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Research Paper  
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Definitions, Critiques,  
and Related Concepts**

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# Human Development: Definitions, Critiques, and Related Concepts

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# Abstract

The purpose of this background paper is: i) to synthesize the discussions regarding the concept of human development, so as to inform the 2010 Report's definition, and ii) drawing on the extensive policy and academic literatures, to propose relationships between the concept of human development and four related concepts: the Millennium Development Goals, Human Rights, Human Security, and Happiness. Inequality, the duration of outcomes across time, and environmental sustainability are also prominent due to their fundamental importance.

Keywords: human development, capability approach, Millennium Development Goals, human security, human rights, inequality, environment, happiness, process freedom.

JEL classification: D6, I3, O1, A13, B5, B2, F0.

The Human Development Research Paper (HDRP) Series is a medium for sharing recent research commissioned to inform the global Human Development Report, which is published annually, and further research in the field of human development. The HDRP Series is a quick-disseminating, informal publication whose titles could subsequently be revised for publication as articles in professional journals or chapters in books. The authors include leading academics and practitioners from around the world, as well as UNDP researchers. The findings, interpretations and conclusions are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UNDP or United Nations Member States. Moreover, the data may not be consistent with that presented in Human Development Reports.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In his *Reflections on Human Development*, Mahbub ul Haq commended far-sighted institutions:

When bombs were still raining on London, John Maynard Keynes was preparing the blueprint for the Bretton Woods institutions. When Europe was still at war, Jean Monnet was dreaming about a European Economic Community. When the dust of war still had not begun to settle, the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe was taking shape. When hostility among nations was still simmering, the hopeful design of a United Nations was being approved by the leaders of the world...

Like those institutions and authors, the 2010 *Human Development Report* will be a forward-gazing report. The report will be released at a time of instability – with the new pressures of climate change and meeting the MDGs, the immediate uncertainties about economic stability, new strains on global security and an ever-changing configuration of political leaders. It will be judged not so much by how well it encapsulates and celebrates the past 20 years as by how well it can inspire and steer future policies.

Against that context, this background paper reaffirms the concept of human development. It endeavours to articulate a concept that is simple yet rich, full yet open-ended, flexible yet responsible, normative yet visionary; inspiring yet practical. It does so drawing on the rich tapestry of people, communities and institutions that have engaged human development over the past 20 years, and whose voices, artistic endeavours, criticisms and disappointments have improved it. The preliminary draft of this paper received wide and energetic comments, which have greatly improved it.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the participants of consultations in Delhi, Oxford, Lima, Valencia, and Busan and to the HD-net, HDCA serves and Oxfam blog participants for their input into this definition as well as for correspondence with other colleagues: Melissa Andrade, Dana Bates, Gabriela Bukstein, Luciano Carrino, Achin Chakraborty, Séverine Deneulin, Andrew Dorward, Carl Farrington, Des Gasper, Harry Jones, Cindy Maguire, Amlan Majumdar, Saidah Najjma, Viola Nilah Nyakato, Khalil Tian Shahyd, A.K. Shiva Kumar, Trudy Tan, Elaine Unterhalter, Adriana Velasco, Rohitha Wickramaratna, and Khalil Zahr. I am grateful to Ann Barham and Uma Pradhan for research support.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we consider the definition of human development that was put forward in the reports from 1990 until 2009. From these reports we observe how human development has been defined, what dimensions it has comprised, and how inequality, time and environmental sustainability have been reflected in this tradition. Building on that basis, together with the accumulated literature on the capability approach and human development from international institutions and academic and policy groups, we propose a ‘capsule’ sentence defining human development, and a succinct exposition of the core concepts.

Human Development is complemented by a number of conceptual frameworks that share similar underlying motivations, but have different emphases, and add value in different ways. Part II of this paper relates human development to other key concepts, showing the synergies between them and also articulating the distinctive contribution of the human development framework. Comparisons are made with:

- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- Human Rights
- Human Security
- Happiness

A post-script to this paper traces the evolution of the World Bank’s concept of poverty from 1946 to the year 2000.

## **Part I. Human Development since 1990**

In 1990, the UNDP launched the first *Human Development Report*, and within it, the Human Development Index (HDI). Subsequently, *Human Development Reports* (HDRs) have been produced nearly every year. The reports apply the concept of human development to diverse themes, such as the environment, gender, poverty, globalization, cultural liberties and migration, to name just a few. The *HDRs* also include a statistical index with the HDI and other figures relevant to human development for many countries.

What is that approach which has been applied for 20 years – what is human development? This section provides an overview of two important and distinct literatures on human development. First, it explores the human development reports 1990-2009, surveying their concept of human development as it was advanced over the first twenty years. Second, it introduces the academic literature on the capability approach – which provides the conceptual foundation for human development – and similarly synthesizes some main innovations.

### **A. The Human Development Reports 1990–2009**

From 1990 to 2009, the HDRs applied the concept of human development to identify and advocate policies. How has the concept of human development evolved in the *HDRs* itself, and has this evolution been conscious or incidental? This section briefly reviews the concepts of human development found in each of the reports 1990–2009. We begin with a slightly longer introduction to the 1990 report, because it is foundational to the rest.

#### **HDR 1990**

The 1990 *Human Development Report* gave the clear and fundamental articulation of the concept of human development. It was the only report to date to focus on the concepts and measures of Human Development, hence provides the richest introduction of any of the reports. The first Chapter of that report, entitled “*Defining and Measuring Human Development*”, opens with these now-famous words:

People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth.<sup>2</sup>

The opening section observed that this goal is so often lost from sight and yet it is not new. Aristotle, Lagrange, Smith, Ricardo, Marx and Mill articulated similar and related positions. Renewed attention to their work is required given countries’ uneven progress on human

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP 1990

development and the economic crisis and adjustments of the 1980s. Thus, “the expansion of output and wealth is only a means. The end of development must be human well-being.”<sup>3</sup>

The section on ‘Defining human development’ lasts merely one page. It includes a box (reprinted in Appendix 1) which, like many subsequent reports, sheds the richness of the concept of human development. The text has three substantive paragraphs, described below, which are interspersed with clarifications as to human development’s linkages with and distinctions from, other foci such as income, welfare and basic needs.

The text, as well as the box “Human Development Defined” begins with what came to be a standard formulation: ‘Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices’ followed by examples of what key choices might be – which I term the ‘dimensions’ of human development. As we shall see, this structure is followed quite readily in subsequent years’ reports, although the wording and examples vary over time. The 1990 paragraph read:

Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices. The most critical ones are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect – what Adam Smith called the ability to mix with others without being “ashamed to appear in public.”<sup>4</sup>

The second substantive paragraph focuses on development as concerned with both a *process* and the levels of achieved well-being, which we might call *outcomes*. A second feature of this description is a distinction between the formation of human capabilities that enable people to act, and how people actually act – responsibly or not – to advance their own well-being, to contribute to economic growth and also to pursue leisure activities. As we shall see, these aspects of human development are less prominent in subsequent descriptions of it.

The term *human development* here denotes both the *process* of widening people’s choices and the *level* of their achieved well-being. It also helps to distinguish clearly between two

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<sup>3</sup> UNDP 1990: 10.

<sup>4</sup> This and subsequent quotations from this section of the 1990 report are found on p 10 of that report.



sides of human development. One is the formation of human capabilities, such as improved health or knowledge. The other is the use that people make of their acquired capabilities, for work or leisure.

The third paragraph provides a number of important qualifications and clarifications. First, it joins the economic system – the production and distribution of commodities – to human lives, by asking how these commodities expand human capabilities and how people use these capabilities. Second, it clarifies a concern for freedom, both in the form of opportunity freedom (choice) and of process freedom (development as a participatory and dynamic process). Finally, it clarifies that human development, because of its breadth and generality, pertains to countries at all levels of development.

Human development...brings together the production and distribution of commodities and the expansion and use of human capabilities. It also focuses on choices – on what people should have, be and do to be able to ensure their own livelihood. Human development is, moreover, concerned not only with basic needs satisfaction but also with human development as a participatory and dynamic process. It applies equally to less developed and highly developed countries.

#### Subsequent HDRs

The 1990 account of human development contained a number of conceptual features. These are important to signal because they have rarely survived the translation of the concept of human development into other institutions. Without being able to do justice to them, we sketch some features of subsequent reports' definition of human development.

The 1991 report<sup>5</sup> argued that, "The real objective of development is to increase people's choices." However it added two interesting turns. First, in addressing growth, it argued that to advance human development growth ought to be "participatory, distributed well and

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP 1991

sustainable.”<sup>6</sup> Second, it presented and developed the proposition that, “It has to be development of the people, by the people, for the people.”<sup>7</sup> We will return to this proposition and wording.

From 1992,<sup>8</sup> we see the formalization of a narrow definition of human development as ‘enlarging people’s choices’. True, the first Report, in 1990, defined human development as “a process of enlarging people’s choices”<sup>9</sup> (it was phrased this way in the 1990 report’s box on Human Development Defined). But the 1990 report had a much fuller account than that mere sentence. From 1992, process concerns cease to be central to the definition of human developing in many subsequent *HDRs*.

The 1993 Report<sup>10</sup> focused on *People’s Participation*. Interestingly, though, in the conceptual account of human development, the report lacked a prominent conceptual statement of whether participation was of intrinsic value, or merely instrumental to human development.

The first *Human Development Report*, in introducing the concept of human development, argued that the real purpose of development should be to enlarge people’s choices. Subsequent Reports have developed the basic concept, looking in particular at how human development could be financed and at its international dimensions – through trade, overseas development assistance, and international migration flows.

At times in that report, participation seemed to have instrumental importance only insofar as it leads to better outcomes: “Human development involves widening [people’s] choices, and greater participation enables people to gain for themselves access to a much broader range of opportunities.”<sup>11</sup> At other times, the intrinsic value of participation is clearly stated, but this point is not developed. “The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development.”<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> UNDP 1991:13.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP 1991

<sup>8</sup> UNDP 1992

<sup>9</sup> UNDP 1992: 12.

<sup>10</sup> UNDP 1993

<sup>11</sup> UNDP 1993: 21

<sup>12</sup> UNDP 1993

report does clarify that the relevant kinds of participation include the participation of individuals and groups.

The 1994 report,<sup>13</sup> on *Human Security*, introduced sustainability of outcomes across time: “the purpose of development is to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities, and opportunities can be enlarged for both present and future generations.”<sup>14</sup>

The 1995 report on *Gender*,<sup>15</sup> returned to the original language from 1990, “Human Development is a process of enlarging people’s choices.”<sup>16</sup> However, almost without explanation, it presented four principles which it argued to be ‘essential’ to the human development paradigm: Productivity, Equity, Sustainability (across time), and Empowerment.<sup>17</sup>

The 1996 report,<sup>18</sup> *Economic growth and human development*, argued that “Human development went far beyond income and growth to cover the full flourishing of all human capabilities. It emphasized the importance of putting people – their needs, their aspirations, their choices – at the centre of the development effort.”<sup>19</sup> It argued, also that “human development can be expressed as a process of enlarging people’s choices.”<sup>20</sup>

The 1997 report,<sup>21</sup> *Human Development to eradicate poverty*, presented its concept of human development in a ‘Glossary’. With incomplete echoes of the 1990 definition, the glossary contained three parts: a definition, a discussion of dimensions and clarification regarding income. We begin with the definitions:

“The process of widening people’s choices and the level of well-being they achieve are at the core of the notion of human development. Such choices are neither finite nor static.”

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<sup>13</sup> UNDP 1994

<sup>14</sup> UNDP 1994: 13.

<sup>15</sup> UNDP 1995

<sup>16</sup> UNDP 1995: 11.

<sup>17</sup> UNDP 1995: 12.

<sup>18</sup> UNDP 1996

<sup>19</sup> UNDP 1996: 49.

<sup>20</sup> UNDP 1996

<sup>21</sup> UNDP 1997

[*Dimensions*] But regardless of the level of development, the three essential choices for people are to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living. Human development does not end there, however. Other choices, highly valued by many people, range from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive and enjoying self-respect and guaranteed human rights.

[*Role of Income*] Income is clearly only one option that people would like to have, though an important one. But it is not the sum total of their lives. Income is also a means, with human development the end.<sup>22</sup>

In 1998, the report<sup>23</sup> *Consumption for human development*, human development is presented, once again, as “a process of enlarging people’s choices,” and a definition including the core dimensions is presented in a box entitled ‘What is Human Development?’.<sup>24</sup>

The 1999 report<sup>25</sup> on *Globalization* shuddered from the untimely death of Mahbub ul Haq, the architect and founder of the *Human Development Reports*, who was by then working on a South Asian report on governance. It was also the year in which Sen published *Development as Freedom*. Interestingly, the global 1999 report gave, without explanation, new prominence to the concept of agency: “[T]he central concern [of the *Human Development Report*] has always been people as the purpose of development, and their empowerment as participants in the development process.”<sup>26</sup>

At its first decade, the 2000 report on *Human rights and human development*<sup>27</sup> picked up again the 1990 reference to processes and outcomes: “Human development is the process of enlarging people’s choices, by expanding human functionings and capabilities. Human development thus

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<sup>22</sup> UNDP 1997: 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> UNDP 1998

<sup>24</sup> UNDP 1998: 14.

<sup>25</sup> UNDP 1999

<sup>26</sup> UNDP 1999: 18.

<sup>27</sup> UNDP 2000

also reflects human outcomes in these functionings and capabilities. It represents a process as well as an end.” This report also reiterates the 1991 formulation as developing being ‘of, for, and by’ the people: “In the ultimate analysis, human development is development of the people, for the people and by the people.”<sup>28</sup>

In 2001,<sup>29</sup> the opening paragraphs of the report on *Making new technologies work for human development* gave a succinct although not novel account of human development: “Human development...is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests. People are the real wealth of nations. Development is thus about expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value. And it is thus about much more than economic growth, which is only a means – if a very important one – of enlarging people’s choices. Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities – the range of things that people can do or be in life.”<sup>30</sup>

In 2002,<sup>31</sup> the report focused on *Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*. The report drew out, perhaps more prominently than in previous formulations, the centrality of human values. “Human development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value.”<sup>32</sup> The 2002 report also, appropriately given its theme, gave more prominence to the agency aspect, and argued that participation forms a third ‘pillar’ of human development. “People are not only the beneficiaries of economic and social progress, they are also its agents, both as individuals and by making common causes with others.”<sup>33</sup>

In 2003,<sup>34</sup> the report addressed *Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty*. The report did not articulate clear linkages between the concept of human development and the MDGs, but did mention that “Every *Human Development Report* has

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<sup>28</sup> UNDP 2000: 17.

<sup>29</sup> UNDP 2001

<sup>30</sup> UNDP 2001: 9.

<sup>31</sup> UNDP 2002

<sup>32</sup> UNDP 2002: 13.

<sup>33</sup> UNDP 2002: 53.

<sup>34</sup> UNDP 2003

argued that the purpose of development is to improve people's lives by expanding their choices, freedom and dignity.”<sup>35</sup>

The 2004 *Human Development Report*<sup>36</sup> focused on *Cultural liberty in today's diverse world*. Early on, it defined human development as “the process of widening choices for people to do and be what they value in life.”<sup>37</sup> Later on, the report did contain a full restatement of human development, as cited below:

People are the real wealth of nations. Indeed, the basic purpose of development is to enlarge human freedoms. The process of development can expand human capabilities by expanding the choices that people have to live full and creative lives. And people are both the beneficiaries of such development and the agents of the progress and change that bring it about. This process must benefit all individuals equitably and build on the participation of each of them. ...

The range of capabilities that individuals can have, and the choices that can help to expand them, are potentially infinite and vary by individual. However, public policy is about setting priorities, and two criteria are helpful in identifying the most important capabilities for assessing meaningful global progress in achieving human well-being, the purpose of this Report. First, these capabilities must be *universally valued*. Second, they must be *basic to life*, in the sense that their absence would foreclose many other choices.<sup>38</sup>

The 2005 report on *International Cooperation*<sup>39</sup> mentioned human development as follows: “Human development is about freedom. It is about building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do, and what they can be. Individual freedoms and rights matter a great

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<sup>35</sup> UNDP 2003: 27.

<sup>36</sup> UNDP 2004

<sup>37</sup> UNDP 2004: 6.

<sup>38</sup> UNDP 2004: 127.

