abusively to give priority to “my preferences over yours”.

References
The first important thing to understand when applying the capability approach in empirical studies is that the capability approach provides a theoretical framework for conceptualising poverty, well-being or inequality and a normative framework for assessing poverty, inequality and well-being. It is not a descriptive theory that can explain why poverty occurs or what causes inequality or economic growth to rise or fall, for instance (Robeyns 2005; Gasper 2004; Brighouse and Robeyns 2010; Kaushik and López-Calva 2011; Kuklys and Robeyns 2005; Nussbaum 2007; Salais and Villeneuve 2005).

Secondly, the capability approach is radically and intentionally underspecified. It provides a broad framework for thinking of normative issues related to poverty and inequality, but does not constitute a full-fledged theory of justice. As such, it does not provide a direct and universal answer to the question of which social arrangements are optimal, although it can tell what issues should be considered and in what evaluative space, when making normative comparisons between social states.

The paper identifies three stages at which important normative choices have to be made by the researcher in empirical applications of the capability approach:

1. The choice between functionings and capabilities
2. The selection of relevant capabilities
3. The weighting of different capabilities to arrive at an overall assessment of well-being.

Functionings or capabilities?

The capability approach emphasises the importance of considering the accessibility rather than the achievement of valuable outcomes. This is an important condition of Sen’s liberal stance, which precludes the researcher from “imposing a particular notion of the good life, but instead aim[s] at providing a range of possible ways of living” (Robeyns 2006, 353).

The choice of whether to focus on functionings or capabilities will have to be made depending on the specific research question being investigated, based on both normative and practical considerations. In many cases (especially in the case of poverty analysis), the theoretical distinction between functionings and capabilities, although important from a normative point of

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2 This is an extract of an article that appeared in the Journal of Political Philosophy, Volume 14, Number 3, 2006, pp. 351-76. It has been condensed by Sebastian Silva-Leander. This summary focuses only on the discussion of value judgements required in empirical applications of the capability approach, and does not include the review of empirical studies that apply the capability approach, which is also presented in the paper. Since the original article included a list of empirical studies published until 2006, it is no longer an up to date overview.
view, can actually be disregarded in practical applications, as the number of people voluntarily choosing to realise available capabilities (e.g. by fasting when they have the possibility to eat), may be statistically insignificant (see also Wolff and De-Shalit 2011).

Selection of capabilities

Once the researcher has decided whether to evaluate functionings or capabilities, she needs to decide which functionings or capabilities to focus on. Some capabilities may be crucial (e.g. the capability to be well-nourished), while others may be trivial, or even bad (Sen 1988; Stewart 1995; Vallentyne 2005; Pogge 2002; Anderson 1999; Fleurbaey 2002).

In the applied and theoretical literature, several proposals have emerged on how to select capabilities, ranging from thick normative accounts of the good life, to proposals that rely on statistical methods:

• **Nussbaum’s list of capabilities:** Nussbaum has proposed a list of ten central human capabilities, deemed necessary to live a valuable life (Nussbaum 2003). The proposed list of capabilities is based on Aristotle’s account of the good life. However, it remains far from consensual or universally accepted. Several other lists have been proposed in the literature.

• **Data-driven selection of capabilities:** At the other end of the spectrum, an often used technique in empirical applications consists in selecting a survey based on the richness of the information it contains, and then using statistical techniques, such as factor analysis, to determine which capabilities are relevant. While empirically appealing, this approach can be criticised for abdicating the important normative function of the researcher.

• **Procedural proposals:** In between these two extremes, Alkire and Robeyns have each proposed procedural guidelines for selecting relevant capabilities (Alkire 2005; Robeyns 2003). The proposals do not specify which capabilities should be included or excluded, but provide guidelines for thinking of the relative importance of various capabilities, and for selecting the most important ones in each context, through an iterative process of prioritisation. Robeyns argues that whatever the capabilities chosen, the list should be made explicit, discussed and defended.

