

SUMMARY OF THE FSN FORUM DISCUSSION No. 38
FOOD SECURITY AND THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE
FROM 25 JUNE TO 24 JULY 2009

Proceedings available at
http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/PROCEEDINGS_FS_Capability_Approach.doc

I. ISSUES RAISED

Forum Members were invited to discuss on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Livelihood Approach and of the Capability Approach and to share experiences and references on the application and operationalization of the Capabilities Approach in Food Security projects/programmes.

II. THE CAPABILITY APPROACH VERSUS THE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH

- Livelihood approach focuses much on the availability of commodities, while the way in which individuals can benefit from the resources matters most. It's more important to analyze the process of end user consumption side than the process of production. Development interventions need to focus on improving adequate standard of living of a person and eventually improving its capability set rather than raising income only. Shifting the focus from "income poverty" to "capability deprivation" would help understand and foster freedom of human lives from poverty (C. Devecchi, R. Ahsan).
- The Sustainable Livelihood (SL) Approach remains linked to the neo-classical paradigm on choice. It ignores the multidimensional nature of decision-making and neglects the power relations that underpin experiences of livelihood by impoverished persons. Gender relations, and cultural imperatives associated with the role of knowledge and peoples access to social goods, play primary roles in livelihood choices. (J. Chalmers)
- The rights deprived situation, the limited influence in decision making and the low social status of women needs to be acknowledged as these critical issues of power involving control of assets, employment and income security are powerful determinates of their food security situation. The human development and capability approach brings clear understanding of the power structures and that in the dialectics of participation in small groups, the primacy of choice stands out, along with the reciprocities that this generates. (J. Chalmers)
- The case of India offers an example of how gender equality has to be considered when discussing of Capability and Livelihoods Approach: extensive survey shows that Indian women do not exercise the freedom to earn livelihood. In such a case freedom for livelihood earning is essential for the capability expansion of a woman.
- On the other hand there are sufficient evidences that a person earning livelihood may not exercise many other freedoms missing the chances for capability development. Food security is basic capability for every one which may be outcome of livelihood and in some cases as a social security measure. (K. Kant Jha)
- With the Capability Approach to agency-oriented development, it is possible to supplement a focus on food with an emphasis on agency and capability as the means and ends of development as freedom. (D. Crocker)
- The Capability Approach being based on the idea that the poor have deficits of some kind, which need to be filled in, deflects attention away from the role of the limiting social system in which the victim is embedded. In viewing hunger as primarily a matter of

deficits among its victims, it is viewed as mainly a technical problem and not as a political problem. (G. Kent)

III. PROGRAMMES USING THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

- The Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI, <http://www.ophi.org.uk/>) has developed a research program grounded in the capability approach that focuses on the Missing Dimensions of poverty (employment quality, physical safety, empowerment, and dignity, psychological and subjective well-being). For each of these areas, OPHI has developed short modules to collect relevant data. (E. Samman)
- SNV Sudan (Netherlands Development Organisation, <http://www.snvworld.org/en/countries/sudan/Pages/default.aspx>) is working on capacity building of public and private organizations and Community Based Services (CBS) to enable them to decide on their own development. SNV is running two programmes focused on capacity building of organizations providing basic services and on an economic development program working on pro poor value chain development. (T. Haile Dargie)
- The OCHA Handbook entitled "Human Security in Theory and Practice" features a Food Insecurity Chapter very much influenced by Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. The Human Security Now Report was published in May 2003 and since then the Human Security Unit at the United Nations has been working to operationalise the concept in different situations of insecurity. (M. Mostafavi)
- The paper "Capability and health functioning in Ethiopian households" operationalises concepts from the capability approach to shed light on the relationship between capability and well-being. The subject is Ethiopian women in partnership. From a recent nationally representative household survey, a decision making latent variable is estimated using a MIMIC (multiple indicators multiple causes) model to identify conversion factors and capabilities (R. Mabsout)

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