3 Theory of the Capability Approach

The main theoretical framework of this research is the Capability Approach. The Capability Approach was first introduced by the 1998 Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen. Martha Nussbaum was also a strong contributor to the development of the Capability Approach. The Capability Approach is a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of well-being and social arrangements of a society. The concepts of the Capability Approach have been determined in the literature review, which guided the design of the project to allow the research questions to be answered.

The Capability Approach is primarily a framework of thought, a mode of thinking about normative issues, hence a paradigm — loosely defined — that can be used for a wide range of evaluative purposes. The Capability Approach also identifies social constraints that influence and restrict well-being as well as the evaluative exercises (Robeyns, 2005, p. 96).

3.1 Capabilities, Functioning's and Conversion Factors

The Capability Approach in basic terms discusses what a person is able to do with their capabilities (opportunities) and what a human being can achieve (functioning) as a result, states of 'being' or 'doing' are outcomes. The Capability Approach thus takes account of human diversity in two ways: by its focus on the plurality of functionings and capabilities as the evaluative space, and by the explicit focus on personal and socio-environmental conversion factors of commodities into functionings (Robeyns, 2005, p. 99). The Capability Approach draws attention to what a person can do with his or her current capabilities and what limits people having a good life.

It is also necessary to prepare the material and institutional environment so that people are actually able to function and live a life they value (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 235). As a result, capabilities are opportunities which are available for people to turn them into valuable actions, into functionings, which may help people to live a valuable life. Sen describes (1999, p.75) functionings as 'the various things' a person may value doing or being. In other words, functionings are valuable activities and states that make up people's well-being, such as being

healthy and well-nourished, being safe, being educated, having a good job, and being able to visit loved ones. People use capabilities in order to have valuable functionings to ensure their well-being. For example, when a person's basic need for food is met, they enjoy the functioning of being well-nourished.

According to the Capability Approach, well-being, justice and development should be conceptualized in terms of people's capabilities to function, that is, their effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and be who they want to be. These beings and doings, which Sen framed as functionings, together constitute what makes a life valuable. Functionings include working, resting, being literate, being healthy, being part of a community, being respected, and so forth.

The distinction between achieved functionings and capabilities is that one is possible and the other is realized. In other words, functionings are achievements and capabilities are the valuable opportunities that people can choose from. What is ultimately important is that people have the freedom and valuable opportunities (capabilities) to lead the lives they want to live, to do what they want to do and be the person they want to be. Once they effectively have these substantive opportunities, they can choose those options that they value most. For example, every person should have the opportunity to be part of a community and to practice a religion, but if someone prefers to be an atheist, they should also have this option (Robeyns, 2005). In Capability Theory, conversion factors, defined as limitations in capabilities which lead to a good life, has been another central concept identified in research. The definition of conversion factors is what a person can take from the existing capabilities that might be restricted by social, environmental and personal aspects of life.

Nussbaum (2000) suggested that there are three types of capabilities, basic, internal, and combined. Nussbaum (2000, p.78-80) developed a universal list of capabilities. These are: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; sense, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment. Nussbaum (2007, p.70) explained the need for this universal list by saying "all of them are implicit in the idea of a life worthy of human dignity." In 2009, Nussbaum discussed her approach further, and said it uses the idea of a threshold level for each capability. The social goal should be understood in terms of getting citizens above this capability threshold to participate in the democratic process and be given the opportunity of social choice.

Nussbaum's use of the given list of capabilities to gain minimal rights against deprivation is extremely useful in a practical sense. Sen (2004, p.78) argued that there should not be a list of capabilities and that capabilities should be determined through a democratic process of public participation. Sugden

(2008, p.305) commented that Sen was a firm advocate of the collective decision-making process based on democratic participation, reasoned discussion, and openness to public scrutiny.

In contrast to Nussbaum, Amartya Sen did not suggest a list of capabilities but suggested that the decisions related to the list should be defined democratically by the public. Robeyns (2003, p.36) explained that he wanted to promote the Capability Approach as a general approach for the evaluation of individual advantage and social arrangements, and not as a well-defined theory.

Sen (2004, p.77) claimed that 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. To have such a fixed list would be a denial of the necessary public participation on what should be included and why. Sen (2004) explained his disagreement with a list of capabilities. He said, "The theory of evaluation and assessment does, I believe, have the exacting task of pointing to the relevance of what we are free to do and free to be (the capabilities in general), as opposed to the material goods we have and the commodities we can command. But pure theory cannot 'freeze' a list of capabilities for all societies for all time to come, irrespective of what the citizens come to understand and value. That would be not only a denial of the reach of democracy but also a misunderstanding of what pure theory can do, completely divorced from the particular social reality that any particular society faces".