<sup>39</sup> UNDP 2005

deal, but people are restricted in what they can do with that freedom if they are poor, ill, illiterate, discriminated against, threatened by violent conflict or denied a political voice.”<sup>40</sup>

The 2006 report on *Water scarcity*,<sup>41</sup> did not advance conceptually on earlier reports, but does provide a statement on human development in the overview. The overview sentence reads, “Ultimately, human development is about the realization of potential. It is about what people can do and what they can become—their capabilities—and about the freedom they have to exercise real choices in their lives.”<sup>42</sup>

The report on *Climate change* in 2007-8<sup>43</sup> opened with a novel statement which combined a focus on freedom with agency: “All development is ultimately about expanding human potential and enlarging human freedom. It is about people developing the capabilities that empower them to make choices and to lead lives that they value.”<sup>44</sup> Later on, the report also contains a more standard definition, “Human development is about people. It is about expanding people’s real choice and the substantive freedoms – the capabilities – that enable them to lead lives that they value.”<sup>45</sup>

The 2009 report on *Migration*<sup>46</sup> defined human development as “the expansion of people’s freedoms to live their lives as they choose.”<sup>47</sup> Another description was the following: “putting people and their freedom at the centre of development. It is about people realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying the freedom to lead lives they value.”<sup>48</sup>

In terms of dimensions, the report stressed that, “Human development is concerned with the full range of capabilities, including social freedoms that cannot be exercised without political and

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<sup>40</sup> UNPD 2005: 18.

<sup>41</sup> UNDP 2006

<sup>42</sup> UNDP 2006: 2.

<sup>43</sup> UNDP 2008

<sup>44</sup> UNDP 2008: 1.

<sup>45</sup> UNDP 2008: 24.

<sup>46</sup> UNDP 2009

<sup>47</sup> UNDP 2009: 14.

<sup>48</sup> UNDP 2009:16.

civic guarantees....”<sup>49</sup> The Report pays special attention to the social bases of self-respect and to relations between social, economic, and racial groups as migrants regularly confront prejudices.

As this survey suggests, the definition of human development has been fairly stable over time, Different reports emphasized different aspects of human development, but the underlying concept has provided a solid foundation which has not changed radically since its articulation in 1990.

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### Dimensions of Human Development

What do we make of this set of definitions? Clearly they were written in the context of policy and advocacy reports. It would not be accurate to award great importance to small textual differences. Given that the emphasis of the reports is not conceptual, differences might be inadvertent rather than deliberate. Further, the descriptions of human development are made in the context of reports addressing particular themes, hence the differences will be motivated in part by the context and content of the report. However, treating the texts accurately, we can see a few patterns.

First, as Table 1 shows, there is a clear common definition of human development as a process of ‘enlarging people’s choices’. The particular wording varies over time, with later reports engaging the language of freedoms and capabilities more often. However this is the most common single definition of human development. As will be noted at once, this definition loses a great deal of the richness present in the longer definition from 1990. It could have been the case that subsequent reports retained that richness in their conceptual chapter but it does seem, rather, that the evolution of reports led to an abbreviation of the conceptual statement and, at least during many years, an omission of human agency, collective action and process freedoms. Furthermore, the short definition does not explicitly include time – the need to sustain outcomes across years and indeed generations, on a limited planet. It also does not include principles such as equity.

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<sup>49</sup> UNDP 2009:60.



**Table 1: Short Definitions of human development:**

**Enlarging (*expanding*) people's choices (*freedoms, capabilities*)**

<b>1990</b>	<b>a process of enlarging people's choices (p 10)</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>The real objective of development is to increase people's choices (p 13)</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>a process of enlarging people's choices. (p 12)</b>
<b>1993</b>	<b>involves widening [people's] choices</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities... (p 13)</b>
<b>1995</b>	<b>a process of enlarging people's choices (p 11).</b>
<b>1996</b>	<b>a process of enlarging people's choices. (p 49)</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>the process of enlarging people's choices</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>a process of enlarging people's choices.</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>the process of enlarging people's choices</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>a process of enhancing human capabilities</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>about expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value.</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value. (p. 13)</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>to improve people's lives by expanding their choices, freedom and dignity.</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>the process of widening choices for people to do and be what they value in life. (p. 6)</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>about building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do, and what they can be.</b>
<b>2007/8</b>	<b>about expanding people's real choice and the substantive freedoms – the capabilities – that enable them to lead lives that they value. (p 24)</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>the expansion of people's freedoms to live their lives as they choose (p 14)</b>

A second observation is that the dimensions that are mentioned vary, although there is some consistency among them. Table 2, below, provides a list of the 'dimensions' that are named in the main statement of human development each year. These lists are never meant to be exhaustive, merely illustrative. So again, a great deal of weight cannot be placed on the annual

changes. However still it is interesting to notice how the language and categories have evolved over time.

Dimensions mentioned in HDR by year	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	07	09
Long healthy life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Resources for decent std of life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Political freedom	X	X						X							X			X
Guaranteed Human Rts	X					X		X		X	X							
Self Respect	X					X		X		X	X							
Good physical environment		X	X		X													
Freedom of Action & Expression			X															
Participation				X	X								X					
Human Security					X		X											
Political, Social & Econ Freedoms						X		X	X	X								
Being creative						X		X	X	X	X							
Being Productive						X		X	X	X	X							
Freedom							X	X										
Democracy							X											
Dignity & Respect of others								X										
Empowerment									X		X							
A sense of belonging to a community									X	X	X							
Security											X							X
Sustainability											X							
Enjoying political and civil freedoms to participate in the life of one's community.														X				
Cultural liberty															X			
Social & Political Participation																X		
Civil & Political Rights																	X	

**Table 2: Dimensions mentioned in different reports.**

In particular, we can see that in all years, health, education and living standards have been mentioned without exception. Process freedoms of one kind or another have been mentioned every year except 2001. Interestingly, work and employment only appear under the names ‘creativity and productivity’, and only for five years. Similarly, the environment was only mentioned five years, although its centrality to human development at this time is indisputable. Human rights and physical security appear in nine reports and are often mentioned even if not in the ‘list’ of dimensions. Social freedoms including dignity and respect, belonging and participation appear in six reports and cultural liberties in one report. Hence there is no any

‘fixed’ list of dimensions of human development – a position Sen has supported.<sup>50</sup> The range of possible dimensions includes:

**Health and Life**

**Education**

**Decent Standard of Living**

**Political Freedom & Process Freedoms**

**Creativity and Productivity**

**Environment**

**Social & relational**

**Culture & Arts**

The language of human rights, as we shall see later, permeates the reports in different ways, and human rights are sometimes included among the ‘dimensions’ or specific capabilities mentioned.

These named aspects have a number of features which are important. First, they are **flexible** – there is not one ‘fixed and forever’ (Sen 2004) list of relevant dimensions or capabilities. This flexibility allows human development to be relevant in different cultural and national contexts. It also enables applications that address ‘rich’ countries and persons as well as poorer people and countries.

Second, the **focal space has been consistent**: people’s lives and capabilities. It would be very easy for human development reports aiming to influence policy to gravitate to resources that policy makers can influence directly – access to public services, social expenditures, or other easy-to-measure administrative targets. But there is not a direct equivalence between these inputs and human outcomes. For example, equivalent social expenditures go along with divergent

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<sup>50</sup> Sen 2004a

human development outcomes. Institutions, policies, growth and other intermediate activities are of critical instrumental importance to human development, and understanding of them must inform policies to advance human development. But the evaluative space for human development remains people's lives and capabilities.

Third, the discussion includes, at least in early reports, both the **creation of capabilities** and also the **use** to which people put these freedoms. This creates the space for a more direct discussion of responsibilities and imperfect obligations than has been undertaken to date. This facet of human development is likely to become prominent in the coming years, particularly given the realities of climate change.

Also, the description of human development as enlarging people's choices, however fundamental, is not enough. It must be complemented by **procedural principles** such as equity, efficiency, sustainability, respect for human rights and responsibility. For human freedoms could well be expanded in ways that exacerbate inequality, that are wasteful, or short-sighted, or that infringe upon the human rights of one group in order to expand the freedoms of another. Furthermore the groups of concern vary widely, and include women as well as racial or ethnic groups, certain age categories, or geographical groups.

In particular, attention to people as '**agents**' who create and maintain positive outcomes must be continuously sustained alongside attention to people as 'beneficiaries' of development. This point is underscored by the national as well as global HDRs. Since 1992, there have been two global human development reports (1993, 2002), one regional report (Arab HDR 2004), and sixty-three national reports where people's participation and empowerment was either a central theme or strong focus. Among the national reports, the attention given to people's agency was spread relatively evenly throughout the regions (11 in Africa, 10 in Arab States, 13 in Asia and the Pacific, 16 in Europe and the CIS and 13 in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>51</sup>). Although

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<sup>51</sup> The year spans are as follows: 11 In Africa 1998-2003; 10 in Arab States 1994-2004; 13 Asia and the Pacific 1992-2009; 16 In Europe and CIS 1995-2000; and 13 in Latin America and Caribbean 1998-2009.

most of the past 18 years have at least one report that directly relates to participation, nearly 40% were published in the years 1999, 2000 and 2001.<sup>52</sup>

## ***Inequality, Sustainability and the Environment***

### ***Inequality***

Examinations of inequity—both its root causes and potential remedies—are often present in *HDRs* even when inequality is not listed as a central theme. Since 1995, however, 11 national reports have focused on equity<sup>53</sup> as either the title theme (as in Paraguay's 2008 *Equidad para el Desarrollo*) or as a major focus (e.g., Panama 2003 which is “a diagnosis on poverty and inequality and finds that inequality is rooted in ethno-social factors”). Most of these reports are scattered through the intervening years, with the exception of 2005, which had a small cluster of three reports (China, Montenegro, and Brazil). Among the HDR regions, the countries within Latin America and the Caribbean appeared to be the most sharply concentrated on inequality, with 6 of the 11 reports coming from this region.<sup>54</sup> There were no regional reports centrally themed on inequality.

At a global level, inequality was mentioned in nearly every global HDR since 1990 and has been prominent in the themes of five of them.<sup>55</sup> The 1990 report *Concept and Measurement of Human Development*, along with launching the HDI, also uses the Gini coefficient to show disparities in income distribution. The report notes that while North-South gaps in human development declined income, inequity tended to increase and that “the average figures for human development hide considerable disparities among countries in the South.”<sup>56</sup>

The 1995 report, *Gender and Human Development*, focused on gender inequality--which is reflected in the GDI and GEM indices. The 1996 (economic growth) and 1997 (poverty) reports argue that growth must cannot be “ruthless” and that steps must be taken to reduce inequalities

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<sup>52</sup> 7 in 1999; 7 in 2000; 10 in 2001; and 6 in 2004.

<sup>53</sup> One each in 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2008; two in 2002; and 3 in 2005

<sup>54</sup> Africa did not have any reports; Arab States and Asia Pacific had one each, Europe and the CIS had three, and LAC had six.

<sup>55</sup> 1990, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2005

<sup>56</sup> UNDP 1990:17, 18.

and moderate its extremes. The 1999 report, *Globalization with a Human Face*, describes the need for the benefits of global markets to be put in service of human development and to help decrease the growing inequality that exists both between and within countries. The 2005 report, *International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*, describes how inequalities can represent an unfair constraining of life choices but they are “also economically wasteful and socially destabilizing.” Moreover, it argues that “overcoming the structural forces that create and perpetuate extreme inequality is one of the most efficient routes for overcoming extreme poverty, enhancing the welfare of society and accelerating progress towards the MDGs.”<sup>57</sup>

The two reports (2006 and 2007/08) that were directly focused on the environment (water scarcity and climate change) also paid strong attention to inequality as water scarcity and the effects of global warming disproportionately harm the poor.

Overall, the main forms of inequality--both in income and in human development outcomes—addressed in the reports were a) the growth of income inequality and its implication for the poor; b) gender inequality; c) inequality between groups of countries, and between regions within a country; d) inequality between groups, with marginalized groups (including migrants) and indigenous groups often suffering higher deprivations. These broadly-categorized inequalities are composed of other inequalities, including unequal access to economic opportunity, legal guarantees, political participation, healthcare and education.

More than one report emphasized the need for greater equity by detailing the ways that inequality can undermine public policies (like support for universal education), erode political legitimacy, exacerbate the consequences of economic crises and prove socially destabilizing.<sup>58</sup> When addressing remedies to the inequalities faced by women, indigenous persons and other marginalized groups, the reports stressed the need to uphold individual rights<sup>59</sup> With respect to income inequality, “narrowing the gaps between rich and poor and the extremes between

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<sup>57</sup> UNDP 2005: 5.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, UNDP 2001: 17 and UNDP 2005: 5.

<sup>59</sup> See for example, Rights that have “been enshrined in global and national commitments from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Human Rights Declaration to various national constitutions” UNDP 1995: 99.

countries should become explicit global goals” of global governance.<sup>60</sup> The reports also insist that national governments and international organizations should seek greater fairness in distributional outcomes using a range of policy instruments.

### ***Sustaining Human Development across Time***

Human Development does not aim to create one lovely but transitory state of affairs; it aims to sustain positive outcomes steadily over time. The first HDR in 1990 made clear that human development was not a steady upward climb; that temporary gains could be fragile and vulnerable to reversals. Special effort is needed to create positive states of affairs that endure across time at an individual, group and national level. And policymakers should give priority to preventing distressing situations of deprivation and disadvantage. The dynamic processes that impoverish people or sustain situations of oppression and structural injustice need to be understood. The dynamics of moving out of capability poverty, staying out of poverty, and coping with risks and shocks need to be unwound. On the monitoring side, decision makers need to know not only who is deprived, but also who is chronically deprived and to what extent there is considerable entrance into and exit from poverty. Human development policies thus must identify the sequence and composition of investments – including support for local initiatives – that mitigate vulnerability, expand capabilities and sustain these expansions.

The past 20 years have seen a great deal of research, analysis and awareness of these issues, which could undergird better dynamic policies for human development. The 1990 HDR concluded that “growth accompanied by an equitable distribution of income appears to be the most effective means of sustainable human development.”<sup>61</sup> This focus on growth with equity as foundational for sustainable human development outcomes is also evident in the 1996 report, *Economic Growth and Human Development*. The 1996 report also follows earlier reports' (especially 1994) emphases on sustainability as a matter of intergenerational equity.<sup>62</sup> Beyond

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<sup>60</sup> UNDP 1999: 36.

<sup>61</sup> UNDP 1990: 42.

<sup>62</sup> See for example, 1994 HDR “Sustainable human development means that we have a moral obligations to do at least well for our successor generations as our predecessor did for us” p 18 and 1996 HDR “Sustainable human development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to met their needs” p 56.

the 1996 report (and to a lesser extent, the reports of 1992 and 1994), the need for equitable growth as part of sustainable development also emerges whenever globalization is taken up in the reports, particularly 1999's *Globalization with Human Face*.

Yet in many circumstances growth is not strictly necessary for sustained human development improvements and it is certainly not sufficient (François Bourguignon et al., 2008). In order to sustain development outcomes, a number of complementary policy ingredients have been suggested. Stronger institutions, the formation of sustainable development networks (1992, p 16), a strong and vocal civil society, stronger national accountability through countervailing powers and increased global governance and responsibility (1999, p 97), increased international assistance in some contexts (e.g., 1992, p. 41; 2005, p 7), and policy investments on the both the national and international level are associated with durable and long-term human development advances (1992, p 83; 2003, p 30).

### ***The Environment: Ecosystems, Climate and Consumption***

Since 1990, the environment and ecosystem has received significant mention in the majority of global human development reports. In the 2006 and 2007/2008 reports, the environment received title billing covering the topics of the global water crisis and global warming respectively. In both of those reports, as in others, the authors point out that various forms of environmental degradation have a disproportionate effect on the poor. For example, the 2006 report, which urges that access to clean water be considered a human right, asks why “poor people get less access to clean water and pay more for it”<sup>63</sup> and notes that “sanitation remains a powerful indicator of the state of human development in any community.” The 2008 report on global warming details how the consequences of global warming, which include reduced agricultural production, coastal flooding, the collapse of ecosystems and increased health risks (e.g., from malaria) fall most heavily on those living in developing nations. “The distribution of current emission points to a total inverse relationship between climate change risk and responsibility.”<sup>64</sup>

The 1998 report, *Consumption for Human Development*, also had a strong environmental angle

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<sup>63</sup> UNDP 2006: 8-9.

