

OPHI

OXFORD POVERTY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

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UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Summer School on Multidimensional Poverty Analysis

Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative,
(OPHI), University of Oxford

3–15 August 2015, Georgetown University
Washington DC

Tabita, Kenya



Rabiya, India



Stéphanie, Madagascar



Agathe, Madagascar



Dalma, Kenya



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Valérie, Madagascar



The Capability Approach

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Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

~Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, 1905

Outline

- Capabilities in policy documents
- Definitions
 - Capability Approach
 - Functionings
 - Freedom – opportunity (capability) & process
 - Agency
- Some Implications for Measurement
 - Indicator selection
 - Attention to diversity
 - Attention to agency

The Capability Approach: Visible

Following Amartya Sen, we see development as a process of expanding freedoms equally for all people. In this view of development, gender equality is a core objective in itself. **World Devt Report *Gender 2012***

Sen's explanations of human-centred development are founded on understanding *what* deprived communities value and aspire to as individuals, families and collective entities, and *why*...

OECD DCR 2013 *Ending Poverty*

The Capability Approach: Visible

In adoption of an understanding of wellbeing that derives from Sen's ideas, **we define wellbeing as the freedoms and capability to make choices and act effectively** with respect to, for example, health, education, nutrition, employment, security, participation, voice, consumption, and the claiming of rights. p 20 **Lancet Commission on post-2015 MDGs, 2010**

The inability to understand how people of different ages, capabilities or income levels have been faring under the MDGs has hampered the design and implementation of strategies to tackle discrimination and ensure achievement of the goals.

SDSN Report on SDGs, July 2014



The Capability Approach: Visible

“Poverty, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics interact to create overlapping and self-reinforcing layers of disadvantage that limit opportunity and hamper social mobility... Being educated is a vital human capability that enables people to make choices in areas that matter. The lack of an education restricts choices. It limits the scope people have for influencing decisions that affect their lives.

Education for All *Global Monitoring Report 2010*

The Capability Approach: Visible

In effect, what really matters are the capabilities of people, that is, the extent of their opportunity set and of their freedom to choose among this set, the life they value. The choice of relevant functionings and capabilities for any quality of life measure is a value judgment, rather than a technical exercise.

Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi Commission 2009 (p15, pt 29)

Human Development Report 2010:

Human development is the expansion of people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet.

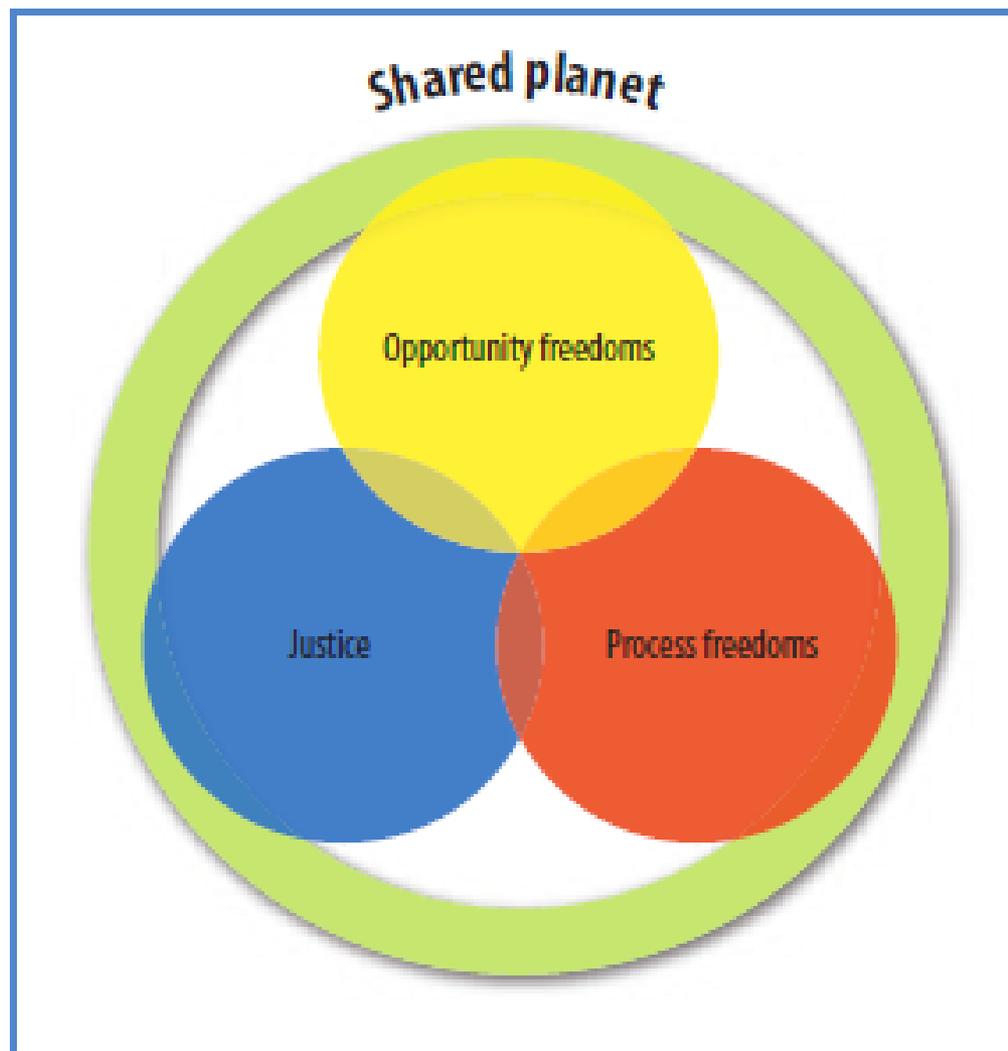
People are both the beneficiaries and the drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups.