Aggregation and weighting

Once the relevant dimensions have been identified, they generally will need to be aggregated into an overall assessment of well-being that gives more or less relative weight to each of the selected dimensions (there are however also research questions where aggregation is not needed). The paper identifies three types of weightings that are relevant in this context:

• **Weighing of indicators within a given dimension:** This relates to how we measure a given dimension and how much importance we give to various indicators that may capture different aspects of a given functioning. The question is especially relevant in the case of functionings requiring complex conceptual structures (e.g. social relatedness), which cannot easily be captured through a single indicator.
• **Intra-personal weighting of different functionings:** This relates to how much importance we give to each dimension of well-being when assessing how well off any given individual is (Kuklys 2005). This question has captured most of the normative attention in the literature. However, it is but one of the normatively relevant and unavoidable questions that need to be addressed when constructing an index.

• **Inter-personal weighting:** In any aggregate or social measure of well-being, a decision will have to be made about what relative importance we give to different individuals when assessing the overall well-being of society (Chakraborty 1996). In a poverty measure, all individuals above the poverty line are given a weight of zero. When measuring the severity of poverty, individuals are given a weight that is proportional to their distance from the poverty line.

“In the capability literature, the discussion on weights focuses mainly on the first two kinds of weighting. For both kinds of weighting three kinds of weighting systems have been used. The first weighting system is to simply allocate certain weights (and justify them). This weighting system has been applied by the UNDP in the construction of the Human Development Index, where the three functionings (educational achievement, life expectancy and economic standard of living) each receive an equal weighting. The functioning of educational achievement itself is composed of literacy (with a weight of two thirds) and school enrolment (weight of one third). Many economists find this an entirely arbitrary procedure and disapprove of the explicit value judgements involved, but others appreciate the clarity that such an explicit weighting procedure brings. Obviously, one can always change the relative weights to test the robustness of the empirical results. The second weighting system is to derive the weights in a statistical way. If functionings are measured using a statistical method, then the weights are derived from the variance of the indicators. Again, such statistical methods have their proponents and opponents. The proponents like the fact that they can use statistical information to determine the weights, and that they do not have to use what are regarded as “simplistic” methods such as the weighting systems in which explicit choices must be made. But there is very little discussion about the validity and plausibility of the normative assumptions underlying these statistical methods. The third and final weighting system is to use a type of social choice procedure. The idea would be to let the relevant group of people decide on the weights. In some contexts, such as small-scale projects or evaluations, this could be done by participatory techniques. For larger scale policy contexts, discussion of the relative weights is the substance of political debates. For large scale measurement applications, information on the weights could in theory be collected using questionnaires, but this method has not yet been applied in practice” (Robeyns 2006 p. 357-358).

**References**


Empirical applications of the capability approach have gained significant momentum in recent years, thanks in large part to technical and methodological advances in the multidimensional measurement of poverty (Alkire & Foster, 2011; Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 1999; Duclos, Shan, & Younger, 2006). As we progress in this direction, we come across an increasing number of normative questions that are inherent to the measurement of welfare concepts. Some of these are specific to multidimensional welfare/poverty (e.g. the selection of dimensions, indicators and deprivation cut-offs, union vs. intersection approach, etc.), others are common to both multidimensional and unidimensional measures – although often overlooked and/or taken for granted (e.g. the selection of a poverty cut-off, inequality-sensitivity, etc.). None of these can be answered through methodological or technical responses alone, and each will require a genuine cross-disciplinary effort, not only to understand the ethical and philosophical implications of different choices regarding functional forms, weights, etc., but also to ensure that the responses we generate are articulated with the tools and language that is useful to economists and other social scientists.

In the background paper prepared for the Value Judgments workshop held in Oxford on June 28–29 2012, we reviewed the most common methods that had been used in the literature to address the delicate normative choices involved in constructing multidimensional poverty indices. In most cases, we found that the normative choices made translated a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the desire to avoid the paternalistic imposition of normative value judgments by the social scientist, and on the other, the reluctance to fall into a form of moral relativism, in which the social scientist uncritically accepts the value judgments implicit in data or methodological choices. In practice, these tensions were played out principally in two
distinct but related choices made by the scientist, namely (1) the choice who and how many people should be involved in deciding what is valuable, and (2) the use of subjective or objective criteria to filter or assess the legitimacy of normative claims.