<sup>64</sup> UNDP 2008: 43.



as it focused on the strains ever-increasing consumption puts on the environment. It notes that “environmental damage threatens both the earth's carrying capacity and people's coping capacity. And it may have serious consequences for future generations.”<sup>65</sup> Development that destroys non-renewable resources or mismanages renewable resources is not sustainable. This tension between growth and environment appears in other global reports as well, and is included in larger discussions of sustainable development. Rising consumption stresses the environment and depletes non-renewable resources. Mismanagement of renewable resources by overfishing, deforestation, over-consumption of groundwater, air pollution and exposing soil to erosion through poor land management also results in environmental degradation.

Attempts to promote sustainable growth necessarily must address these issues, and the environmental component of sustainable development receives consideration in some of the reports. The 2003 report *Millennium Development Goals: A Compact Among Nations to End Human Poverty* points out that while “many environmental problems arise from the production and consumption patterns of non-poor people, particularly in rich countries,” “many environmental problems stem from poverty—often contributing to a downward spiral in which poverty exacerbates environmental degradation and environmental degradation exacerbates poverty.”<sup>66</sup> The reports argue that these challenges must be met at both the international and national policy level. The 2003 report, for example, lists the need for strengthening institutions and governance, making environmental sustainability part of all sector policies, improving markets and removing environmentally damaging subsidies, bolstering international mechanisms for environmental management, investing in science and technology for the environment and increasing efforts to conserve critical ecosystems.”<sup>67</sup>

Overall, the various forms of environmental threats (poor air quality, water scarcity, global warming, deforestation, desertification, loss of ecosystems, ozone dissipation, etc), the need to protect the environment during economic growth, and the unequal consequences of environmental damage on the poor have been important themes or received significant mention in 11 of the past global reports.

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<sup>65</sup> UNDP 1998: 78.

<sup>66</sup> UNDP 2003: 123.

<sup>67</sup> UNDP 2003: 127.

Environmental challenges (climate change, pollution, desertification, water scarcity, etc) are touched on in many national or state *HDRs*. Even when the environment is not an explicit focus, it is a component of other themes such as sustainable development. Nevertheless, the environment has been spotlighted in 28 national human development reports since 1995.<sup>68</sup> Of those national reports, 18 were from the two HDR regions of Africa and Europe with the CIS (9 apiece). The years 1996 and 1997 represent 9 of the 28 national reports.

## **B. Human Development in Academic Literature**

This section gives a brief overview of the main strands of writing in academic literature that have intersected with the concept of human development. We restrict our attention to philosophical and theoretical literature, and do not include the many empirical and descriptive studies of human development activities in different contexts, or of measurement.

Most of the literature is not focused on the UNDP definition of human development directly but rather on the capability approach which provides the most visible philosophical foundation for the concept of human development. There are surprisingly few direct conceptual treatments of human development.<sup>69</sup> Martha Nussbaum's masterful book *Women and Human Development* does not offer a distinct account of human development; she draws on the capabilities approach. Some other authors do attempt to distinguish between human development and the capability approach. However there is no consensus as to a *conceptually* clear distinction between human development and the capability approach, nor is it obvious that such a distinction is useful or required. What is clear is that, while the capability approach spans philosophy to practice, human development – particularly as represented in the *Human Development Reports* – emphasises real world applications, identifying and advocating policies that advance capabilities and human development in different contexts and institutional settings and at different levels. Also, human development draws on a broader ownership. Indeed it would be constructive to build up a fuller documentation and acknowledgement of intellectual political and artistic sources – ranging from

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<sup>68</sup> One each in 2004, 2005, 2006; two each in 1995, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2009; four each in 1996, 1999 and five in 1997.

<sup>69</sup> Anand and Sen 1997, Fukuda-Parr 2003, Fukuda-Parr and Kumar 2003, Gasper 2002, McNeill 2007, Nelson 2004, Nussbaum 2001, Qizilbash 1996, Robeyns 2005, Stewart 1996, Streeten 1994, ul Haq 1995

Goulet to Streeten to Stewart to Nyerere to Gandhi and including nationally known sources and women leaders who have advocated aspects of human development and whose writings, songs and speeches could continue to enrich it.

The literature on the capability approach has developed very actively since 1990, and this section surveys key stepping stones of progress.<sup>70</sup> First, we outline Sen's writings on capabilities and human development, both before and since 1990. Second, we identify a set of key issues which have been discussed in the academic literature, and outline the debates and contributions they generate. In particular, discussions have focused on: a) how to choose capabilities – the role of 'lists' of capabilities and the process by which to select appropriate focal capabilities for different settings; b) how the capability approach must focus on **individual** people (to avoid overlooking oppression within a group or household), and yet relies on the action of **groups**, institutions, and communities in addition to individuals to generate capabilities; c) the dual purposes of the capability approach as being to evaluate states of affairs, and to affect future states of affairs by guiding policy; d) the emergence of certain **sectoral analyses** of capabilities including in health, in education, in decentralisation, in gender studies, in political theory and in measurement. Naturally any synthesis of a broad literature is incomplete; contributions were selected which arguably have the closest tie with human development.

It is worth observing that the capability approach has two interpretations in the literature.<sup>71</sup> In the 'narrow' approach it is seen merely as identifying the space in which development is to be evaluated. In the 'broad' view, the capability approach provides a more extensive framework for evaluation, which includes attention to process freedoms as well as to principles such as equity, sustainability, or maximin. Like many others this work takes – and I argue human development should likewise take – a 'broad' understanding, and consider Sen's work on development as a whole.

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<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, Sen's capability approach created a great deal of interest from philosophers and economists from the start, so there is a large secondary literature that cannot be adequately summarized here. The *Standard of Living* includes a chapter each by John Muellbauer, Ravi Kanbur, Keith Hart, and Bernard Williams responding to the central tenets of the approach. *The Quality of Life* Nussbaum and Sen 1993 expanded the circle of philosophers and social scientists interacting with the capability approach still further.

<sup>71</sup> I discussed these in Alkire 2002b See also Alkire, Qizilbash and Comim 2008

The writings of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen gave rise to the capability approach in 1980 with the publication of a 1979 lecture, ‘Equality of What?’. The Dewey Lectures ‘Well-being, Agency and Freedom’ published in 1985 provided a fuller philosophical articulation of the approach, while *Commodities and Capabilities* – a slim volume of the same year – and *The Standard of Living* (1987) clarified various linkages to economics and to economic development. In the 1989 article ‘Development as Capability Expansion’ the proposition that informed the 1990 Human Development Report was clear.<sup>72</sup>

While Sen’s capability approach is rightly widely acknowledged as providing the philosophical foundation of human development, it was not the only conceptual input at the time, and is not the only justification. The capability approach explicitly draws on a long lineage of thinkers including Aristotle, Smith, Kant, Mill and Marx among others. In the more immediate past, Sen acknowledges the Basic Needs Approach<sup>73</sup> which pre-dated the capability approach. The basic needs approach had a shared motivation, and had already advanced key insights for human development – such as the focus on a limited set of domains for poor people; the need to consider the economics of human development, viewing its supply and demand, its links to government activities, to markets and to non-market institutions; its affects on incentives and issues of participation as well as of domination by vested interests. Leading national sources of similar ideas can be found in many countries.

Whilst acknowledging many authors and sources, the capability approach drew together several aspects only some of which had been stressed in previous approaches. Some key features of this work are:

- a focus on people as the ‘ends’ of development; clarity about ends and means. People-centred.
- a substantive notion of freedom related to well-being (capabilities) and agency (empowerment)
- a focus on that freedom being ‘real’ – not just paper freedom but an actual possibility

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<sup>72</sup> Of course there are a number of other articles during this time period, but these provide an adequate representation: Sen 1985a, Sen 1985b, Sen 1986, Sen 1989

<sup>73</sup> Alkire 2006, Doyal and Gough 1991, Hamilton 2003, Stewart 1985, Stewart 1996, Streeten 1984, Streeten 1994, Streeten and World Bank 1981.

- a well-being objective that included multiple capabilities – that need not be unidimensional;
- stable curiosity regarding the causal interconnections between different dimensions of human development and between economic growth and human development
- a focus on supporting people as active agents, not passive victims, of development
- an ability to prioritise capabilities for poor people across time while keeping in view the development of rich persons and of non-material capabilities.

Sen continued to publish on the capability approach after 1990.<sup>74</sup> Among these writings are several key texts. *On Inequality Re-examined* (A. K. Sen, 1992) argues, to economists, that inequality should be considered in the space of capabilities rather than in resources, utility, or even functionings. It develops the capability approach more systematically and discusses capability poverty. The Appendix by Foster and Sen in *On Economic Inequality* (A. K. Sen, 1997b) has a section on the measurement of capabilities. Of key interest to human development are Sen's many papers that apply this approach as is feasible to issues such as hunger, basic education, growth strategies, women's agency, health, democratic practices and so on. These are synthesized in *Development as Freedom* (A. K. Sen, 1999). As the title of that book and of *Rationality and Freedom* (A. K. Sen, 2002b) suggest, the term freedom – which had been the distinctive feature of the capability approach and human development from the beginning – was developed further in Sen's own writings. And in *The Idea of Justice* (A. Sen, 2009) re-states the capability approach in the context of a more developed account of justice, relating it to newer philosophical writings and to happiness.

At the risk of oversimplification, I will draw attention to two relevant elaborations in Sen's writings since 1990: one regarding agency and democratic practice and the other regarding principles of evaluation.

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<sup>74</sup> A number of overviews from secondary sources exist of Sen's capability approach: see for example Agarwal, Humphries and Robeyns 2003, Alkire 2005b, Alkire 2010, Clark 2005, Crocker 1992, Crocker 1995, Fukuda-Parr 2003, Gasper 1997, Gasper 2002, Qizilbash 1996, Robeyns 2005, Robeyns 2006.

## *Agency and Democratic practice*

Sen's Dewey lectures 'Well-being Agency and Freedom' published in 1985 recognized well-being and agency to be distinct aspects of freedom that did not subsume one another.<sup>75</sup> Hence the concept of agency was present and developed from that time. Initially economic writings emphasized the advantage of evaluating well-being and development in the space of functionings and capabilities rather than income, resources, or psychic utility. As the capability approach became better established, agency received equal prominence.<sup>76</sup> This parity is evident in Sen's Arrow lectures, which appear as Chapters 20 and 21 of *Rationality and Freedom*. The chapters articulate two aspects of freedom: opportunity freedoms (capabilities) and process freedoms, which include agency.

“Freedom is valuable for at least two distinct reasons. First, more freedom gives us more *opportunity* to achieve those things that we value, and have reason to value... Second, the *process* through which things happen may also be of fundamental importance in assessing freedom... There is, thus, an important distinction between the ‘opportunity aspect’ and the ‘process aspect’ of freedom. p 585.

Further, Sen's later writings explicitly link individual agency to other kinds of process freedoms such as democratic practices and public debate. “The ability of people to participate in social decisions has been seen, particularly since the French revolution, as a valuable characteristic of a good society.”<sup>77</sup> Sen had written earlier on democratic freedoms, both in the context of famine and of social choice.<sup>78</sup> *Rationality and Freedom* identifies systemic process freedoms – “the processes that operate as general rules in the working of the society” - alongside agency;<sup>79</sup> they also receive greater attention in the more applied work. *Development as Freedom* identifies

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<sup>75</sup> Aspects of Sen's account of individual agency were also developed in Sen 1982, Sen 1983a, Sen 1983b

<sup>76</sup> A passage that suggests the increased prominence of agency is from page 6 of Drèze and Sen 2002. It reads: “The approach used in this study is much concerned with the opportunities that people have to improve the quality of their lives. It is essentially a ‘people-centered’ approach, which puts human agency (rather than organizations such as markets or governments) at the centre of the stage.”

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Sen 1979a, Sen 1981

<sup>79</sup> Sen 2002b: 624.

political freedoms<sup>80</sup> as the first of five ‘instrumental freedoms’ which should be fostered by public policy, and like the Arrow Lectures, distinguished between processes and opportunities.<sup>81</sup> Chapter 6 of that book is simply entitled, ‘The importance of democracy’ and argues that participation and democratic practice can have *intrinsic importance* to people; they can be *instrumentally powerful* in helping people to achieve socially desirable means; and can be *constructive* in building better alternatives, by influencing others’ views through reasoned engagement and dialogue.<sup>82</sup> *India: Development and Participation* (with Jean Drèze) deals fundamentally with voice, solidarity and participation in the introduction; Chapter 10 is entitled ‘The Practice of Democracy’. Subsections address inequality,<sup>83</sup> decentralization and local governance, transparency and corruption, accountability and countervailing power, human rights and democracy, and democracy and participation. Discussions of democratic practice thread throughout *The Idea of Justice*. Special attention is given in Part 4 of *The Idea of Justice*, which focuses on practical reasoning and democracy, particularly in two chapters.

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<sup>80</sup> These are defined as follows: “*Political freedoms*, broadly conceived (including what are called civil rights), refer to the opportunities that people have to determine who should govern and on what principles, and also include the possibility to scrutinize and criticize authorities, to have freedom of political expression and an uncensored press, to enjoy the freedom to choose between different political parties, and so on. They include the political entitlements associated with democracies in the broadest sense (encompassing opportunities of political dialogue, dissent and critique as well as voting rights and participatory selection of legislators and executives).” Sen 1999: 38.

<sup>81</sup> “Unfreedom can arise either through inadequate processes (such as the violation of voting privileges or other political or civil rights) or through inadequate opportunities that some people have for achieving what they minimally would like to achieve (including the absence of such elementary opportunities as the capability to escape premature mortality or preventable morbidity or involuntary starvation).” Sen 1999: 17.

<sup>82</sup> The argument in summary is as follows: “There are 3 different considerations that take us in the direction of a general preeminence of basic political and liberal rights:

- 1) their *direct* importance in human living associated with basic capabilities (including that of political and social participation).
- 2) Their *instrumental* role in enhancing the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including the claims of economic needs).
- 3) Their *constructive* role in the conceptualization of ‘needs’ (including the understanding of ‘economic needs’ in a social context). Sen 1999: 148.

<sup>83</sup> In striving for democratic ideals, reducing the asymmetries of power associated with these social inequalities is one of the central challenges of democratic practice in every institutionally democratic country in the world.” Drèze and Sen 2002 : 353.

It is fair to say that the emphasis on political freedom, voice, accountability, democratic practice, and individual agency is a strong and core component of Sen's capability approach to human development. An approach which focused on expanding human capability but omitted process freedoms would not be consistent with this approach. Further, many others in the human development tradition have raised a similar call for greater emphasis on participation, mobilization, democratic practice, deliberation, social movements and process freedoms.<sup>84</sup> Thus it would seem apt and accurate for the restatement of human development to include this aspect.

### ***Principles, Priorities and Distribution***

One other strand of Sen's work stands alongside opportunity and process freedoms as being essential to his approach broadly conceived and these are principles.<sup>85</sup> Principles, as are used here, are considerations that help set priorities or judge society-wide distributions of capabilities – considerations such as poverty reduction, efficiency, equity and resilience. These are related to Lant Pritchett's 'rows' in the matrix (with capabilities being the columns).<sup>86</sup> Sen goes beyond the principles that Pritchett suggests and also includes principles such as Kant's maxim to treat others as ends (which gives rise to human rights). Other principles Sen engages are participation, environmental sustainability, the durability of outcomes across time and responsibility – being held accountable for one's actions.

Many of the great debates within economics and development can be framed as debates as to which of two principles was of greater moral importance (equity or efficiency; human rights or utilitarianism). Framed in such a way, people are forced to choose one moral principle and

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<sup>84</sup> Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland 2006, Bamberger 1988, Bennett 2002, Blackburn and Holland 1998, Cernea 1985, Chambers 1997, Chambers 2008, Cleaver 2007, Cooke and Kothari 2001, Crocker 2007, Davis and Soefstad 1995, Deneulin 2005, Deneulin 2006, Deneulin, Nebel and Sagovsky 2006, Drydyk 2005, Forester 1999, Ghai 1989, Goulet 1995, Hill 2003, Holland, Blackburn and Chambers 1998, Kabeer 1999, Narayan-Parker 2005, Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher and Koch-Schulte 2000, Narayan and Petesch 2007, Richardson 2006, Stiefel and Wolfe 1994.