FIGURE

1.3

The human development concept—on a shared planet

Conceptual framework for human development



Source: HDRO based on Alkire 2010.

Uncertain Glory 2013 (Dreze & Sen):

[W]e have argued that development is best seen in terms of an expansion of people's basic freedoms, or human capabilities. In this perspective, we have to recognise the importance of the two-way relationship between economic growth and the expansion of human capability, while also keeping in mind the basic understanding that the expansion of **human freedom and capabilities is the goal for which growth of GDP, among other factors, serves as important means.**

(p ix-x)

Intellectual History of CA

- 1979 – Sen ‘Equality of What’?
- Basic Needs – same motivation but in some versions people are passive. CA stresses freedom
- 1980s – focused on growth as end; CA growth as means; needs to be complemented by HD / CA
- 1990s to present: *Annual Human Devt Reports*
- Key texts by Sen:
 - 1984: *Commodities and Capabilities*
 - 1992: *Inequality Re-Examined.*
 - 1993: *Quality of Life (edited with Martha Nussbaum)*
 - 1999: *Development as Freedom*
 - 2009: *The Idea of Justice*
 - 2013: *An Uncertain Glory (with Jean Dreze)*
- Now a large group of other authors



Amartya Sen, *key author*

Born 1933 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Primary education in Tagore's school in Santiniketan, India.

Witnessed Bengal famine in which 2-3 million people died.

Witnessed murder of a muslim day laborer in the times of partition

Studied in Kolkata and Cambridge UK; taught in Delhi School of Economics, London School of Economics, Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard.

Received Nobel prize 1998

Currently teaching at Harvard.

Why the Capability Approach?

- **Content:** The capability approach sees human progress, ultimately, as ‘the progress of human freedom and capability to lead the kind of lives that people have reason to value’ Drèze and Sen, 2013:43

- **Visibility:** The capability approach has been key in prompting a “fundamental reconsideration of the concepts of poverty” Jenkins and Micklewright, 2007:9

What is the Capability Approach?

Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi Report's definition, 2009

1. Is a focus on **human ends**
2. and on the importance of **respecting people's ability** to pursue and realise the goals that he or she values [**agency**].
3. Is the rejection of the economic model of individuals acting to maximize their self-interest heedless of **relationships and emotions,**
4. and a recognition of the **diversity of human needs and priorities.** p 151

What is the Capability Approach?

Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi Report's definition, 2009

5. Is an emphasis on the **complementarities** between the various capabilities for the same person...
6. A last feature of the capability approach is the role of **moral considerations and ethical principles**, and its central concern with **justice**, in the form of either bringing each person above a given threshold for each capability, or assuring equal opportunities to all in the “capability space” (Alkire 2003). p 152

Capability

- the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. [It] is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another...to choose from possible livings. (*Inequality Re-examined*)
- *think of it as a budget set*
- “The focus here is on the freedom that a person actually has to do this or be that – things that he or she may value doing or being.” *Idea of Justice* 232
- All formulations of capability have two parts: freedom and valuable beings and doings (functionings). Sen's key contribution has been to unite the two concepts.

Functionings

The various things a person may value and have reason to value doing or being

- intuitive
- intrinsically valuable to the person
- intrinsic value (have reason to value)
- so avoids adaptive preferences
- ‘doings and beings’ is our focal *space*

Functionings *(Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi p 151)*

Functionings is a broad term used to refer to the activities and situations that people spontaneously recognize to be important. These can also be conceived as a collection of the **observable achievements** of each person (e.g. their health, knowledge or having a meaningful job). Some of these achievements can be quite elementary, such as being safe and well-nourished, and others quite complex, such as being able to express oneself in public without shame. As people in different places and times have different values and experiences, the list of the most relevant functionings depends on circumstances and on the purpose of the exercise. In this perspective, the well-being of a person is a summary index of the person's functionings.

Functionings allow for different interpersonal conversion factors

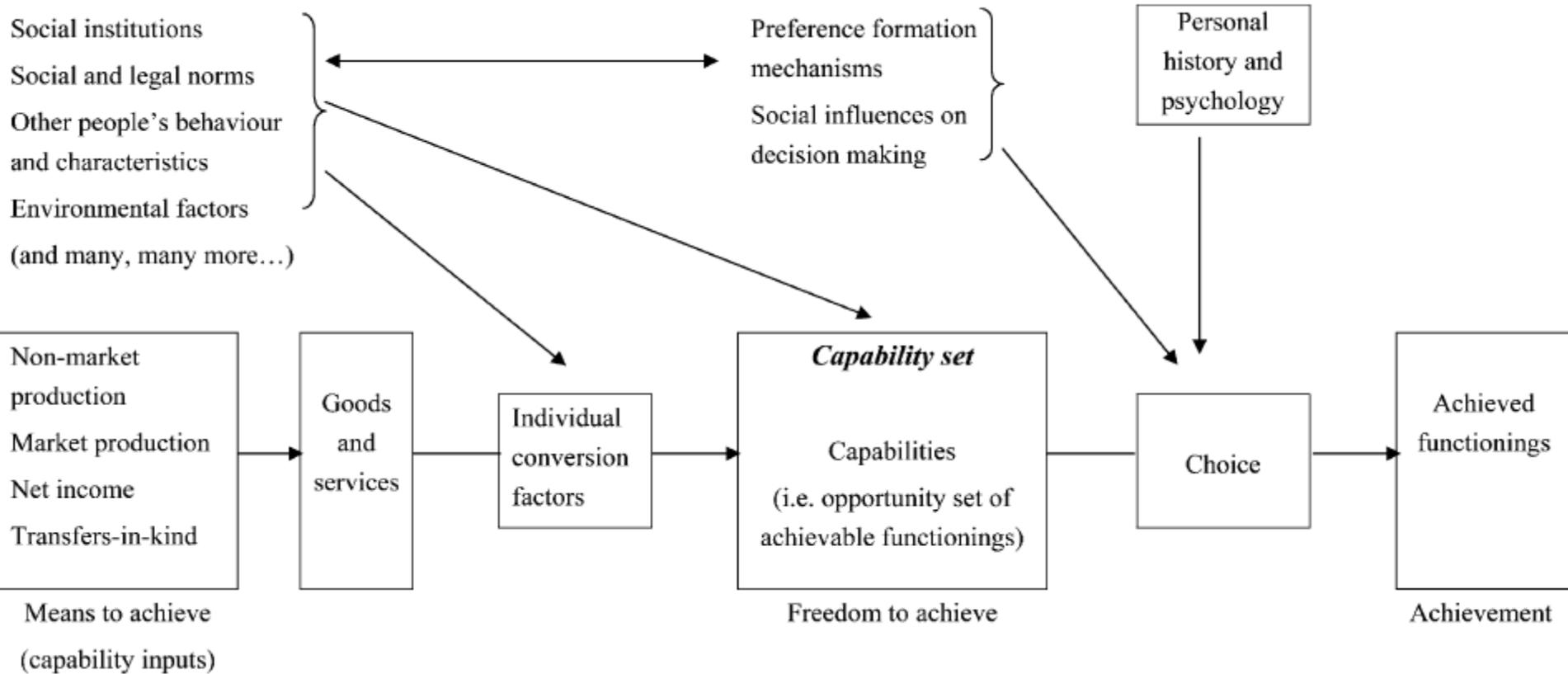
Resources → Capability → Functionings → Utility