Based on this analysis, we developed a taxonomy in Figure 1 below grouping some of the most commonly used techniques for determining weights, dimensions and cut-offs in welfare and poverty indices, depending on the relative importance they give to each of the two concerns listed above. The horizontal axis represents the number of decision makers, ranging from no decision makers on the left in the case of equal weights or statistical selection of weights, to approaches in which each person decides individually on weights and cut-offs. The vertical axis represents the basis for decision-making, with approaches relying on subjective preferences at the top, and approaches seeking to base value judgments on objective criteria at the bottom. As with any taxonomy, the categories created aimed at simplifying a complex issue, rather than providing a complete and detailed description of each approach.

**Figure 1: Normative approaches, by breadth and basis of decision-making**

Based on these criteria, we classified existing approaches into the following 5 categories, representing where they find themselves on these two axes:

1. **Non-normative** approaches: This includes methods relying on purely statistical tools, such as principal component or factor analysis to select dimensions or determine weights (Cahill & Sanchez, 2001, p. 312; Klasen, 2000; Noorbakhsh, 1998), as well as methods imposing equal weights to different dimensions (Babbie, 1995). In both cases, these methods have been criticised for disregarding normative judgments, which may result in the effective imposition of arbitrary or indefensible
weights. Stochastic dominance techniques proposed by (Atkinson & Bourguignon, 1982) and (Duclos, Shan, & Younger, 2006), also avoid difficult normative choices, by focusing instead on the identification of pairs of observations for which a clear ordinal ranking can be established for all weights used or functional form chosen. Unlike the two previous techniques, this remains fully compatible with Sen’s own normative position, which emphasizes the need to allow for incompleteness in normative rankings (Sen, 2010). However, in practice, it is often difficult to establish clear dominance relations.

2. Approaches deriving normative judgments from individual preferences: This includes hedonic, most favourable and participatory approaches (Decancq, Ootegem, & Verhofstadt, 2011; Brun & Tungodden, 2004; Fleurbaey & Trannoy, 2003; Chambers, 1994; Carvalho & White, 1997). Despite their differences, these approaches all seek to derive their normative judgments from the preferences of the individuals being assessed. In so doing, they avoid any accusation of paternalism, since each individual is made to determine for him/herself the relative value of the dimensions of welfare by which she is to be assessed. At the same time, this exposes these techniques to the fallibility of individual preferences, due to adaptation, irrationality, ignorance, etc. In many cases, the uncritical acceptance of individual preferences, without regard for the social, cultural or economic processes that have shaped these preferences, will amount to a morally relativistic stance that can aggravate inequalities and entrench imbalances of power within society.

3. Approaches deriving normative judgments from behavioural patterns: This includes survey-based approaches, as well as conventional economic approaches, relying on the use of market prices to weigh different dimensions of welfare (de Kruijk & Rutten, 2007; Mack & Lansley, 1985; Halleröd, 1995; Guio, Fusco, & De Marlier, 2009; Bossert, Chakravarty, & D'Ambrosio, 2009). These approaches also ultimately derive their normative force from individual preferences. However, they differ from the above mentioned methods in that they do not assign individual-specific weights. Instead, they attempt to estimate prevailing attitudes from observation of preferences or behavioural patterns across large groups of individuals. This renders the method less liable to individual biases due to adaptive preferences or other distortions. In so doing, however, it also runs the risk of imposing median or dominant values on individuals who may have good reasons for having a different valuation structure from the societal norm (e.g. members of religious minorities, or disabled people).

4. Approaches basing normative judgments on the views of qualified decision-makers. This includes expert-based approaches, as well as approaches relying on the decisions of policy-makers. These approaches share the fact that they typically consider individual preferences to be an unreliable basis for making normative judgments, for the reasons stated above (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 34). On this view, value judgments ought to be left to qualified decision-makers for the purpose and nature of the assessment. The risks of such an approach are evident, and relate primarily to the difficulty of determining if and when the judgments of the chosen decision-maker are more legitimate than those of the individuals being assessed.