<sup>85</sup> A discussion of Sen's approach to principle pluralism in relation to similar works is found in Alkire 2002 Chapter 3.

<sup>86</sup> Pritchett, L. (2010). Birth Satisfaction Units (BSU): Measuring Cross-National Differences in Human Well-Being. Background paper for the 2010 Human Development Report. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report Office.



abandon the other. But often both principles raise reasonable considerations that could be taken into account.

Sen argues that we do not need to choose one principle. *The Idea of Justice* develops this idea the most fully, beginning with its opening story about three children and a flute. One child made the flute, one child can play the flute and one child is very poor. All desire the flute. To whom should the flute be given? Rather than adjudicating such stark trade-offs (about which people will disagree), Sen advocates using several principles in social choices, to eliminate sub-optimal outcomes. For often it is not necessary or desirable to choose among principles; one can bring several to bear at the same time.<sup>87</sup>

In *Inequality Reexamined* Sen writes, “[e]quality would typically be one consideration among many, and this could be combined with *aggregative* considerations including *efficiency*... The real question is not about the kind of equality to ask for *if* that were the *only* principle to be used, but [how] in a mixed framework in which aggregative considerations as well as equality are taken into account, the demands of equality as such are best represented ...”<sup>88</sup> Again in a 1996 chapter on the foundations of welfare economics Sen argues that there is no ‘royal road’; no one principle that should be used to solve all normative economic problems.<sup>89</sup> Principle pluralism, which he advocates, means using more than one procedural or ethical principle to evaluate alternative possible actions or states of affairs.<sup>90</sup> Principles are used to ‘rule out’ alternatives that are not maximal.<sup>91</sup> This plate has more chocolate but no mangos, this has lovely mangos and no chocolate; but that plate has as much chocolate and mangos, so the other two plates are clearly not going to be chosen. Even if in the end this procedure cannot identify a single optimal alternative, it can generate a partial ordering of options that respect most key principles in a pluralist society.

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<sup>87</sup> Key texts are: Sen 1979b, Sen 1997a. See Alkire 2002b: Chapter 3

<sup>88</sup> Sen 1992: 92.

<sup>89</sup> Sen 1996 : 61.

<sup>90</sup> See Sen 1979b: 129-131.

<sup>91</sup> This is quite akin to dominance approach; see also Finnis’ principles of practical reasonableness Finnis 1980

Human development already navigates using plural principles: human rights, equity, efficiency, participation, responsibility, sustainability across time, care for the environment, political stability and so on. It does so implicitly most of the time, and explicitly sometimes, but the principles are already in play. For example, the 1995 report explained human development in terms of four principles: Productivity, Equity, Sustainability (across time), and Empowerment (p 12).

Why are principles required? The answer is straightforward: a definition of human development that called for an ‘expansion of capabilities’ and ‘process freedoms’ could not set priorities. For example, a growth boom which kept the outcomes of the low and middle classes stable but did not reduce poverty and generated huge short-term top end gains for the richest in a democratic society would, strictly speaking, be an expansion of human development, because it expanded some persons’ capabilities and respected some process freedoms. Which principles should be emphasised is a value judgement, but that principles are required by (and are used in practice now in) human development is not in doubt. What Sen’s recent work in the *Idea of Justice* does is provide one account of how several principles can be used at the same time to rule out the worst options. It also suggests some key candidate principles to be considered by public debate.

The remainder of this section summarizes, very briefly, some of the main developments of the capability approach and human development that have arisen from authors other than Sen. This section draws on a pro-active search of the literatures, but the secondary literature is vast, multi-disciplinary and international. This summary is restricted to literature in English and Spanish, and to journals that are visible in major search engines, thus it is unfortunately bound to be incomplete; additional references are welcomed.

### ***Choosing Capabilities***

In the 1990s, Nussbaum set forth an Aristotelian specification of central human capabilities, and argued that these capabilities should provide the basis for “constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations.”<sup>92</sup> In subsequent writings she has continued to argue that the capability approach needs to specify central capabilities explicitly

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<sup>92</sup> Nussbaum 1988, Nussbaum 1990, Nussbaum 1992, Nussbaum 1993, Nussbaum 2001

at the international level if it is to have cutting power – for example with respect to women’s capabilities. “Sen’s ‘perspective of freedom’ is too vague. Some freedoms limit others; some freedoms are important, some trivial, some good and some positively bad. Before the approach can offer a valuable normative gender perspective, we must make commitments about substance.”<sup>93</sup> Local decisions made by public discussion could easily reflect the views of the male elite, hence an external set of capabilities is to be preferred. She is not the only one who wishes to wrest the selection of capabilities away from local actors. Others suggest that the set of human rights be taken as a set of basic capabilities for example (Polly Vizard, 2006).

Sen argues that human development should be considered in the space of capabilities, and that the choice of capabilities is a value judgement. But he does not endorse one set of basic capabilities for several reasons. The primary reason, he argues, is that the value judgements involved in choosing capabilities should not be disassociated from process of public reasoning and discussion. “The problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning.”<sup>94</sup> Related to this, “To insist on a fixed forever list of capabilities would deny the possibility of progress in social understanding and also go against the productive role of public discussion, social agitation and open debates.”<sup>95</sup>

Sen also observes that one list would be impractical because it could not address all contexts. A list of basic constitutional rights is different from a measure of quality of education which is different again from a local framework for women’s empowerment. Different capabilities, rightly, would be identified as central to these distinct evaluative exercises. Hence Nussbaum’s list is a plausible candidate list for one particular evaluative context – but it would not necessarily be ideal to use all 10 capabilities in a measure of quality of education in Belize.

In practice, the natural areas of consensus seem to emerge. In 2002, using many different accounts of dimensions of human development; I found significant overlap among them; Ranis, Stewart and Samman in an updated 2006 version came to a similar conclusion, and the Stiglitz-

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<sup>93</sup>. Nussbaum 2003a

<sup>94</sup>. Sen 2004: 77.

<sup>95</sup>.Ibid.: 80.

Sen-Fittoussi commission, and the OECD taxonomy on efforts to measure the progress of societies, echo this observation.<sup>96</sup> Fully multidimensional approaches to human well-being and progress share a great deal of similarity at the level of general categories of discussion (health, relationships), even though the particular local articulations are very distinct. For example, consider these five lists: the set of dimensions identified by the Sarkozy Commission on the Measurement of Economic Development and Social Progress led by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, the Gross National Happiness Index of Bhutan, the categories identified in Voices of the poor, the categories identified by Ranis, Samman and Stewart as being relevant to measures 'Beyond the HDI' and the categories I have found useful in participatory work as well as measurement, which were proposed by John Finnis. One notes considerable similarity and overlap between them, at the level of abstract and quite general categories.

<b>Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi</b>	<b>Bhutan GNH</b>	<b>Voices of the Poor</b>	<b>Ranis Samman &amp; Stewart</b>	<b>Finnis</b>
Health	Health	Bodily Wellbeing	Bodily Wellbeing	Health & Security
Education	Education	Material Wellbeing	Mental Development	Knowledge
Economic security	Material Standard of living	Social Wellbeing	Material Wellbeing	Work & Play
The Balance of Time	Time Use	Security	Work	Agency & empowerment
Political Voice & Governance	Governance	Psychological Wellbeing	Security	Relationships
Social Connections	Community		Social Relations	Harmony - Arts, Religion, Nature
Environmental Conditions	Environment		Respect for other Species	Inner peace
	Culture &		Spiritual Well-being	

<sup>96</sup> Alkire 2002a, Finnis 1980, Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher and Koch-Schulte 2000, Ranis, Stewart and Samman 2006, Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009 and [www.grossnationalhappiness.com](http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com)

Personal Security	spirituality		Empowerment and Political Freedom	
Subjective measures of quality of life	Emotional Well- being			

In sum, Sen argues that key capabilities must be selected, but argues consistently against the specification of only one authoritative ‘canonical’ list of capabilities to be applied at all times and places.<sup>97</sup> I have tried elsewhere to identify the five different mechanisms by which capabilities can be and are being selected in many different contexts, and to discuss which process might be most appropriate in different situations.<sup>98</sup>

Clearly in the context of human development, the global *HDRs* do have the distinctive possibility and responsibility to identify some capabilities that are fundamental to human development across many societies – for example in the HDI and gender indices. Yet in many years, the themes of each report will focus only on a subset of capabilities and go into more depth with respect to those indicators. National, state and district human development reports have the possibility of creating richer and more contextually appropriate accounts of central human capabilities.

### ***Individuals, Groups and Institutions***

The capability approach evaluates states of affairs with respect to people’s lives. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, “One should always remember this: that the primary subject of political justice is the person. It is as persons that we flourish or fail to flourish, that we love each other or separate from one another, join a sustaining group or flee from a domineering group.”<sup>99</sup> A number of authors accused human development and the capability approach therefore of being

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<sup>97</sup>. For a fuller account see Alkire 2002b, Ch. 2 section 1.

<sup>98</sup> Alkire 2008

<sup>99</sup> Nussbaum 2003b : 67.

individualistic, and blind to institutions and groups.<sup>100</sup> While now this criticism has largely been settled as being inaccurate, the discussion has drawn attention to interesting ways in which the capability approach is being extended to engage more explicitly with institutions and groups.

A key clarification is put forward by Ingrid Robeyns (Ingrid Robeyns, 2008). She explains that Sen's capability approach embraces ethical individualism but does not defend methodological or ontological individualism. *Ethical individualism* "postulates that individuals, and only individuals, are the *ultimate* units of moral concern. ... This, of course, does not imply that we should not evaluate social structures and societal properties, but ethical individualism implies that these structures and institutions will be evaluated *in virtue of* the causal importance that they have for individuals' well-being." *Ontological individualism* - which Robeyns argues the capability approach does not support and nor should feminists - holds that "society is built up from only individuals and nothing than individuals, and hence is nothing more than the sum of individuals and their properties." Explanatory or *methodological individualism* presumes "that all social phenomena can be explained in terms of individuals and their properties." Critics had accused the capability approach of all three kinds of individualism, not distinguishing them.

Like many, Robeyns argues in favor of ethical individualism - because moral theories that take an alternative unit of moral concern such as the family, the social group, or the community, will systematically overlook any existing or potential oppression and inequality *within* these units. For example, the deprivations particular to women and children have regularly been overlooked by analyses that focus on the household unit. Further, she observes Sen's commitment to ethical individualism is compatible with his many writings that advocate a more collective, democratic, institutionally embedded and culturally rich response to social issues.

While the capability approach, therefore, is not methodologically or ontologically individualistic, its initial writings focused on other issues, and not on how people are embedded in social groups,

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<sup>100</sup> This has been raised often, but see in particular the exchange in Evans 2002, Sen 2002c, Stewart and Deneulin 2002 See the special issue of *J of Human Development and Capabilities* in 2007, Issue 2, on Individual Capabilities and Relational Freedoms edited by Séverine Deneulin and Tom de Herdt, and the Introduction and Chapter 1 of Comin, Qizilbash and Alkire 2008. See also Deneulin 2006, Deneulin, Nebel and Sagovsky 2006, Dubois, Brouillet, Bakshi and Duray-Soundrou 2008.

and how these groups influence them for good or ill. A surge of newer writings have observed the need for a greater development of these influences. As Stewart and Deneulin wrote, “flourishing individuals generally need and depend on functional families, cooperative and high-trust societies, and social contexts which contribute to the development of individuals who choose ‘valuable’ capabilities”<sup>101</sup>. The literature has explored constructively the contexts that give rise to and support the collective and cooperative actions that the capability approach requires and commends.

### ***Quantitative Measurement***

When Anand and Sen drafted their paper on multidimensional poverty which gave rise to the Human Poverty Index (HPI) launched in the 1997 *HDR*, the literature on capability measurement was in its infancy. Allardt had tried to link capabilities to social indicators (Allardt, 1993); a conference in Italy had pioneered some fuzzy set work on capability measurement. In 1998 Brandolini and D’Alessio drafted a splendid paper (Brandolini & D’Alessio, 1998) surveying the issues and challenges in measuring capabilities and functionings, and Chakravarty et al. published the first axiomatic paper on multidimensional poverty.<sup>102</sup> A large number of papers have been produced since that time. The three key early papers were Tsui 2002, (Atkinson, 2003) and Bourguignon and Chakravarty 2003.<sup>103</sup> This area has matured rapidly not only in terms of quantitative techniques,<sup>104</sup> but also conceptual work regarding the choice of capabilities, indicators, weights and so on.<sup>105</sup>

### ***The Capability Approach: specific applications.***

Like measurement, most of the other advances in capability have enriched a particular literature in theoretical and, importantly, practical ways drawing on insights from the capability approach. For example, the work on education and capabilities has brought Sen’s work into dialogue with

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<sup>101</sup> Stewart and Deneulin 2002: 68.

<sup>102</sup> Brandolini and D’Alessio 1998, Chakravarty 1998: 175-194.

<sup>103</sup> Atkinson 2003, Bourguignon and Chakravarty 2003, Tsui 2002

<sup>104</sup> Alkire and Foster 2007, Bossert, D’Ambrosio and Peragine 2007, Duclos, Sahn and Younger 2006, Kakwani and Silber 2008b

<sup>105</sup> Chiappero-Martinetti 2004, Kakwani and Silber 2008a, Qizilbash 2003, Chiappero -Martinetti Forthcoming. See also OPHI working papers.

styles of pedagogy and has deepened and clarified distinctions between policies to advance human capital and policies to advance education for human development.<sup>106</sup> Similar work has been done in the fields of human rights,<sup>107</sup> social choice theory,<sup>108</sup> disability and health,<sup>109</sup> participation and deliberation,<sup>110</sup> culture and indigenous people,<sup>111</sup> political theory,<sup>112</sup> the environment,<sup>113</sup> children,<sup>114</sup> gender and feminism,<sup>115</sup> migrants,<sup>116</sup> water,<sup>117</sup> design and technology,<sup>118</sup> among others. In terms of volume, these sub areas form the largest bodies of secondary literature.<sup>119</sup> Their emphasis is on implementing the concept of human development rather than on further refining the conceptual framework more generally; however very interesting conceptual refinements in fact occur during these various implementations and these would merit a more in depth discussion than is possible here.

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<sup>106</sup> Burchardt 2005, Clark 2002, Dubois and Trabelsi 2007, Flores-Crespo 2007, Klasen and Wink 2002, Klasen and Wink 2003, Lanzi 2007, Lessmann 2009, McGillivray 2005, Nussbaum 2006, Papastephanou 2002, Robeyns 2005, Saito 2003, Sen 1995, Sen 2002a, Sen 2002d, Sen 2004c, Streeten 1994, Terzi 2005a, Terzi 2007, Terzi 2008, Unterhalter 2003, Unterhalter 2005, Walker 2003, Walker 2005, Walker 2006, Walker and Unterhalter 2007

<sup>107</sup> Fukuda-Parr 2008, Nussbaum 2003a, Nussbaum 2004, Sen 2004, Sen 2005, UNDP 2000, Vizard 2006, Vizard 2007

<sup>108</sup> Arrow, Sen and Suzumura 2002, Sen 2009, Sen 1998, Sen 2002b, Suzumura 2005, Zamagni 1993, Kuklys 2005, Gaertner 2009

<sup>109</sup> Anand 2002, Anand and Chen 1996, Anand and Hanson 1997, Anand and Harris 1990, Anand and Harris 1994, Anand, Peter and Sen 2004, Beaglehole 2005, Drèze 2004, Drèze and Murthi 2001, Drèze and Sen 1989, Drèze and Sen 2002, Drèze, Sen and Hussain 1995, Hurley 2001, Klasen 1994, Klasen and Wink 2003, Ruger 2007, Terzi 2005b

<sup>110</sup> Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani and Menchini 2006, Bohman 1996, Crocker 2008, Crocker 2007, Deneulin 2005, Deneulin, Nebel and Sagovsky 2006, Drèze and Sen 2002, Drydyk 2005, Frediani 2010, Gasper 2004, Narayan-Parker 2005, Peter 2003, Richardson 1994, Richardson 2006, Ruggeri-Laderchi, Saith and Stewart 2003,

<sup>111</sup> Rao and Walton 2004, Deneulin and Bano 2009

<sup>112</sup> Brighthouse and Robeyns 2010

<sup>113</sup> Anand and Sen 1996, Ballet, Dubois and Mahieu 2008, Giri 2000, Robeyns and Van der Veen 2007, Scholtes 2007,

<sup>114</sup> Drèze, Saxena, Sinha, Roy, Srivastava, Mander, Prasad, Gupta, Bajaj, Raja, Shatrugna and Sundararaman 2007, Nussbaum 2001, Osmani and Sen 2003, Sen 2007 Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani and Menchini 2006

<sup>115</sup> Agarwal, Humphries and Robeyns 2003, Agarwal, Humphries, Robeyns and Sen 2003, Agarwal and Panda 2007, Nussbaum 2001, Peter 2003, Robeyns 2002, Robeyns 2003, Robeyns 2006, Robeyns 2007, Robeyns 2008 Agarwal, Humphries and Robeyns 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Risse 2009

<sup>117</sup> Anand 2007

<sup>118</sup> Oosterlaken 2009

<sup>119</sup> They have not been exhaustively surveyed, although for some key inputs see Robeyns 2006.