Bike	Able to ride around	Ride around	😊
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Food	Able to be nourished	Nourished	😊
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Ingrid Robeyns 2005: Social Influences matter!

Social context:



Indicators of Functionings

Which are direct indicators of functionings?

- A. Income
- B. Times per week consume green leafy veg
- C. Years of Schooling completed
- D. The presence of a local health clinic
- E. Anthropometric measure of weight-for-height
- F. Satisfaction with health

Indicators of Functionings

Which are direct indicators of functionings?

- A. Income **No – is a resource.**
- B. Times/week eat green leafy veg **No – resource**
- C. Years of Schooling completed **Yes? (though does not show quality/other education)**
- D. The presence of a local health clinic **Not usually – (Open? Discriminate? Quality?).**
- E. Anthropometric measure of weight-for-height **Yes? (though some low BMI are nourished)**
- F. Satisfaction with health **No – unless proxies objective health functionings**

Freedom

for Sen, Freedom has two aspects

Process Aspect:

Ability to act on behalf of what matters (agency)

Institutions, movements, democratic practice as well as each person's agency

Opportunity Aspect:

Real opportunity to achieve valued functionings, selected from among various good possibilities. (capability)

Freedom

for Sen, Freedom has two aspects

Agency:

authentic self-direction – the ability to shape one’s own destiny as a person and a part of various communities.

Capability:

- “the *real opportunity* that we have to accomplish what we value”
- “The ‘good life’ is partly a life of genuine choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life – however rich it might be in other respects.”

Freedom *(Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi p 151)*

Freedom requires expanding the range of information relevant for assessing people's lives beyond their observed achievements, to the full range of *opportunities* open to them. The limits of focusing on achievements for assessing QoL become obvious when considering cases where a low observed functioning (e.g. low calorie intake) reflects a choice (as in the case of fasting) or where a high level of functioning reflects the choices of a benevolent dictator. The concept of freedom emphasises the importance of *empowering* people to help themselves, and of focusing on individuals as the *actors* of their own development.

Freedom is regularly misunderstood

- Freedom is Not a ‘paper’ freedom: it has to be *effective* freedom, a *real* possibility.
- Freedom is Not maximization of choices without regard to their quality and people’s values
“Indeed sometimes more freedom of choice can bemuse and befuddle, and make one’s life more wretched.”
- Freedom is not necessarily direct control by an individual; groups, states, etc can increase freedoms by public action and investment.

Agency: Definition

“what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important.”

Sen “Well-being Agency and Freedom” *J of Philosophy* 1985: 203

“**someone who acts and brings about change**, and whose achievements can be judged **in terms of her own values** and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some **external criteria** as well”

Sen *Development as Freedom*. 1999: 19

agency is **the person’s ability to act on what they value and have reason to value.**

Sen's agency is wider than most definitions of empowerment

- i) agency is exercised with respect to **multiple goals**;
- ii) agency includes **effective power** as well as direct control;
- iii) agency may advance wellbeing or may address **other-regarding goals**;
- iv) recognizing agency entails an assessment of the **value** of the agency objectives;
- v) agency introduces the need to incorporate the agents' own **responsibility** for a state of affairs into their evaluation of it.