5. Hybrid approaches that seek to avoid the pitfalls of paternalism and moral relativism associated with the aforementioned approaches: We reviewed two very
different ways in which this has been done. The first, involves the use of shadow-prices, which try to correct market prices, in cases where such prices are missing or distorted by externalities (Ravallion, 2011) (Card, 1999) (Murphy & Topel, 2006). In practice, however, it is often extremely difficult to accurately estimate unobservable shadow prices. The so-called rights-based approach, on the other hand, involves deriving the choice of weights and dimensions from legal frameworks, such as international human rights instruments (Vizard, 2007; van Rensburg, 2007). Insofar as legal frameworks have been agreed through proper democratic procedures, they can in some sense be said to reflect the underlying preferences or general will of citizens, albeit filtered through an arduous vetting process of inter-rational validation. In practice, however, legislative processes often fall short of this ideal, particularly in the international arena.

References


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**In the practice**

**DEVELOPING A CAPABILITY LIST: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EQUALITY MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK**

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The Equality Measurement Framework (EMF) is a new indicator based tool that is being used by the British Equality and Human Rights Commission in discharging its statutory responsibilities to monitoring equality and human rights. The EMF has its conceptual origins in the capability approach and is based on a capability list covering 10 domains. These are:

- Life;
- Health;
- Physical security;
- Legal security;
- Education and learning;
- Standard of living;
- Productive and valued activities;
- Individual, family and social life;
- Identity, expression and self-respect;
- Participation, influence and voice.
The question of how to develop a capability list that specifies the substantive freedoms and opportunities that ‘matter’ for the purposes of monitoring equality and human rights was an early challenge in the development of the EMF. The need for ‘bottom-up’ deliberative and participative processes for developing and agreeing capability lists has been an important theme in the recent literature; and direct participation and deliberation are themselves critical human rights concerns. However, there is nevertheless a possibility that capability lists that emerge from ‘bottom-up’ processes might not fully capture the standards and principles that are recognized and embedded in international human rights law. This is of particular concern where the ‘bottom-up’ deliberative/participative strategies in question are ‘imperfect’ due to resource and time constraints and/or are ‘non-ideal’ in terms of their underlying democratic conditions and representation.

Our proposed two-stage procedure for specifying an agreed capability list addresses this dilemma and involves: (1) deriving a ‘minimum core’ capability list from the international framework; and (2) refining, expanding and orientating the ‘minimum core’ capability list through a deliberative research exercise. This methodology, we contend, strikes a pragmatic comprise between ‘bottom-up’ deliberative strategies on the one hand, and recognized international human rights standards on the other, when conditions of deliberation are imperfect.

Building on this approach, the EMF capability list was derived through a two-stage process. First, the international human rights framework was used to draw up a core/minimum capability list. This involved viewing core international human rights instruments as protecting and promoting underlying set of freedoms and opportunities. Second, the human rights-based capability list was supplemented and refined through a process of deliberative consultation – a program of workshops and interviews with the general public and with individuals and groups at high risk of discrimination and disadvantage.

Full details of the deliberative consultation are given in Alkire et al (2009) and Burchardt and Vizard (2011). Briefly, despite limited time and resources, a total of around 200 participants were involved in the deliberation, including two full-day workshops with members of the general public, shorter workshops with groups of people at particular risk of discrimination and disadvantage (including lesbian, gay and bisexual people; people with a physical impairment; people from different ethnic minority groups; teenagers; elderly people and their carers; non-English-speaking Pakistani women from lower social classes; and Scottish and Welsh participants); and a series of in-depth interviews (with individuals from different religions and faiths; people with sensory impairments and mild learning difficulties; and transgender people).

Participants in the deliberative consultation responded to two main research exercises. The first aimed to provide evidence about participants’ unprompted responses to the capability domain problem—with participants invited to discuss and reflect upon what is needed for a person to flourish in Britain today and to lead a life that they value and would choose. A second exercise was responsive and aimed to provide evidence about participants’ prompted responses to the human rights-based capability list, with a plain English version of our human rights-based capability list used as a stimulus for further discussion and reflection.

This two-stage process resulted in the development of a detailed list of central and valuable substantive freedoms and opportunities grouped under the ten headings or domains specified above. Other, more specific, subdomains are listed under each capability. An equivalent capability list for children has also been developed.
For further details of the EMF capability lists for adults and children see:


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KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MARGINS IN THE POST-2015 PROCESS

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In November 2010, five development organisations came together to think about the MDGs. They recognised that despite the many shortcomings of the MDG framework (not least the top-down secretive process through which they were designed), there were a great many positive impacts of a global framework. Working on the theory that an inclusive process, set in motion early enough, could help create a better, legitimate framework to replace the MDGs — and Beyond 2015 was born. The original group grew into a campaign with more than 500 participating organisations from across the globe.