### C. The Concept of Human Development in 2010

In 1990, the UNDP launched the first *Human Development Report*. It is worth recalling the context. The Berlin wall had just crumbled; de Klerk had just released Nelson Mandela from Robben Island; George Bush led the US; Margaret Thatcher led the UK. John Williamson had just given his paper on the Washington Consensus.<sup>120</sup> Iraq was about to invade Kuwait, Mary Robinson was about to be elected the first female president of Ireland and the Global Environment Facility was about to be launched. In this context the *Human Development Reports (HDRs)* stood on distinctive ground, and called with eloquence and humanity for a different approach to economics and to development. In 2010, we have revisited that concept, and restate it in ways that speak to our current context.

One of the positive aspects of the HDR tradition is that the description of human development was **living, not calcified**; it has varied over time and place and context while maintaining an underlying consistency. In no way is it suggested that that living engaged approach to human development be replaced by a static form of words. What is proposed, however, is that the core conception of human development regularly include *process freedoms* in addition to capability expansion, and that principles such as *poverty reduction, durability, sustainability* and *support for human rights* be integral to human development. Such a restatement is coherent both with the *Human Development Report* tradition and with the academic literature on human development and the capability approach.

#### **The Concept of Human Development:**<sup>121</sup>

People are the real wealth of nations. The basic objective of development is to enable all people to flourish in varied and creative ways. This may appear obvious. But in the haste to create economic growth and financial wealth, it is overlooked remarkably often. Human development makes the centrality of people explicit.

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<sup>120</sup> John Williamson, 1990, "What Washington Means by Policy Reform", in J. Williamson, ed., *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* Institute for International Economics (based on a talk given in November 1989 at a conference organized by the Institute for International Economics).

<sup>121</sup> This section draws on the 1990 *Human Development Report* in structure and wording.

Usually, the progress of societies is measured mainly by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and the growth of the economy– not by improvements in people’s well-being. Yet dissatisfaction with GDP and economic growth rates as adequate metrics of well-being is rising for several reasons. First, although GDP is useful for many purposes, it does not reflect equity nor the composition of growth. Second, some high GDP growth strategies have created financial instabilities and crises. Third, GDP does not reflect the burden on the earth’s resources. Fourth, people often value achievements that do not show up immediately or at all in high income and growth figures: health; knowledge; livelihoods; relationships; safety; art and culture; happiness, self-direction; and political freedoms. Naturally people want good incomes and work hard to obtain them. But income is not the sum total of human life.

The idea that the fundamental aim of economic activity is to support human development goes back at least to Aristotle in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. He argued that we should judge “between a good political arrangement and a bad one” by considering its success and failure in enabling people to lead what he called “flourishing lives”. This is the case also for economic gains: as Aristotle wrote, “Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.”

Those who pioneered quantitative economics also aimed to advance people’s flourishing: William Petty, François Quesnay, Nicolas de Condorcet and Arthur Cecil Pigou. The focus on people’s well-being as the objective of economic activity is also apparent in the founders of modern economics: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. Adam Smith also expressed concern for equity, writing that “No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”<sup>122</sup> Moreover Smith was mindful that economic activities should foster individual agency; for example he objected to work that never allowed a worker “to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention”.

Human development makes explicit the objectives that many economists, political leaders, citizens and activists have acknowledged in different ways across time. The objectives are:

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<sup>122</sup> Smith 1863

**Well-being:** A focus on expanding people's real freedoms, enabling people to flourish.  
[*Opportunity freedom*]

**Agency:** Supporting people and groups as actors; helping them to help themselves.

[*Process freedom*]

**Justice:** Seeking to expand well-being and agency in ways that expand equity, sustain outcomes across time, respect human rights, limit environmental destruction and respect other goals of a society. [*Plural Principles*]

So Human Development aims to expand people's freedoms – the worthwhile capabilities they value – and to empower people to engage actively in development processes. And it seeks to do so in ways that appropriately advance equity, efficiency, sustainability and other key principles. The last objective, related to principles of justice, is important. On a daily basis, policy makers choose between policy options. Some options are better for poverty reduction, for human rights and for sustainability. Other policy choices favour the existing elite, dismiss freedoms of information or association and deplete natural resources. Human development anticipates the likely impacts of policy choices on poor and marginalised communities and on future generations. This is done by evaluating policy options according to principles like efficiency, equity and sustainability. Policy makers do not need to agree precisely what justice is; they do need to rule out clearly undesirable options. Principles of justice help them do just that.

In practice human development analyses are multidimensional, dynamic and holistic. They focus on identifying how to expand intrinsically valuable ends. Advancing those ends requires deep curiosity about effective means. These means include economic growth, stability and good governance. For some people, health and education are both an end and a means at the same time. As Sen – who calls these 'instrumental freedoms' observes, "Human beings are the agents, beneficiaries and adjudicators of progress, but they also happen to be—directly or indirectly—the primary means of all production." (Sen 1989) The human development perspective, thus, has the key relevant variables in view at the same time. It relates ends and means, short term and long term goals, macroeconomic, sectoral and bottom-up processes. Human development analyses synergies and identifies high impact pathways to expand key capabilities. It recognizes that the

interconnectedness between social, economic and political phenomenon matters for effective policy.

### ***Defining Human Development***

In 1990, Human Development was often described as ‘enlarging people’s choices’. We have retained that fundamental motivation of human development as expanding people’s capabilities; we have also added two further features that have been discussed, deliberated, advocated and clarified over the past twenty years. Our new statement of human development is this:

**Human Development aims to expand people’s freedoms – the worthwhile capabilities people value – and to empower people to engage actively in development processes, on a shared planet.<sup>123</sup> And it seeks to do so in ways that appropriately advance equity, efficiency, sustainability and other key principles.**

People are both the beneficiaries and the agents of long term, equitable human development, both as individuals and as groups. Hence Human Development is development *by* the people *of* the people and *for* the people.

Human development has three components: capabilities, process freedoms and principles of justice.

Human development focuses on expanding people’s real freedoms, their **capabilities**. When human development is successful, people are able to enjoy activities and states of being that they value and have reason to value. With human development, people live long and healthy lives,

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123 Other versions include:

**Human Development is a process of expanding people’s real freedoms – their valuable capabilities – and empowering people as active agents of equitable development on a shared planet. ~or~**

**Human development is about freedom. It is about building human capabilities—the range of worthwhile things that people can do, and what they can be – and enabling people to shape their own lives. ~or~**

**Human Development aims to enlarge people’s freedoms to do and be what they value in life, and to empower people to actively engage in development processes on a shared planet.**

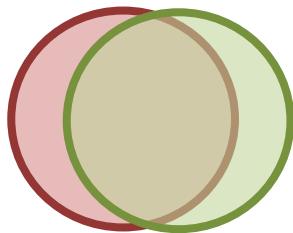
enjoy education and a decent quality of life. They are able to be productive and creative at home and/or at work, shape their own destiny and together advance shared objectives. With human development, people are able to enjoy human relationships and feel relatively secure. In human development, the ‘focal space’ is people’s lives. Resources, income, institutions and political or social guarantees are all vitally important means and policy goals; yet ultimately success is evaluated in terms of the lives people are able to lead, the capabilities they enjoy.

Capabilities are often called opportunity freedoms. *Opportunity freedom* refers to people’s actual ability to achieve something. It is not a paper freedom. The capability to enjoy healthcare requires that the health clinic exist, that it is staffed, that medical supplies are stocked, and that the patient is not refused treatment for lack of money or because of gender, race, age, or religion. If the right to free speech is enshrined in the constitution, but violated in practice, then there is no capability. That is why capabilities are often called *real* freedoms. Opportunity freedom usually allows people who do not wish to enjoy a functioning to refrain from it. People are able to fast rather than eat a nutritious meal.

In practical terms, capabilities are the opportunity or real freedom to enjoy functionings. What does this mean? *Functionings* are beings and doings that people value and have reason to value. Functionings have three characteristics:

- Functionings are **beings and doings**. They can vary widely; some are specific and some are general; and they need not be basic. Examples are being well-nourished, playing cricket, listening to drumming, or flying a plane. Human development is not limited to basic health, nutrition and education objectives; it can include a vast range of other goals.
- Capabilities and functionings are beings and doings **that people value**. Functionings must be valued by those who achieve them. This means that development cannot be imposed without regard to people’s values and preferences. Ultimately, if people do not value an outcome, then human development has not occurred.
- **Capabilities and functionings are beings and doings people have reason to value**. Human development does not advance everything that people value. People and groups sometimes value socially destructive things, such as being able to exclude or to inflict violence or to sustain domination. And people’s values conflict. Human development

does not specify who decides what people ‘have reason to value’ in each context. But it does create the space to discuss this issue, to question and dialogue.



#### **How Values Enter**

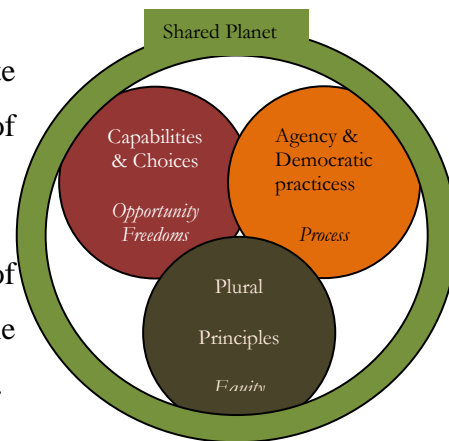
Capabilities are the intersection of what people value (red) and what people have reason to value (green).

**Process Freedoms: Empowerment and Democratic Practice** Human beings are not only the beneficiaries of development; they are also agents, whose vision, ingenuity and strength are vital to advancing their own and others’ well-being. Human development supports people as agents, both personally within families and communities, and collectively in public debate, shared action and democratic practice. While the spaces for agency will vary, human development empowers people to advance the common good, enabling them to have a voice and to participate in the processes that affect their lives. Hence Human Development is development *by* the people *of* the people and *for* the people.

**Principles of Justice:** Human development advances people’s freedoms within constraints including resources, time, information, technology, political will, uncertainty, and institutional capacity. Thus it uses several principles, including efficiency, to set priorities and to rule out undesirable courses of action. When human development is advanced by expanding the capabilities of the ultra-poor, when it empowers marginalised groups while maintaining the peace, when it achieves long-term change and conserves natural resources, it does so because it has given priority to the poor, to the marginalised, to durable changes and to sustainability. Policies to advance human development often consider principles such as poverty reduction, equity, efficiency, participation, the sustainability of outcomes across time and on this planet, responsibility and respect for human rights. The *HDRs* have regularly introduced principles by

which to evaluate human development. The *HDRs* invite discussion of these principles and an explicit application of them to identify synergies.

The diagram above portrays the first three components of human development as coloured shapes, and the environmental concerns as a green band encircling them all.



**Shared Planet:** A particularly important principle is environmental sustainability. Nearly seven billion people now inhabit the earth. Some live in extreme poverty--others in gracious luxury. The limits of our common planet will shape human development more sharply in the coming years than it did during the first twenty years of the HDR. The reality of climate change requires a fundamental re-shaping of the behaviours and aspirations of many persons and of the institutions that produce the goods and services we enjoy.

Clearly different nations and communities will emphasise different dimensions, principles and forms of agency than others, such that their human development carries the melody of their culture, values and current priorities. Indeed the concepts, poems and speeches of different intellectuals and public figures may be drawn upon to articulate human development in different contexts. Human development is not one size fits all; it is flexible and responsive. Yet all its forms will offer people more opportunities while fostering their ability to shape their own lives and advancing justice across society both at present and in the future.

### **Human Development Defined**

**Human development aims to enlarge people's freedoms to do and be what they value and have reason to value. In practice, human development also empowers people to engage actively in development on our shared planet. It is people-centered. At all levels of development, human development focuses on essential freedoms: enabling people to lead long and healthy lives, to acquire knowledge, to be able to enjoy a decent standard of living and to shape their own lives. Many people value these freedoms in and of themselves; they are also powerful means to other opportunities.**

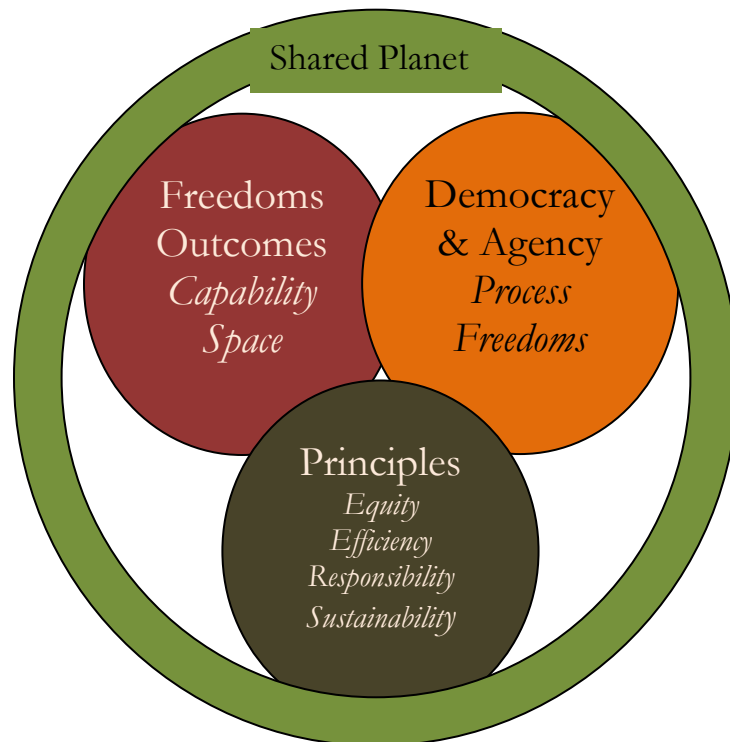
**Human development also encompasses other worthwhile freedoms associated with human well-being in both developing and industrialized nations. The emphasis and particularities vary but often include secure, safe and meaningful livelihoods; caring and dignified relationships; protection against crime and violence; artistic, cultural and spiritual activities; participation in political and community activities; self-respect; and emotional well-being.**

**Human development is development *by* the people, *of* the people and *for* the people. For it is people, both poor and rich, as individuals and in groups, who create human development. So human development empowers people to be responsible and innovative actors. Because human development views people not as passive victims but as entrepreneurs and active agents, it helps people to help themselves.**

**Human development sets priorities among goals using several principles at the same time. Commonly used principles include poverty reduction, equity, efficiency, voice and participation, sustainability, respect for human rights and fostering the common good.**

**Human development is multidimensional and its components are interconnected. Thus analyses and policies to advance human development take a holistic view. They identify how powerful means such as economic growth best advance human development across time. They clarify the sequence and type of investments that expand key capabilities most effectively. And they engage in periodic public debate about values and priorities.**





## **Part II: Conceptual Relationships: the MDGs, Human Security, Human Rights and Happiness**

Human development remains a powerful and deeply necessary concept. It is powerful because it succinctly clarifies the ends and means of development and crystallizes development objectives, processes and principles. It is deeply needed because while the dominant paradigm guiding development has evolved significantly, it is still not reliably and consistently focused on human lives.

Given the centrality and the need for a clear identification of ends and means, and the need to focus professional efforts of economists, lawyers, politicians and other groups on shared objectives, it is not surprising that concepts exist that are related to human development but partially distinct from it, such as human rights, human security, happiness and the Millennium Development Goals. Some of these (rights, happiness) pre-date human development; others have emerged subsequently.

This section notes first some commonalities between the different concepts. Then the unique conceptual contribution of each approach is identified in greater depth.