Alkire 2008 in *Arguments for a better world*, Basu & Kanbur

Values enter in distinct ways

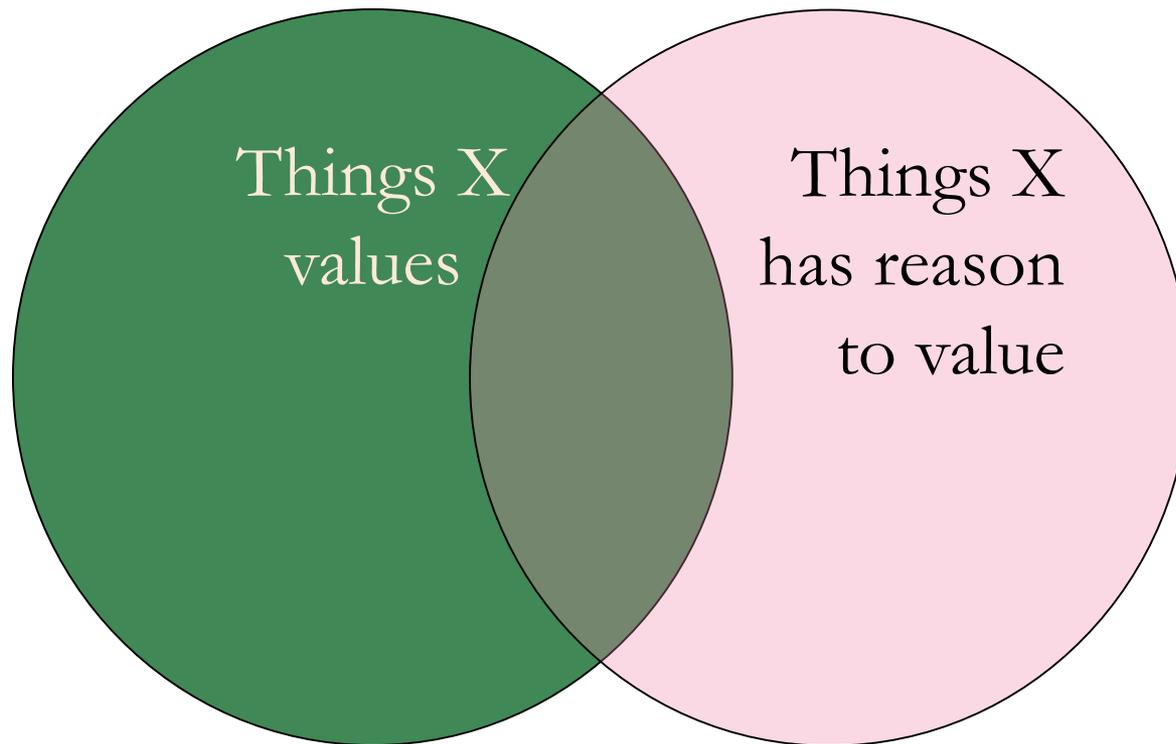
Agency is **people's ability to act on what they value and have reason to value.**