As a result of comparing the different approaches of Sen and Nussbaum, Robeyns (2003, p. 24) summarized the distinct difference between Sen and Nussbaum by saying, "to perform this task, Nussbaum develops and argues for a well-defined but general list of central human capabilities". Sen clearly didn't have such a clear aim when he started to work on the Capability Approach. When summarizing, Sen had asked, "The equality of what?" and he argued that there are good reasons to focus on capabilities instead of resources or utilities.

Most researchers have drawn implicitly on commonly used methods for selecting dimensions of capabilities. The first is the use of existing data or convention. In this method, the selection of dimensions mostly relies on convenience or a convention (Alkire, 2008). The second method uses the theory of the Capability Approach to select dimensions of capabilities, i.e. choosing concepts based on implicit or explicit assumptions about what people do value or should value. The third option is to select capabilities based on public consensus. In this case, dimensions would be selected using a list that has achieved a degree of legitimacy due to public consensus. For example, human rights, national plans, laws or strategies would be sufficient for this method (Alkire, 2009).

3.2 Agency

The Capability Approach takes agency to the center of the theory to discuss what a person is able to do in terms of removing the obstacles to having a meaningful life. Agency defines what a person can achieve in his or her current condition to contribute to a valuable life. The fundamental aspect of agency is not only for self-benefit, as Sen (1997, p.56) described agency as a notion that includes "acting for others" as well as the "realization" of goals. Sen (1999, p.19) refers to agency as a person's ability to pursue and realize goals that he or she values and has reason to value. In a further development of the Capability Approach, agency is related to self-determination, empowerment, authentic self-direction, autonomy, participation, leadership and entrepreneurship (Alkire, 2009, p.51).

Continuing from the above description of agency, an agent is "someone who acts and brings about change" (Sen 1999, P.19). Alkire (2008, p.258) clarified the concept of agency as the following: (I) agency is exercised with respect to the goals the person values, (ii) agency includes effective power as well as direct goals, (iv) the identification of agency also entails an assessment of the value of the agent's goals, (v) the agent's responsibility for a state of affairs should be incorporated into his or her evaluation of it.

Sen also discussed the concept of well-being freedom (2009, p. 203). This concept of freedom, based on the well-being aspect of a person, needs to be clearly distinguished from a broader concept of freedom which is related to the agency aspect of a person. In other words, a person's agency freedom refers to what the person is free to do and achieve, in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important for his or her life, to achieve maximum capacity. Agency freedom is freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve.

3.3 Women and the Capability Approach

A feminist Capability Approach would use a rich theory of gender to argue that at least three elements of the Capability Approach have to be addressed: gender inequalities in the conversion of resources into capabilities, the gender inequalities in the capability sets, and how gender interacts with choice and personal responsibilities (Robeyns, 2008, p. 96). The analytical framework for gender equity encompasses the following aspects: the philosophical foundation of equality of capabilities and freedoms, a focus on individuals as the objective of gender and development, the evaluative aspect of capability expansion, and the agency aspect of capability expansion (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). Gendered social structures and constraints are important for all theories of well-being and justice.

Justice theories do not take account of gender relations, explicitly relying on androcentric and gender-biased assumptions (Robeyns, 2008, p. 89). Also, Fukuda-Parr (2003, p. 315) highlighted the fact that gender equity has been a prominent aspect of equity concern in public policy.

Women have also often been socialized to believe that a lower living standard is what is right and fitting for them and that some great human goods, for example, education and political participation, were not for them at all (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 128). The fact is that women have been the primary victims of socio-cultural deprivation and access to resources has been made difficult for them (Berenger & Verdier-Chouchane, 2011, p. 281). Women are much less likely than men to be literate, and even less likely to have a pre-professional or technical education (Nussbaum 2000, p. 242). When women enter education and the labor market they are confronted with various difficulties such as insufficient child support, intimidation from their family or spouse, sex discrimination in hiring, or lower wages compared with men in similar conditions. Women all over the world have a lack of support for central human capabilities because they are women. This unequal treatment is causing capability deprivation and is creating problems for justice and equality between genders. Women have especially been excluded from education and have been unequally treated in terms of access to the labor market.

The basic foundation from which the Capability Approach begins, in the political arena, is that human abilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed. Through institutional support, women can become fully capable of these human functions (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 131). Valuations on the basis of race, religion, or nationality affect development efforts everywhere, intertwining with valuations based on wealth, gender, health and status (Scanlon, 2009, p. 202). The experiences of women should not be viewed simply as a source of examples of social injustice and problems of social arrangements, inspiring examples of women should also be stressed to inspire women and provide an adequate perception of the quality of life (O'Neill, 2009, p. 334).