What follows is a conceptual discussion. It is important to stress this point because at another level, human development, human rights, human security and the MDGs are all advanced by different and indeed overlapping parts of United Nations institutions. Hence an alternative analysis would scrutinise the extent to which institutions have “chosen” one concept to guide their own work rather than another. This would uncover territorial tensions within UN institutions, as well as among other national, international and bilateral institutions; it would reveal power dynamics and also the human need to motivate staff by portraying their work as meaningful and possibly superior to others. Such analysis is not undertaken here.

Additionally, activities associated with each of these terms have been successfully or poorly implemented to various degrees in different contexts. In some contexts, for example, the MDGs may seem technocratic; in others, traditional but helpful; in still others they may galvanise vibrant social movements. Hence to some readers, a particular concept will have a positive or negative association due to their experience of its implementation in a particular context. Once again, an analysis of the varied track record of implementation is a valid and interesting undertaking, but it is not considered here.

The tensions between the concepts discussed here, which stem not from definitional differences but rather from institutional mandates, implementation and territorial disputes, are real. However this *conceptual* discussion will leave them to one side. It could be useful, in a different setting, to explore these tensions directly and overtly, particularly among the UN institutions, and generate a statement of human development that could be shared by different agencies.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> There are many examples of missed opportunities for synergy. For example the Regional and National Human Development Reports were a natural space in which to contextualise the MDGs and specify national policy goals that would advance the MDGs as well as other goals efficiently and effectively. They certainly were designed for this purpose. In practice, the MDG reports grew up alongside the NHDRs as separate policy documents and have created considerable confusion as people (rightly) think that these agendas are overlapping.

### *Similarities between all approaches*

At some level, all of the conceptual approaches share a similar agenda, which can be framed as focusing the objective of professional efforts on improving people's lives. The primary audiences of each approach, the primary literatures, the 'dominant' paradigms and the specific foci of the distinct approaches, however, differ.

For example, the primary *audience* for human development at least initially was development planners, economists and those working on 'aid' in international and bilateral institutions. The dominant *paradigm* with which human development compared itself and with respect to which it articulated its value-added was one focused on growth of the economy as the primary objective. The human development paradigm purported to *add value* by making two fundamental changes. First, it changed the *unit of analysis* from the economy to the person. This allowed considerations of equity and of poverty to accompany assessments of well-being. Second, it changed the *space* in which progress was tallied from income to capabilities or freedoms. In the earlier framework, the healthy economy was one that was growing in terms of income per capita. In the human development framework, a healthy economy is one that is growing in terms of people's freedoms and capabilities. Clearly this 'shift' is tremendously underspecified, leaving each country or group to decide itself on focal capabilities, distributional weights and so on. And yet, shifting the unit of analysis and the focal space — even given this open-endedness — decisively influenced markers of success, and consequently, the policies that are advocated to advance human development.

To the extent that the different conceptual approaches of human security, human rights and human development articulate similar claims in distinct disciplines, literatures and audiences, it is not surprising that they are somewhat intertwined, overlapping and indeed mutually reinforcing. While the subsequent sections will clarify the distinctions between the concepts, the reader should not lose sight of this fundamental sympathy.

## A. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

### *~MDGs: Background from a Human Development perspective*

Since 1990, the HDRs advocated the development of national and international action plans that would specify HD goals and targets, have clear budgetary implications, and influence national governments and development assistance institutions. The calls for the setting of explicit international objectives and commitments that appear in the 1990, 1991 and 1994 *Human Development Reports* directly foreshadow the MDGs in substance and process.

While many remember that the 1990 *Human Development Report* launched the HDI, few recall that the report also

called for the setting of “global targets for human development.” In particular, Chapter Four, on development strategies, recalled that during the past three decades, global targets had already been set singly by world conferences and UN General Assembly debates — for example, reducing under five mortality by half or to 70 per 1000, whichever was lower. The 1990 HDR acknowledged that such targets are advocated as having benefits — such as creating a “conducive environment and political pressure for their serious pursuit nationally and internationally”. The report also cited critics, who argued that: “the global targets have no price tag, are not differentiated according to different country situations, are not accompanied by concrete national and international plans for implementation—and that any link between national progress and global targets is only incidental” (p 67). The report argued that the time had come to set “more realistic and operational” targets.

Quantified global targets for the year 2000 do exist for some of the key indicators of human development examined in this Report.

- Complete immunisation of all children.
- Reduction of the under-five child mortality rate by half or to 70 per 1,000 live births, whichever is less.
- Elimination of severe malnutrition, and a 50% reduction in moderate malnutrition.
- Universal primary enrolment of all children of primary school age.
- Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate in 1990 by half, with the female illiteracy rate to be no higher than the male illiteracy rate.
- Universal access to safe water.

To catalyse this process, the 1990 HDR enumerated quantified, time-bound global targets that already existed for the year 2000 (p 67, reprinted to the right). It then discussed whether those targets seemed realistic based on empirical assessment of country progress to date. And it drew attention to recent studies that had attempted to identify the rough financial costs of realising

certain goals. The section closed by proposing four criteria for quantifiable, time-bound international development targets:

- “The number of global targets should be kept small to generate the necessary political support and policy action for their implementation. The international agenda is already crowded, and having too many targets diffuses policy attention.”
- “The implications for human and financial resources must be worked out in detail, country by country, *before* fixing any global targets — to ensure that the targets are realistic.”
- “Different targets should be fixed for different groups of countries, depending on their current state of human development and past rates of progress.”
- “National strategies for human development should bridge national planning and global target-setting, for without national development plans the global targets have no meaning.”

Clearly the MDGs directly reflect the first and fourth points — having a small set of goals and national strategies to achieve them. Just as clearly, the country-by-country costings were not completed before the MDGs were adopted, and while the goals were set at the international rather than the national level, distinct national targets were not explicitly set for different country groupings. Yet it does seem clear beyond any reasonable doubt that one root of the MDGs reaches directly back to the 1990 *Human Development Report*, and that the 2010 *HDR* offers a signal opportunity to re-state this.

Lest the reader imagine that the call for international goals, financial plans and concerted political action was an incidental tangent never again mentioned in the *Human Development* literature, they need only read the 1991 *HDR*. For the 1991 *HDR* reiterated these points and developed them even more explicitly: “Broad concepts must be translated into concrete plans, and words into practical action, both nationally and internationally” (p 77). At the national level, the report argued that nations should develop plans having four elements: 1) a human development profile, 2) human development goals and targets, 3) budget restructuring plans, and 4) a viable political strategy (p 77). But as before, the 1991 report did not stop at national goals. The 1991 *HDR* closes by calling for a “Global Compact on Human Development,” in which

countries and donors would unite behind shared goals. While the goals and targets could, it suggested, arise from national plans, the substance was not deeply mysterious: “Targets should include universal primary education and primary health care, safe water for all and the elimination of serious malnutrition...Another aim should be the expansion of employment opportunities” (p 84).

The 1994 *Human Development Report* carried the Global Compact idea forward yet again, proposing what was now called a 20:20 compact,<sup>125</sup> having the end date of 2005 and specific budgetary costings (See Box 4.8 below from page 77 of the 1994 report). In the following year, the penultimate chapter of Mahbub ul Haq’s book *Reflections on Human Development* reiterated the vital need for a Global Compact on development using the 20:20 ideas of shared responsibilities, shared goals and consensus. He recognised that doing so would limit some of the more visionary aspects of human development, yet thought that this was acceptable: “The task of overcoming the worst aspects of human deprivation in the next decade is far too important to be sacrificed on the altar of unnecessary controversy” (p 185).

Concretely, ul Haq proposed that priority be given to universal access to basic education, primary health care facilities, clean water and immunization, that maternal mortality be halved, that severe malnutrition be eliminated and family planning services be extended. He acknowledged that income and work were significant omissions from this list but argued that these seven goals could be a starting point.

It is beyond a doubt that the UNDP HDRs, particularly in the person of Mahbub ul Haq, played a leading role within the UN in formulating and advancing the need for a set of time-bound, quantifiable and realistic internationally agreed goals and targets, and for related budgetary analyses. Indeed, the UNDP HDRs contain draft goals, a draft wording of a new Global Compact, considerations of the strengths and weaknesses of this proposal, and motivation for continuing to try to advance it. Thus the concept of human development and the work of the Human Development Report Office contributed significantly to the MDGs.

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<sup>125</sup> The concrete proposal was that developing countries earmark 20% of their national budgets and that donors earmark 20% of their budgets, for human development priority concerns.

### *~The MDGs and Human Development: Conceptual Relationship*

The primary audience for the MDGs is also development planners, economists and those in international and bilateral institutions. Like human development, they focus on the human being as the fundamental unit of analysis and shift the currency of assessments to indicators and targets that better reflect human lives. Growth and other changes are evaluated insofar as they generate positive change in the core “human” variables. The focal space of the MDGs is more specifically articulated and more limited than human development — both in its focus only on a particular set of capabilities and in its exclusion of process features such as empowerment — but the general aim of the MDGs is clearly congruent with human development, and achieving the MDGs would tremendously advance human development.

The Millennium Development Goals arose from the *Millennium Declaration* which was agreed upon by heads of states in 2000. Conceptually, the MDGs are a particular quantitative articulation of some core human development priorities. They are *particular* in that the final set are particular to a time and place, and to the possibilities and limits of a consensus decision by a particular community (in this case, “international” as represented by particular people). They are quantitative in that they identify certain goals, targets and a timeframe for global progress; yet other goals, targets and timeframes might have been reasonably chosen both at the international level and at regional or national levels. The MDGs articulate *some* human development priorities but are clearly not exhaustive; other aspects of human development – including those present in the Millennium Declaration itself – may be of comparable or greater priority in a given context.

Clearly, the MDGs articulate human development priorities. First, most goals and targets are measured in the space of human capabilities or in the closest feasible space to it. Where they do not (e.g., development assistance), the resources are justified in terms of the capabilities they would generate. Second, multiple capabilities are argued to be of importance at the same time. Third, the goals are argued to be interconnected: the UN *Roadmap towards the Implementation of the MDGs*, published 6 September 2001, recognizes the interconnectedness of the MDGs and advocates an integrated approach to them:

Given that all the issues around poverty are interconnected and demand crosscutting solutions, such measures as the “School meals” and “Take home rations” programmes can have multiple benefits that extend beyond nutritional assistance. Education provides the skills that can lift families out of extreme poverty and preserve community health. In particular, when society facilitates girls’ empowerment through education, the eventual impact on them and their families’ daily lives is unequalled (page 3).

In addition to the goals themselves, there are other conceptual linkages to human development. One relates to the motivation: **the MDGs provide an explicit platform for concerted political and social action towards common goals**. Human development requires not only economic decisions but also political mobilisation and action; this is expressed in the 2003 *HDR*, which emphasises the importance of democratic practice above “formal” democracy. It is also present recurrently in the writings of Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen on the need for action by the state, civil society groups, social movements, private sector, philanthropists and individual citizens, in order to address pervasive deprivation.

Further, as is often noted, the MDGs specified quantitative, time-bound targets and subsequent work has tried to articulate the financial requirements and political actions required to meet them. In this way **the goals were argued to be realistic and feasible priorities** rather than long-term utopias. Whether or not they are met, or could have been met, the aim to identify feasible alternatives is inherent to the human development approach.<sup>126</sup>

The MDGs thus can be seen conceptually as one application of human development to an international context.

Even if there were no conceptual linkage — which there clearly is — there could be an instrumental connection. As human development concerns the expansion of capabilities, then insofar as the MDGs have resulted in more education for children and for girls in particular, in better nutrition, lower child and maternal mortality, decreased prevalence of HIV/AIDS, TB and

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<sup>126</sup> Indeed this aspect has been stressed even more in Amartya Sen’s *The Idea of Justice* Sen 2009.



malaria etc, than would have occurred in their absence, the MDGs have been instrumental to human development.

There are, at the same time, clear distinctions between the MDGs and human development. These mainly arise because the MDGs are one possible application of human development among many. A mobile phone can often be set up with several different ring tones, background colours, alarm settings and contacts; it can be set up for a business account or a personal account or a child's account within a family. Any one particular configuration of a mobile phone shows some but not all possibilities of that phone. In the same way, the MDGs express one particular application of human development, but there could be – and have been – others. Human development is an incomplete, open-ended “paradigm”, and the MDGs are one particular contextual application of it. Understanding this, one immediately can identify other differences.

First, the MDGs are time-bound and pertain to the international community; human development is an enduring conceptual framework that can be used at local, state, national or regional levels. Second, the MDGs were fixed from 2000 to 2015; Human development is open-ended and its priorities need periodic debate — as will occur for any successor to the MDGs, for example, after 2015. Third, human development pertains to all countries at all levels of development and, indeed, to all people including the wealthy and elite. Whereas the decision to give priority attention to the poor or relatively deprived may be one features of human development in national applications — and commendable in them — one could also imagine a group meeting of OECD country leaders who wished to support the well-being of their citizens rather than merely add to their GDP. This too, would be human development. Next, human development does invest in analysing the interconnections between variables; whereas in some approaches to meeting the MDGs, each goal was analysed independently of others. Finally, the 2000 MDGs are imperfect reflections of human development as a number of critics have mentioned. One crucial issue is an absence of empowerment or concern for people's agency in the MDGs (as well as reproductive issues, work and human rights); most human development approaches would consider this, as well as considering the responsibility of different agents towards the poor.

*~View from the MDGs:*

Usually, the MDGs are introduced with no history at all, as a consensus that was reached in the year 2000. In the best accounts, the Millennium Declaration is cited. For example, the website of the United Nations that is devoted to the MDGs describes their genesis thus:

In September 2000, building upon a decade of major United Nations conferences and summits, world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets - with a deadline of 2015 - that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>127</sup>

An ahistorical perspective draws attention to the consensus decision in a positive manner is thus the natural way to describe the MDGs. It is particularly constructive as any specific historical account would undoubtedly be controversial and could be divisive. The absence of history leaves it open to many specifications – as is widely recognised, success has many parents. The UNDP HDRO clearly played an historic role in bringing the MDGs, but there were also other parents, so the lack of formal attribution is understandable.

In “International Norm Dynamics and ‘the End of Poverty’: Understanding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)”, Hulme and Fukuda-Parr focus on how the MDGs have galvanized international support by institutional actors and by civil society groups. The implication of their analysis is that in this way the MDGs improved upon the first decade of human development. In particular, they find “that the MDGs’ super-norm brought specificity and concreteness to the idea of ending global poverty. Earlier specifications of ‘development and poverty eradication’ had been too vague to capture the imaginations and empathy of leaders and publics around the world”.

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml> accessed 20 November 2009

In their analysis, the MDGs have been useful and effective in promoting the broad norm of eradicating global poverty. Because the MDGs are internally plural and composed of the eight goals and the many targets, Hulme and Fukuda-Parr refer to the MDGs as a “super-norm”. They also argue that the mechanisms by which the MDGs were advanced were distinct from the characteristics of “norm” entrepreneurs. They articulate the idea of “message entrepreneurs” who were willing to make pragmatic concessions in order to build a consensus that was supported by diverse organizations and groups.

Conceptually, however, the story is different. As was elaborated above, conceptually the MDGs are directly related to human development, as a particular example of an international consensus on some core areas of human development. What is missing is a clear acknowledgement of conceptual linkages, which has created considerable confusion particularly at the national level. In addition, much of the MDG work has not drawn upon a wealth of previous research. For example *Millennium Project* was charged with addressing the policy and budgetary implications of the MDGs. Their 2005 report, ‘Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals’ quotes only one *Human Development Report* — the 2003 *HDR* on the MDGs which Jeffrey Sachs had largely authored. It otherwise does not cite any of the early work on costing, nor the *HDRs*. Equally noteworthy is the silence from the human development community: the 2003 *HDR* did not link the MDGs to the earlier calls of the UNDP and HDRO for such goals. It would be apt to rearticulate forcefully and accurately the interlinkages between human development and the MDGs, for it is clear, historically grounded and could be helpful in the coming years as a resource for those considering future national and international goals.

## **B. Human Rights & Human Development**

Human rights are the rights possessed by all persons, by virtue of their common humanity, to live a life of freedom and dignity. They give all people moral claims on the behavior of individuals and on the design of social arrangements — and are universal, inalienable and indivisible.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> UNDP 2000: 16

Human rights and human development have much in common.<sup>129</sup> Both hold that people should not be treated as a means to an end, but should be treated as ends. Also, both are focused on the advancement of human freedoms, as these familiar quotations from the founding documents of international human rights show.