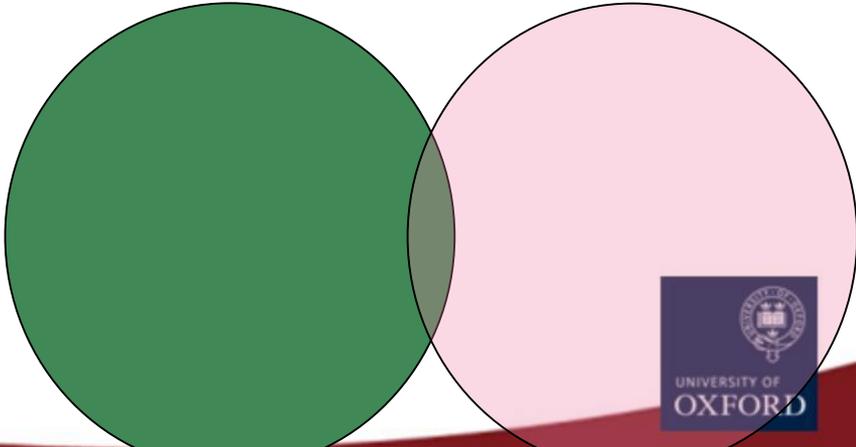
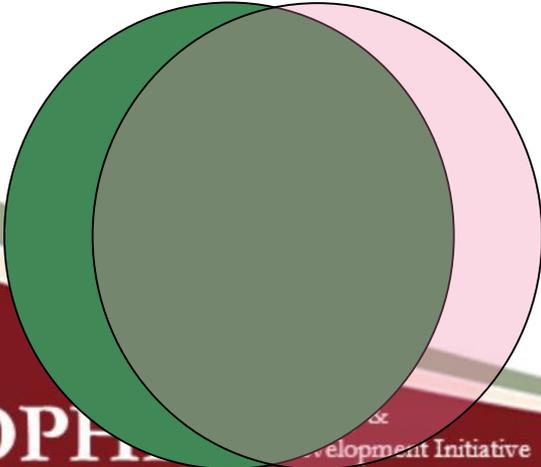
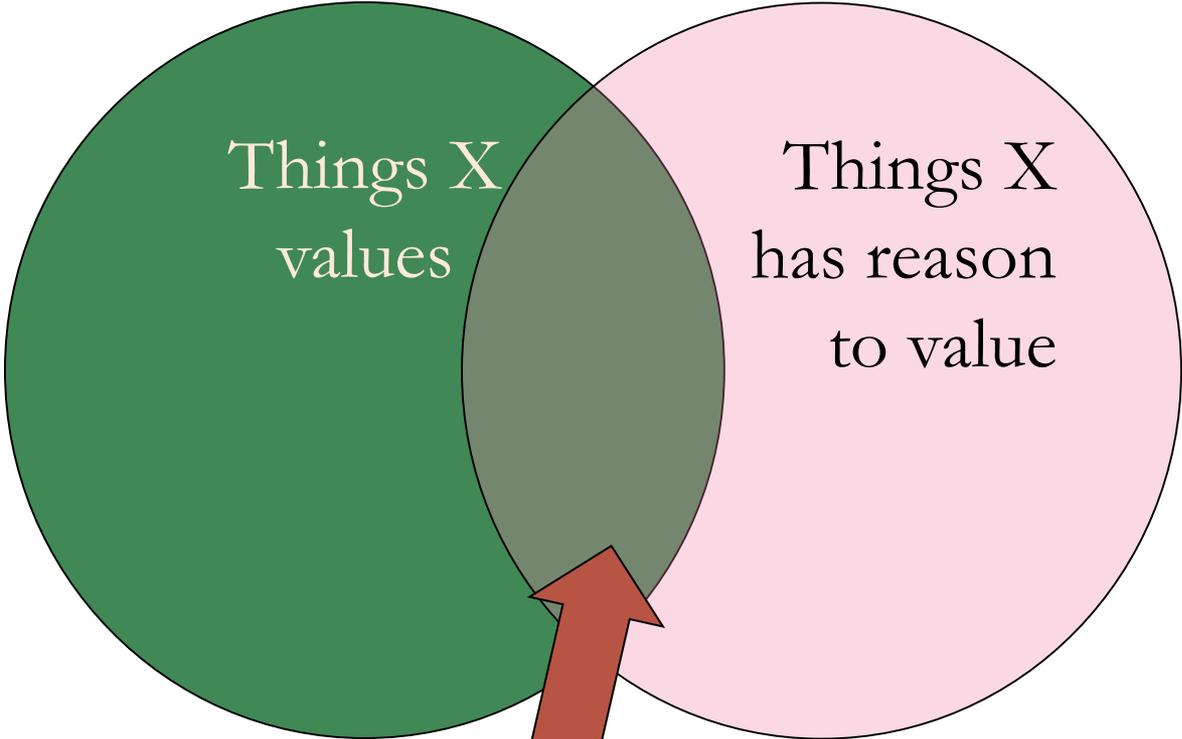
Capability: **people's freedom to enjoy beings and doings that they value and have reason to value.**

Value: People's own evaluation

Have Reason to Value: Objective value judgements

Things X
values





Engaged Research – virtuous circle for research quality



‘the value of scientific research can, in many circumstances, be enhanced *even further* if it is combined with real world involvement and action.’