Initial tasks were for the UN to take the lead in developing the new framework. While the UN slowly took responsibility for post-2015, there were no plans for direct engagement of people living in poverty in the policy process. Beyond 2015 members felt that, unless they initiated such consultations, nothing would take place. A dialogue between Beyond 2015 and the Institute of Development Studies led to a proposal being put together. However, the project remained unfunded until the nomination of David Cameron as co-chair of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on post-2015 (HLP) pushed DFID to prioritise this agenda.

Participate provides high quality evidence on the reality of poverty into the post-2015 debate by bringing the perspectives of the poorest. Participate is facilitating a global Participatory Research Group (PRG) comprising of 15 participatory research projects. While establishing some common criteria, the initiative adopted a broad, inclusive understanding of participatory research, fundamentally it is a process in which research is constructed and designed by the
research participants. Participants are at the centre of process, contributing to identifying research questions, gathering information and knowledge, carrying out the analysis, and articulating the key messages that they want others to hear.

Participatory research is complementary to the other ‘knowledges’ used in designing a new framework. A unique contribution, it often shows unexpected insights by providing fresh perspectives into intractable problems. It helps to understand the complexity and interconnectedness of issues in people’s lives. Moreover, it can challenge assumptions about how change happens and which development interventions work. As the rate of change accelerates in many contexts, participation becomes even more important to shed light on rapidly shifting realities.

Participate delivered a review of previous consultations of ‘the poor’ in global policy-making to the HLP in November 2012. Participate aims to embed participatory methods into policy-making, monitoring and evaluation in the long-term. Participate has encountered several challenges, both methodological and practical, which are dealt with through collective reflection.

Participate is characterised by an intrinsic tension between the nature of participatory research and the needs of the policy process. The key feature of participatory research is its open process in which participants decide priorities and research questions. However, at the same time, participatory research within a policy-process needs to provide some of the answers that policymakers are looking for, otherwise it risks irrelevance. Participate’s research initiatives are attempt to find the balance between these two elements. The framing questions set by the HLP will be used as a guideline of policy-makers needs, but negotiated with research participants to generate knowledge that responds to their own concerns and perspectives. In this way, Participate will have participatory research that is pertinent to the global process.

A second challenge is the analysis. The 15 research initiatives carried out by the PRG are the outcome of local research projects in numerous countries and communities. How is it possible to merge diverse participatory knowledge into clear key messages for policy-makers? Locally generated data, analyzed in its own context, may not be easily comparable with research conducted elsewhere. Moreover, Participate’s research projects adopt a variety of participatory methods and techniques, shaped by both research participants and local researchers. How is it possible to move between different scales of analysis and use locally grounded data to contribute to a global discussion? How to translate complex contextual findings into policy recommendation? How is it possible to remain faithful to the original participants’ analysis in the process of drafting a meta-analysis?

But, more importantly, who will do the meta-analysis? Where does the power lie in the process of synthesising the perspectives of those living in poverty? We are now exploring different possibilities for a solid methodological framework to facilitate the process. Limitations will, however, always remain.

Finally, there is the issue of the timing. Whilst policymakers have committed to ‘listen to the perspectives of those living in poverty’, in reality they made very little time available for it. The post-2015 policy process has a very tight schedule, with the three co-chairs pushing for a draft report to be written as quickly as possible – some sections will be signed off in March 2013. Participatory research is an inherently time-consuming process, requiring collective listening, research planning, data analysis, and so on. Participate has to mediate between the pressure to
produce ‘quick messages’ that simplify the lived experience of poverty, and the risk of failing to impact on the policy process if outputs reach policymakers too late. The decision was taken to avoid undermining the participatory nature of the project, and thereby compromising the quality of the research process, at the expense of opportunities influence the HLP. Participate will report in early summer 2013, in order to feed into the UN special event on post-MDGs which will take place in the fringes of the UN General Assembly next September.

You’re invited to follow Participate as it develops and get in touch with reflections, comments and criticisms at http://www.ids.ac.uk/participate

While this piece reflects on a collective process, any shortcomings and failings in presentation are my own