...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of the freedom, justice, and peace in the world...<sup>130</sup>

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.<sup>131</sup>

The 2000 *Human Development Report* had on the inside of the front cover the following description of the similarities and distinct histories of human rights and human development:

Human rights and human development share a common vision and a common purpose—to secure, for every human being, freedom, well-being and dignity. Divided by the cold war, the rights agenda and the development agenda followed parallel tracks. Now converging, their distinct strategies and traditions can bring new strength to the struggle for human freedom. *Human Development Report 2000* ... shows how human rights bring principles of accountability and social justice to the process of human development.<sup>132</sup>

Human rights pre-date human development and have been taken up by and influenced a great many disciplines and institutions. However it could be argued that human rights were in part developed to address the legal community — and secondarily political and activist communities — and the practices by which legal disputes were settled was shifted from positive law to include moral claims. Normative claims, even fundamental ones, were given legal status. Human rights

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<sup>129</sup> Drèze 2004, Drèze 2006, Drèze and Sen 2002, Nussbaum 2003a, Sen 2004, Sen 2005, Sen 1984, ul Haq 1995, UNDP 2000, Vizard 2006.

*International human rights instruments are available on* <http://www.un.org/rights/index.html>

<sup>130</sup> Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights cited in UNDP HDR 2000

<sup>131</sup> Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>132</sup> UNDP 2000, inside of front cover

law works to align claims with duties to protect people's lives, hence once again could be seen as shifting the focal space – in this case from precedent to human freedoms.<sup>133</sup>

This is indeed the view taken by the 2000 *Human Development Report*, which argues:

Until the last decade human development and human rights followed parallel paths in both concept and action—the one largely dominated by economists, social scientists and policy-makers, the other by political activists, lawyers and philosophers. They promoted divergent strategies of analysis and action—economic and social progress on the one hand, political pressure, legal reform and ethical questioning on the other. But today, as the two converge in both concept and action, the divide between the human development agenda and the human rights agenda is narrowing. There is growing political support for each of them—and there are new opportunities for partnerships and alliances (p 2).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 sets out the universal and inalienable freedoms to which all people are equally entitled. These include the human rights to food, health, housing, an adequate standard of living, education, protection of the family, democracy, participation, the rule of law and protection against enslavement, torture, cruel or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Clearly the human freedoms these rights aim to protect overlap with the dimensions of human development enumerated earlier. Even if certain dimensions have been more or less emphasized in practice, conceptually human rights do include economic, social and cultural rights, and human development does include civil and political liberties. Human rights specify a set of rights with clarity and moral passion; human development is flexible and context specific, with no fixed and forever set of capabilities. Both are extremely useful and complementary.

Perhaps the key contribution of human rights is to specify responsibilities and to structure the core responsibilities and accountabilities of certain “duty-bearers”, particularly the state. The language of responsibility and obligation is present, but nascent, in human development — for example the 1990 *HDR* referred to how people used their expanded freedoms. Human rights

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<sup>133</sup> For other works that discuss the relationship between human rights and human development please see Anand and Sen 2000, Fukuda-Parr 2008, Osmani 2005, Sen 2005, Sen 2004b, ul Haq 1995, Vizard 2006

draws out responsibilities of institutions and persons explicitly. Indeed human rights can identify not only “perfect” legally binding obligations but also imperfect obligations, in which people are bound by some underspecified moral obligation to do what they can to help. Thus human rights emerged in the realm of public international law and sought to bind states. States were asked to ratify the treaties and thus voluntarily accede to binding obligations. As the era in which human rights were advanced was colored by the Cold War, in practice, Western countries and more wealthy countries tended to emphasize the political and civil human rights, and Soviet bloc countries as well as poorer countries tended to emphasize economic, social and cultural rights.

Human rights also complement human development by providing an “absolute” safeguard, which prohibits certain actions from proceeding that would directly violate the human rights of some groups — even if their overall impact on human development could be positive. This can be tremendously powerful, for example when the negative impacts would affect only a small minority community. They also are politically appealing, and many groups have arisen to protect and advance human rights.<sup>134</sup>

Human rights also support agency in a different way from human development, because citizens and people are engaged to defend human rights. The very language and thought process of human rights can be empowering. It can give people a way to voice their grievances and seek justice and to challenge and reverse abuses of power. Also, a discourse of human rights appeals to people as agents. As the 2000 *HDR* put it, the rights approach “directs attention to the need for information and political voice for all people as a development issue — and to civil and political rights as integral parts of the development process.”

Human development also complements and adds to human rights in several ways also. First, if at times human rights are seen as focused mainly on governments, human development reinforces the idea that *all* people and institutions are agents who have the possibility and responsibility to support human rights and human development. Indeed the very implementation of human rights requires activism and political engagement and social movements — and these are explicitly a part of the human development approach.

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<sup>134</sup> Fukuda-Parr 2008

Second, while some human rights are to be progressively realized, the options by which decisions of how to implement this progressive realization require analysis and trade-offs. Human rights are argued to be *indivisible*, in that some cannot be selected and others ignored. Yet in realizing human rights progressively, it is necessary to understand their interconnections. The empirical analysis that is naturally undertaken by human development analysts can help to specify the most effective sequence of policies, the causal connections between different human rights and the instrumental value that one capability has in advancing other capabilities.

Third, human development calls for the ongoing discussion of the priorities and goals of development in a contextual, dynamic way that draws on the values and value judgments of groups. The original list of human rights was fixed in 1948 by a particular group of people and leaders, and subsequent treaties have involved a small group of leaders. It can be important in local contexts to critically discuss how precisely to specify the human rights and responsibilities.

### **C. Human Security & Human Development**

The term human security had been discussed in some circles since the late 1960s. It gained greater attention at the end of the Cold War and yet greater prominence after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the Twin Towers of New York. The idea of human security directly parallels human development and addresses a different community: those focused on defending national security.<sup>135</sup> Originally, military strategists were the key reference audience for human security; other audiences included those working in humanitarian emergencies, conflict and post-conflict zones.

What is the value added of human security? Since the Peace of Westphalia, the dominant military paradigm has framed security in terms of the protection of a nation's territorial boundaries from violent assault. The unit of analysis was the physical territory of the country and the focal variable was territorial aggression.

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135 This is clearly indicated in a box authored by Amartya Sen within the 2003 document *Human Security Now* p x. For additional references please see Sabina Alkire 2003, 2007; Commission on Human Security 2003; Gasper 2005; Haq 1995; Kaldor 2007; King & Murray 2001-02; MacFarlane & Khong, 2007; Tajbakhsh & Chenoy 2007; ul Haq 1995.

The human security paradigm shifts the *unit of analysis* from the territory to the human beings who dwell within them. It then broadens the *focal variable* from one single threat – that of territorial aggression — to the multiple threats that could undermine people’s security, dignity and livelihood — their vital core human security looks at who is insecure and in what dimensions (e.g., food, health, environment). Like human development, human security is a general concept and must be specified in each context. Yet like human development, simply the shift of unit of analysis and focal space alone has cross-cutting implications for security policies to advance human security.

Similar to human development, human security scrutinises the interconnections between dimensions and recognises that the core aspects of human development are of intrinsic value. Human security also locates the focal space in which to evaluate human security in the capabilities or freedoms that people enjoy.

Human security is best seen not as a “competitor” to human development, but rather as a subcategory of human development, which has several distinctive qualities:

1. Whereas human development focuses on the protection and expansion of capabilities, human security has a more limited focus. It focuses on creating a minimum set of capabilities and of protecting these vital capabilities from critical pervasive threats.
2. Human development could encompass any capabilities ranging from basic (ability to be well-nourished) to complex and high level (ability to learn architectural drawing). Human security, like human development, pertains to rich and poor nations and persons, but human security gained prominence recently because of the need for relevant insecurities to be given greater priority among “highly developed” countries.<sup>136</sup>

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136 “Where one might argue that human security is a concept minted for application to the developing world, [the UNESCO 2007] report [for Western Europe] responds that, having vanquished the basic challenges of physical survival, the European system of public welfare must now turn to adequately addressing the growing human insecurity of Western Europeans ...”. Burgess 2007: 93.



3. Human security's conceptual origins responded to long-term threats of violence. Hence human security explicitly includes responses to violence and often studies how poverty causes violence and how violence contributes to poverty. It explores trade-offs between investments in military capabilities and investments in people's survival, livelihood and dignity.
4. Human development has stressed the intrinsically valuable aspect of capabilities and also investigated their instrumental value in advancing other aspects of human development. Human security likewise stresses the intrinsic importance of its core capabilities; it introduces an explicit analysis of the instrumental value of these for political and military security.
5. Both human security and human development emphasise both the need to involve and empower people as agents and also the need to clarify the role and obligations of other institutions in protecting (for human security) or protecting and advancing (for human development) core capabilities.<sup>137</sup>
6. Human development in theory incorporates short-term and the long-term issues; in practice often human development has been interpreted as focusing on long-term issues rather than short-term emergencies. Human security likewise in theory incorporates short-term and long-term but in practice has tended to focus on short-term crises related to conflict or to natural disaster, to financial crises or climatic disasters. Both approaches emphasise sustainability and stability of outcomes.
7. The language of human security can be oriented towards humanity as a whole. There is an emphasis on our shared vulnerabilities and fragilities as a species, particularly with respect to the environment.

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137 "Human security goes beyond protective mechanisms to include the need to empower individuals, identifying their security threats and articulating the means by which they will implement the changes needed." United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security 2007

## D. Happiness & Human Development

The recent surge of interest in happiness and subjective well-being reflects an increased desire to consider how material well-being translates into psychological experiences of fulfillment.<sup>138</sup> As the Sarkozy Report's section on the Quality of Life makes clear, this approach shares with human development a fundamental aim to reorient economic assessments away from aggregate income and to the realities of human lives.<sup>139</sup> It therefore shares a criticism of income and resource-focused approaches and also brings an important emphasis and expertise on the measurement of subjective experiences.

Some of the "happiness" literature defines well-being sufficiently broadly that it is more or less synonymous with human development. For example, Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness, and its Gross National Happiness index, has nine domains: health, education, standard of living, governance, environment, community vitality, culture and spirituality, time use, and emotional well-being.<sup>140</sup> The domains and indicators used to reflect Gross National Happiness thus could be seen as a country-specific articulation of human development, in which the goal itself was named in a culturally appropriate manner.

In defining happiness so broadly, Bhutan is an outlier. The huge majority of studies of happiness and "well-being" define and measure these in far narrower terms than is widely understood by the public and certainly in far narrower terms than human development does. It is worth, therefore, enumerating the distinctions between the (internally diverse) "happiness" literature (not including Bhutan, which as we have said has a wide conception of happiness) and the

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<sup>138</sup> For example, the OECD project on 'Measuring the Progress of Societies' convenes many different groups who share this common desire to reorient social and economic goals; groups participating in this project come from the happiness perspective as well as from human development, quality of life, and wider approaches to well-being and human flourishing.

<sup>139</sup> See particularly Sen 2009 Ch 13 and Sarkozy report of Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress and their working papers on <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr>. See also Alkire 2005a, Argyle and Martin 1991, Bok 2010, Bruni, Comim and Pugno 2008, Clark 2005, Diener 2000, Diener, Lucas, Schimmack and Helliwell 2009, Graham 2010, Inglehart and Welzel 2005, Kahneman, Diener and Schwarz 1999, Kahneman and Krueger 2006, Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone 2004, Kenny and Kenny 2006, Layard 2005, McGillivray 2007, Ng 2003, Offer 1996, Qizilbash 2006, Samman 2007, Van Praag and Ferrer-i-Carbonell 2004, Veenhoven 1994

<sup>140</sup> See [www.grossnationalhappiness.com](http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com) and Alkire, Santos and Ura 2008.

human development approach. We do so while appreciating, as mentioned above, the fundamental similarity of motivation between both approaches, the tremendous popular interest in happiness and the shared aim of reorienting development and economics towards human flourishing.

The happiness literature is internally diverse. In particular, there are distinct definitions of happiness and distinct indicators. Two of the most widely used indicators are:

1. *Happiness* “Taking all things together, would you say you are: 1 Very happy; 2 Rather happy; 3 Not very happy; 4 Not at all happy”
2. *Satisfaction* “Overall, how satisfied are you with your life? Are you...5 Very satisfied; 4 Satisfied; 3 Neither unsatisfied or satisfied; 2 Unsatisfied; or 1 Very unsatisfied.”

On the basis of answers to these questions, the happiness of populations is evaluated, primarily because cross-country data for these indicators are widely available. The “happiness” question focuses more on the mood state, whereas the “satisfaction” question evokes a more reflective response. In addition, two variations are often implemented and analyzed. In the first, the satisfaction question is repeated, but the words “your life” are replaced with certain domains of life such as “your health, your security, your community”. This indicator is intended to reflect respondents’ subjective evaluations of distinct domains of life. The second approach is to ask respondents to record their subjective state of happiness at distinct times of the day and night when they are engaged in different activities. Such a diary of evaluated time use provides information on the flow of hedonic experiences, which is arguably more accurate and precise than responses to the above survey questions. However because of the cost and complexity of this collecting these data, they are not at this time widely available from nationally representative samples in many countries.<sup>141</sup>

The many studies of happiness — its measurement, its determinants and its role in public policy — bring to human development two tremendous resources. First, they debate and clarify how happiness and subjective well-being should be defined and measured. Capabilities concern the freedoms people have to enjoy beings and doings they value and have reason to value. Clearly

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<sup>141</sup> Kahneman and Krueger 2006

being happy is a state that most people value and have reason to value and as such it is a functioning, a specific and intrinsically valuable dimension of human development. Hence the current development of improved measures of happiness and exploration of their cross-cultural validity are providing critical inputs into this underemphasized aspect of human development. This will also strengthen the applicability of human development to “rich” countries where subjective questions are arguably more influenced by public policy.<sup>142</sup>

The happiness literature also is beginning to explore empirical interconnections and indeed causal linkages between subjective states and more familiar dimensions of human development such as health and employment. Careful studies of the “instrumental” power of different freedoms in advancing other capabilities — such as the instrumental value of female education in controlling family size<sup>143</sup> — have always been a core part of human development. Thus the literatures on the causes and correlates of happiness are of direct interest.

However there are a number of problems with having the achievement of happiness as the only objective, rather than taking the human development approach, which seeks to increase a diverse set of functionings, which may include happiness/subjective well-being.

The first distinction — and one which is often overlooked — is that the happiness literature does not emphasize people’s agency or give intrinsic value to democratic practices. Rather, the happiness literature adopts a more social engineering approach, which shifts the power and the emphasis away from democratic practice and debate as a venue in which to identify core priorities and away from people and communities as agents of development. In the happiness approach, people are viewed as experts of their own well-being and their response to questionnaires regarding their subjective state is treated as authoritative. However ordinary people are not engaged as agents in deciding how to advance their own happiness. Nor is it possible for them to trade off subjective well-being with other dimensions of life. Rather, the expansion of happiness is treated as a “scientific” project, with psychologists telling policy makers what actually makes people happy and recommending changes that would make people happier (such as employment, or marriage/partnership, or being educated in ways that root self-

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<sup>142</sup> Diener, Lucas, Schimmack and Helliwell 2009

<sup>143</sup> Drèze and Murthi 2001

esteem in absolute achievements not relative states).<sup>144</sup> But at the level of individual people and communities, if implemented the policies could be criticized for being top down, expert-driven and disempowering. It is not terribly clear how a community that disagreed with the experts' assessment would be able to exert their voice and affect their own livelihoods.

Expert knowledge enters human development in many individual areas: nutritionists for example can pinpoint the points in child development where malnutrition sets in and recommend measures to adopt. But the expert input is generally complemented by community input. As yet the role for people's voices, skills, insights and leadership in happiness literature (in which there is only one goal) is not clear.

Second, happiness is given either absolute priority or at least a prominent position among social goals. Yet this might have troubling policy implications. For example, given that further income, above a certain level, does not make people happy, and given also that many of the causes of happiness appear to be internal, it is likely that in any given country a tremendously poor and deprived homeless person had achieved a very high level of equanimity and happiness, and that a rich banker who had recently lost his job and reputation because of a badly judged action but who remained a multi-millionaire was utterly miserable. Public policy might expand national happiness by investing less in the happy homeless person and transferring public resources to counseling and life coaching for the distressed millionaire.