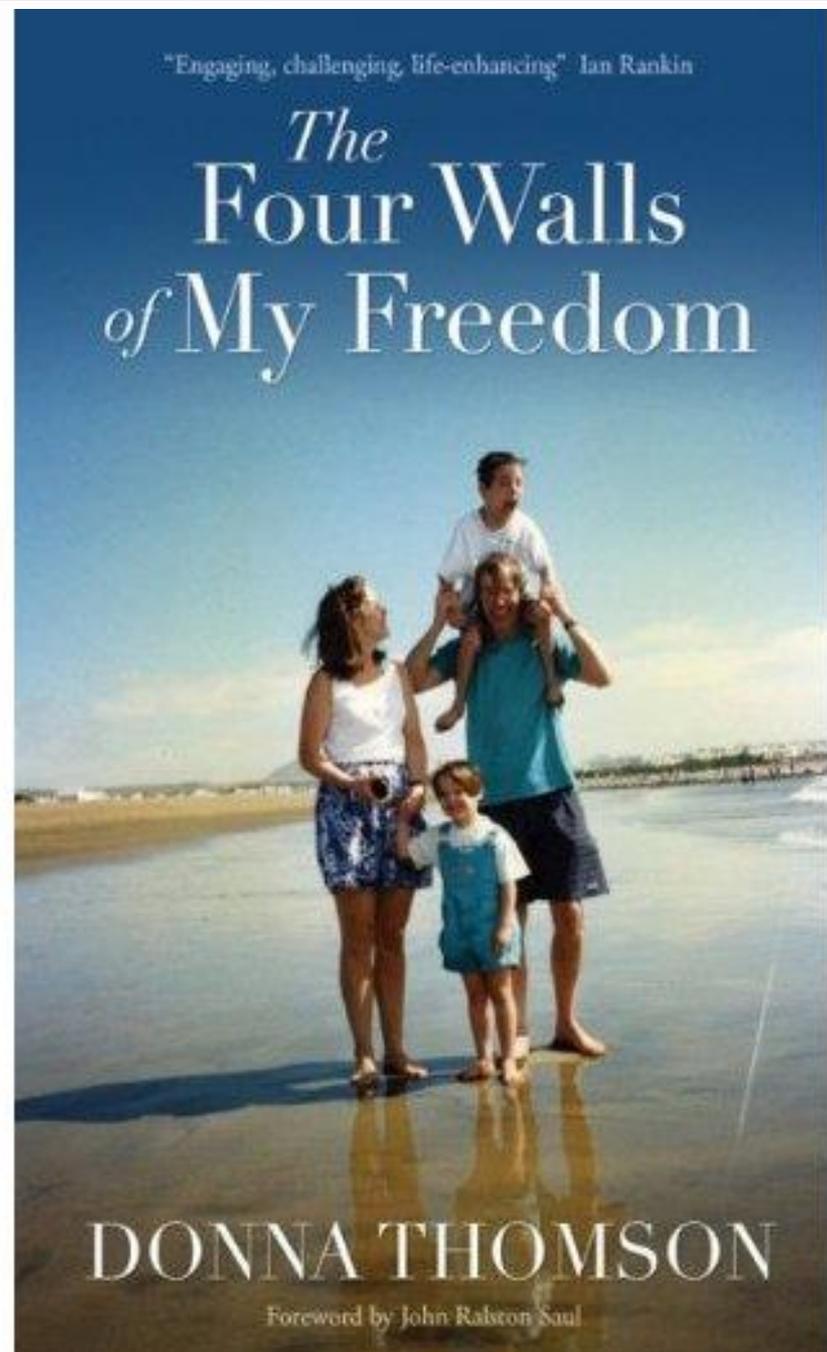
Jean Drèze ‘02

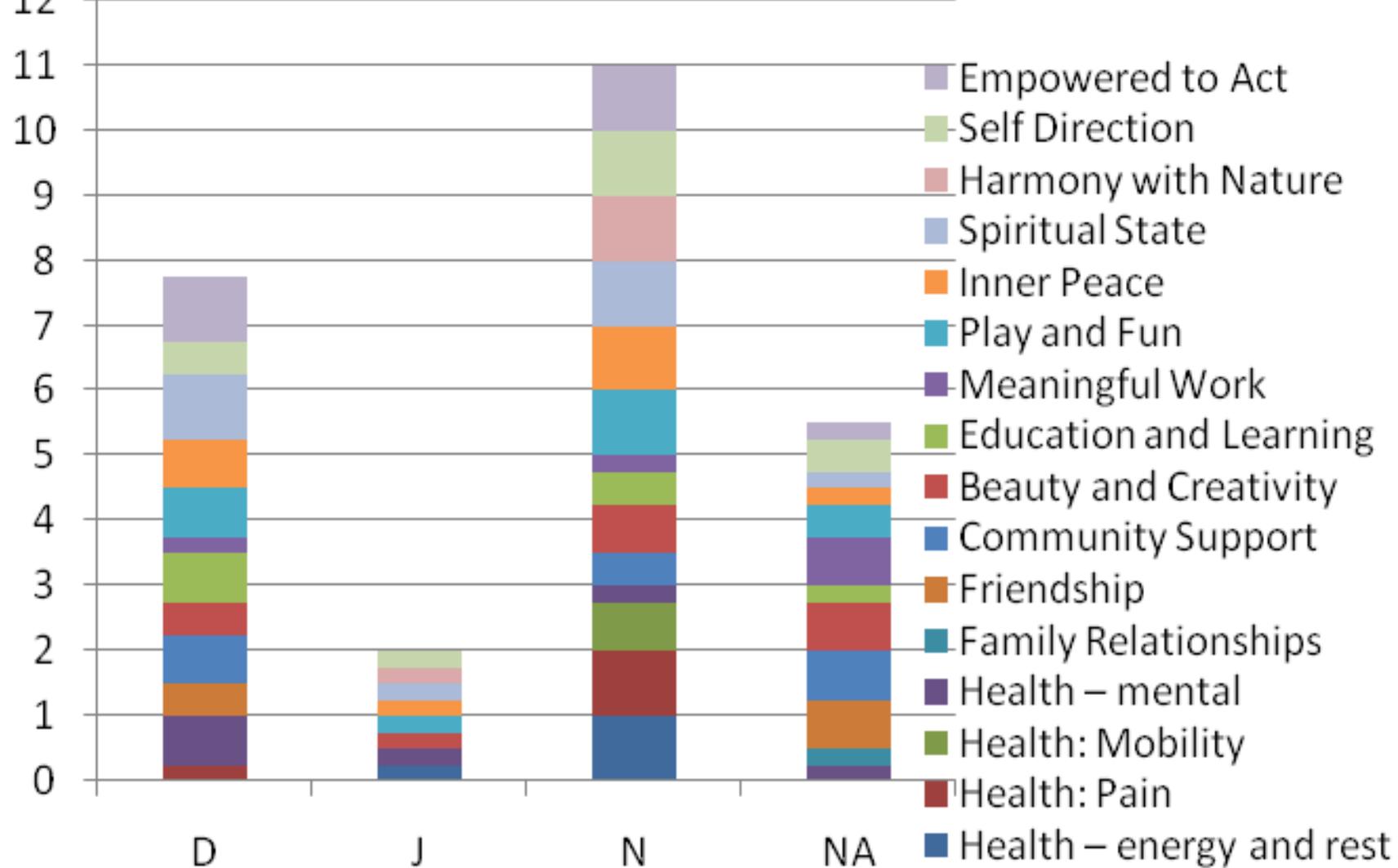
“What tends to inflame the minds of suffering humanity cannot but be of immediate interest both to policy-making and to the diagnosis of injustice.”

Sen The Idea of Justice 2009 p 388

Donna's Family exercise:

- 1) what are the key capabilities/functionings that you value and [judge that you] have reason to value?
- 2) What level of achievement would be sufficient?
- 3) Where are you now? [make up your own scale – e.g. 1-5]
- 4) How did these expand / contract since starting the Summerschool? 😊





Implications for Measurement

Indicator Selection:

Resource – Functioning or Capability – Utility?

Input – Output – Outcome?

Things people Value and have Reason to value?

Implications for Measurement

Attention to Diversity:

In conversion from Resources into Functionings

Disability, Metabolism, Pregnancy

In people's behaviours and preferences

Fasting, Blood transfusion, few choices

Implications for Measurement

Attention to Agency:

In articulating what people value

Participatory, Deliberative

In analysing poverty

Share with local actors as well as national/expert

Make value judgements transparent & explicit

In taking action

Subsidiarity, voice, solidarity



Other Process freedoms:

Social Movements, Advocacy, Democratic Practice, Responsibility

“The fact that so many people ... go on perishing from persistent deprivation on a regular basis, is a calamity to which the world has, somewhat incredibly, got coolly accustomed. It does not seem to engender the kind of shock and disquiet that might be reasonable to expect given the enormity of the tragedy. Indeed, the subject often generates either cynicism (‘not a lot can be done about it’) or complacent irresponsibility (‘don’t blame me – it is not a problem for which I am answerable’).



**What is lacking is constructive
impatience and public outcry**