A third problem is that even if happiness were to correlate with high achievements in other domains in all countries, a unidimensional measure might still not be as useful for policy purposes as using data on multiple dimensions.

A fourth question, which is largely an empirical question, is the extent to which public policy can efficiently produce happiness. In "Elements of a Theory of Human Rights", Sen suggests that capabilities that are given central priority as human rights which impose obligations on others should respect two criteria. First, they should be widely recognized as being of special importance. And second, they should be socially influenceable — that is, effectively and directly influenced by public policies. Sen gives the example of serenity which might clearly be widely

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<sup>144</sup> Layard 2005, Frey and Stutzer 2002

recognized as having a special importance, but which seems to be obtained through personal journeys rather than efficiently produced by public policies. Can happiness be influenced by public policy as directly as famine, infectious disease or a need for primary education?

Finally, a further challenge in using cross-sectional happiness data to guide policy, particularly in developing countries, is that subjective data may reflect a person's actual subjective state, and they may also reflect, to some extent, the respondent's culture, aspirations, personality or mood at the moment of the survey (which may change depending on the order of questions). A particularly difficult issue for the use of subjective data among poor and uneducated groups is the issue of "adaptive preferences". For example, consider the question of how satisfied people are with their health status. Data on self-reported health are often used in the absence of objective data on health status; they are very quick hence inexpensive to gather and in some contexts seem to reflect objective health status. However in developing countries, poorer groups may have lower expectations for health and their comparison groups may be other poor persons. Hence, their self-reported health may be higher than their health status would be when judged objectively or would be if the same respondents had access to other information. Sen gives the example of how women in the Indian state of Bihar have higher self-reported health than women in Kerala, yet the morbidity and mortality data show that women in Bihar have much lower health achievements than those in Kerala. If the subjective data are used to guide policy, this would suggest that public resources should be transferred away from Bihar to Kerala, and this seems deeply problematic.

Clearly happiness and human development have much in common. Both consider the unit of analysis to be the person, and both focus on creating an economy to serve the flourishing of human beings. It seems that the happiness literature resonates with a popular demand and motivates popular engagement, particularly in developed countries. Further it brings expertise on the measurement and empirical analysis of the interconnection between subjective states and other dimensions of human development. It can be seen as enriching human development in vital ways. Human development provides a core framework for development, which complements a focus on happiness alone, by articulating a role for people as agents and arguing that human flourishing is composed of multiple dimensions, each of which have intrinsic importance.

## ***Conclusion***

Economics is poised to change. Within a decade it will be different. Sources of change have come from without – with the financial collapse, and the awakening to climate change; they have come from within the discipline – for example from research in behavioural, experimental and neuroeconomics shifting the legitimate assumptions about *homo oeconomicus*; they also come from a popular demand that the economy not be the master of people's lives, but the servant of human flourishing.

For the past 20 years, the concept of human development has provided an alternative organizing objective to economic growth for economists and development workers. It has shown how and why policy makers should orient the tremendously powerful processes of economic growth, industrialisation, and service delivery to human freedoms.

Given the present foment and creativity in economic thinking, human development can find a deeper voice and greater purchase on even academic debates. Coming as it does out of the economics tradition, it can contribute to the current reformulation of economics, and yet do so in a way that supports rather than silences public debate. This paper has tried to articulate a rich yet succinct concept of human development which will be capable of playing a leading role in the re-thinking of economics in the coming decade. We also clarified the conceptual relation between human development and other concepts that engage groups with similar intent: the MDGs, human rights, human security, and happiness. Our aim was to identify the unique contribution of human development and to affirm the common goals and value of complementary approaches.

***Postscript: A brief conceptual history of poverty at the World Bank until 2000***<sup>145</sup>

Sabina Alkire

The World Bank is not monolithic; it is an internally complex organization, whose staff and projects reflect a multitude of experiences, disciplinary expertise and opinions. Any attempt to streamline such diversity into a neat conceptual evolution of an idea such as poverty is bound to be both contested and radically incomplete to the point of occasional inaccuracy. However this

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<sup>145</sup> Alkire 1994

Postscript does attempt to trace exactly that: the conceptual evolution of poverty within the World Bank's work from 1946–2000. It does so drawing on documentary sources, which were supplemented by staff interviews, using mainly documents that were officially promulgated from the “anchor” rather than from country offices.

The World Bank was first opened as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) in 1946, and its task was to provide lending and loan guarantees for projects that aided reconstruction in post-war Europe, immediately, and development, continuously. As the purposes of the *Articles of Agreement* of the World Bank reveal, the early grounds of loan allocation were nearly all economic. On December 13, 1946, Bank president Eugene Meyer produced these practical criteria for evaluating loan applications:

Are funds available from private sources on reasonable terms? What is the effect of the loan on the country's economy and how sound is the investment? What are the prospects that the borrower will be able to meet the obligations incurred? If the loan is to be granted, what would be a reasonable rate of interest and what other charges should be made? Is the schedule of repayments appropriate to the loan? What methods of supervision can be undertaken to see that the credit is properly used and repaid?<sup>146</sup>

These considerations suggest that the Bank's predominant concern in 1946 was its own survival and reputation to investors. Only one consideration — that which looked beyond financial mechanics to ask what was the “effect of the loan on the country's economy” — prefigured all more idealistic and articulate Bank objectives.

Throughout the fifties and sixties, the Bank's objective was to increase the GNP of recipient countries.<sup>147</sup> The evolution that occurred in this period was the broadening of the scope of projects considered productive of growth. Hence whereas at first loans were given for capital infrastructure in transport, power and communications, subsequently education, health and agriculture also became seen as legitimate projects for Bank loans.

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<sup>146</sup>Meyer 1946: 4.

<sup>147</sup>World Bank 1978 “Conclusion on its Development Experience 1950-1975” (by definition, an increase in GNP is identical with “economic growth”).



The transformation of lending assistance occurred in the 1970s. In his historic Nairobi Speech of 1973, McNamara described the conditions of hundreds of millions of citizens who live in absolute poverty: “This is absolute poverty: a condition of life so limited as to prevent realization of the potential of the genes with which one is born; a condition of life so degrading as to insult human dignity — and yet a condition of life so common as to be the lot of some 40% of the peoples of the developing countries. And are not we who tolerate such poverty, when it is within our power to reduce the number afflicted by it, failing to fulfill the fundamental obligations accepted by civilized men since the beginning of time?”<sup>148</sup> It is well-documented that under McNamara, the Bank undertook vigorous confrontation of poverty by re-orientating lending to those sectors (such as rural development and health) which were understood to be most influential on the poor.

This imprint of the poverty priority is evident in the first two *World Development Reports*, published in 1978 and 1979, which reported on the “twin objectives of economic growth and poverty alleviation”. Of course the Bank had always supported ‘the poor’ to some extent — as was evident in the impetus to establish the International Development Association in 1960 and when the income criterion came into effect (1967) — yet it had never before held this objective alongside economic growth.

McNamara’s mandate to relieve absolute poverty coincided with a dramatic increase of the Bank’s financial resources and Bank personnel. Simultaneously, the Bank’s objective became something broader than economic growth. In the 1970s, an awareness of the interdependence of different disciplines (economics, social policy, political processes, technological progress) emerged: “The economic growth of nations has been associated with far-reaching changes in their social and political structures”.<sup>149</sup> GNP growth alone then became an unsatisfactory measure of development. The discussion of what development really is, and what indicators best represent it, began in earnest. The *World Development Reports* of the late seventies affirm that aspects of welfare such as health care, nutrition, literacy, family planning, employment and urban planning are important in their own right, as well as in order to promote economic growth. Furthermore the 1978 *World Development Report* stated that growth, modernization and an

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<sup>148</sup>McNamara 1973

<sup>149</sup>World Bank 1979: 44.

increase in living standard (already the broadening of goals beyond growth alone) “have been neither sufficiently fast nor sufficiently broad-based to reduce the numbers in absolute poverty”.<sup>150</sup> The key insight is that the Bank now judged economic achievements to be insufficient if they did not *lead to* a decrease in poverty. This marks the conceptual shift which did not occur in the first two decades of Bank history but arguably emerged in the third: a Bank objective defined in terms of impact on the poor.

The Bank objective championed in the eighties, in retrospect, was in conceptual terms a poor substitute for its predecessor. In common with the major international actors during the eighties, the Bank selected as its objective a neoclassical system of deregulated prices and markets. The “new goals” were: 1. improving the system of prices and incentives and market performance, 2. programming public investment 3. disciplining government attention to the most important issues and investments, 4. facilitating coordination and consultation internally and with the private sector, and 5. enabling swift responses to external changes.<sup>151</sup>

The rationale for this near-worldwide retraction is obvious: impatience at the recurrent failure of comprehensive planning to achieve growth (and its unfortunate success in creating price distortions), a desire for efficiency and at least a rudimentary faith in the market.<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately, the results were disappointing. “For the poor [in many developing countries]” wrote president Barber Conable in 1990, “the 1980s was a lost decade”.<sup>153</sup>

Yet it would be simplistic to say that the general eighties’ turn towards “narrow goods” pervaded the whole of Bank activities. The 1980s also produced the first comprehensive poverty report, “Focus on Poverty: A Review of Bank Operations in FY84” which was reissued in 1985 and 1986. The report recommended that the consequences for the poor of all Bank projects -- not just poverty projects -- be appraised. A Task Force was established in 1988 to study poverty reduction, and it created the Core Poverty Program (CPP) and devised more qualitative forms of

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<sup>150</sup>World Bank 1978: 11.

<sup>151</sup> Baum and Tolbert 1985: 27.

<sup>152</sup>The rationale was also flawed: the perceived failure of structuralist means to achieve the broad bright goals of the seventies should not have led to disillusionment with the goals themselves, but rather to re-evaluation of how they might best be achieved.

<sup>153</sup>World Bank 1990: iii.

poverty assessment.<sup>154</sup> The late eighties also gave increased attention to the social costs of adjustment and to the requirements of data collection. Thus the experiences of the eighties, both positive and negative, paved the way for a focus on multidimensional poverty.

The poverty focus of 1990 was a necessary prerequisite for a move to a multidimensional focus. In 1990, Bank President Barber B. Conable called the eradication of poverty the “integrating theme for the many facets of the Bank’s work, and ... the *raison d’être* for our operational emphases.”<sup>155</sup> The 1990 *World Development Report* went so far as to be moralistic about this concern: “No task should command a higher priority for the world’s policy makers than that of reducing global poverty.”<sup>156</sup> A later statement portrayed all Bank development efforts as deriving from its concern for the poor: “The basic mission of the World Bank and the core of its assistance program is the reduction of poverty. The Bank’s overall mandate to promote development arises from this fundamental imperative.”<sup>157</sup>

The 1990 *World Development Report* was given to the topic “Poverty” and represented the foundational document of this objective, one which argued that the problem of poverty could be addressed professionally and technically and laid out the Bank’s strategy for so doing. The two-fold strategy for poverty reduction which was outlined in the 1990 *WDR* was operationalized for policy makers in *Assistance Strategies to Reduce Poverty* 1991, for the entire staff in *Operational Directive 4.15*, 1991, and for operational task managers in the *Poverty Reduction Handbook* 1992. A preliminary review of World Bank poverty programs and a summary of trends, was published as *Implementing the World Bank’s Strategy to Reduce Poverty: Progress and Challenges*, April 1993.

But how did the Bank define poverty alleviation? This is no easy question, for although the stated objective was single (poverty reduction), there seemed to be many dimensions which were argued to contribute to it. In the mid 1990s, I examined internal bank documents, and determined

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<sup>154</sup>The qualitative assessments were to be “based on the *purpose* of the particular project/study” *Poverty Reduction Handbook* 9.3.

<sup>155</sup>*Address to the Board of Governors of the World Bank Group*, Sept 25, 1990.

<sup>156</sup>World Bank 1990: 5.

<sup>157</sup>World Bank. 1991: 5. Opening statement of the “Foreword” to *Assistance Strategies to Reduce Poverty*. (Hereafter *Assistance Strategies*.)

that “The Bank seems to pursue the following items, and only the following items as ‘ends’: Education, Health, Nutrition, Consumption, and the Environment”. However this definition was gathered only by a documentary review and staff interviews; it was not explicitly articulated as policy.

Yet by 1997, the Bank had, according to its own documentation in the year 2001, moved to a multidimensional definition of poverty. The definitive public statement of this move was the 2000 *World Development Report* on poverty led by Ravi Kanbur. This report articulated three complementary pillars of poverty reduction: opportunities, security and empowerment. It was in preparation for this WDR that the Bank financed the *Voices of the Poor* study, which articulated the multidimensionality of ill-being drawing on a re-analysis of 40 participatory studies and new participatory studies in 20 countries.

The overview of the 2000-1 *WDR* opens with these words, which state clearly the move to a multidimensional approach:

Poor people live without fundamental freedoms of action and choice that the better-off take for granted. They often lack adequate food and shelter, education and health, deprivations that keep them from leading the kind of life that everyone values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives. These are all dimensions of poverty.

The WDR used the *Voices of Poor* material to articulate these dimensions poignantly, drawing on the experiences and words of poor people: “The experience of multiple deprivations is intense and painful. Poor people’s description of what living in poverty means bears eloquent testimony to their pain...” (overview, continued from above). In sum, the *WDR* 2000/1 called “for a broader, more comprehensive strategy to fight poverty” (overview).

Thus evidently from 1946 to 2000, the concept of poverty within the World Bank – at least as it was expressed in certain centrally promulgated documents – evolved from a unidimensional to a multidimensional concept of poverty. How central the poverty reduction objective has remained

since 2000, and the extent to which the verbal emphasis on multiple dimensions has been translated into projects and assessments, is an open question.

## Excerpt from the 1990 Report, pages 10-11, section on *Defining Human Development*

*Human development is the process of enlarging people's choices*

- Many fast-growing developing countries are discovering that their high GNP growth rates have failed to reduce the socioeconomic deprivation of substantial sections of their population.
- Even industrial nations are realizing that high income is no protection against the rapid spread of such problems as drugs, alcoholism, AIDS, homelessness, violence and the breakdown of family relations.
- At the same time, some low-income countries have demonstrated that it is possible to achieve high levels of human development if they skilfully use the available means to expand basic human capabilities.
- Human development efforts in many developing countries have been severely squeezed by the economic crisis of the 1980s and the ensuing adjustment programmes.

Recent development experience is thus a powerful reminder that the expansion of output and wealth is only a means. The end of development must be human well-being. How to relate the means to the ultimate end should once again become the central focus of development analysis and planning.

How can economic growth be managed in the interest of the people? What alternative policies and strategies need to be pur-

### Defining human development

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical ones are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect — what Adam Smith called the ability to mix with others without being “ashamed to appear in public” (box 1.1).

It is sometimes suggested that income is a good proxy for all other human choices since access to income permits exercise of every other option. This is only partly true for a variety of reasons:

- Income is a means, not an end. It may be used for essential medicines or narcotic drugs. Well-being of a society depends on the uses to which income is put, not on the level of income itself.
- Country experience demonstrates several cases of high levels of human development at modest income levels and poor levels of human development at fairly high income levels.
- Present income of a country may offer little guidance to its future growth prospects. If it has already invested in its people, its potential income may be much higher than what its current income level shows, and vice versa.
- Multiplying human problems in many industrial, rich nations show that high income levels, by themselves, are no guarantee for human progress.

The simple truth is that there is no automatic link between income growth and human progress. The main preoccupation of development analysis should be how such a link can be created and reinforced.

The term *human development* here denotes both the *process* of widening people's choices and the *level* of their achieved well-being. It also helps to distinguish clearly between two sides of human development. One is the formation of human capabilities, such as improved health or knowledge. The other is the use that people make of their

#### BOX 1.1

#### Human development defined

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible.

But human development does not end there. Additional choices, highly valued by many people, range from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying personal self-respect and guaranteed human rights.

Human development has two sides: the formation of human capabilities — such as improved health, knowledge and skills — and the use people make of their acquired capabilities — for leisure, productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. If the scales of human development do not finely balance the two sides, considerable human frustration may result.

According to this concept of human development, income is clearly only one option that people would like to have, albeit an important one. But it is not the sum total of their lives. Development must, therefore, be more than just the expansion of income and wealth. Its focus must be people.

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