Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Human Development and Capabilities
A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People-Centered Development

ISSN: 1945-2829 (Print) 1945-2837 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cjhd20

Food Deserts, Capabilities, and the Rectification of Democratic Failure

Andrew F. Smith

To cite this article: Andrew F. Smith (2016) Food Deserts, Capabilities, and the Rectification of Democratic Failure, Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 17:2, 178-190, DOI: 10.1080/19452829.2015.1019433

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2015.1019433

Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 2016
Vol. 17, No. 2, 178–190, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2015.1019433

Food Deserts, Capabilities, and the Rectification of Democratic Failure

ANDREW F. SMITH
Department of English and Philosophy, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA

ABSTRACT *Food deserts include any area in the industrialized world in which reasonably priced, nutritious food is difficult to obtain. They constitute a pressing public health concern insofar as food desert inhabitants disproportionately suffer from a variety of diet-related conditions. Amartya Sen has written extensively about famine as a failure of functional governance. I draw on these considerations to defend two claims. First, the perpetuation of food deserts also constitutes a breakdown specifically of functional democracy. Second, this breakdown is best addressed by implementing programs and policies that reflect Sen's capabilities approach to justice. I challenge the proposition that resourcism or any other competing approach is preferable for this particular undertaking.*

KEYWORDS: Capabilities, Resources, Amartya Sen, Food deserts, Democracy

1. Introduction

A food desert is any area in the industrialized world in which reasonably priced, nutritious food is difficult to obtain. Most food deserts encompass low-income, urban communities. Few local food outlets carry fresh, healthy provisions. And if public transportation is available, a lengthy commute is required for food desert inhabitants (FDIs) to reach outlets that do carry it (see Wrigle et al. 2002; Gallagher 2006). As a result, FDIs disproportionately suffer from a variety of diet-related conditions—including obesity, heart disease, diabetes, attenuated disease resistance, and impaired cognitive development—and a considerably higher risk of premature death than fellow citizens (see MacIntyre 2007; Whitacre, Tsai, and Mulligan 2009; Alviola, Mayga, and Thomsen 2013). The perpetuation of food deserts thus constitutes a pressing public health concern.

In the first part of the two-part argument that comprises this essay, I argue that their perpetuation also constitutes an acute failure of democracy. Drawing on Amartya Sen's entitlement approach to famines provides a useful means by which to frame the specific character of this failure. Namely, by being complicit in the formation of food deserts and then doing little to eradicate them, the state fails to fulfill its duty equally to protect all citizens from exposure to conditions that compromise their well-being freedom and agency freedom. Due to both state action and inaction, the capacity of FDIs to advance both their welfare

Correspondence Address: Andrew F. Smith, Department of English and Philosophy, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Email: afs52@drexel.edu

and their conception of a good life is undermined. Specifically, the state fails equally to support good health and the ability to pursue it (see Ruger 2010, 41).

Equal support surely requires eradicating food deserts and facilitating eating habits that are conducive to long-term health among *all* citizens. This includes eating lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains; maintaining a balanced intake of complex carbohydrates, lean proteins, and unsaturated fats; and eating foods that are high in sugar and salt only in moderation. The prevalence of poor eating habits throughout all demographics in many industrialized societies arguably is an indicator of generalized democratic failure. How best to rectify it varies demographically due to factors that I take up in what follows. The social and economic conditions that FDIs face make democratic rectification on their behalf particularly urgent.

In the second part of my argument, I contend that democratic rectification for FDIs is best achieved by implementing programs and policies that reflect Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to justice. Proponents of neither resourcism nor any other competing approach offer what Sen can and what FDIs acutely need: means to envision how to both avoid deprivation and, perhaps more importantly, actively ward it off. This is most readily accomplished by facilitating the 'four As': making healthy food *available*, delivering *assets* to obtain it, improving *abilities* to prepare it for consumption, and creating *attitudes* that support its consumption. Resourcism focuses on the first two. The capabilities approach accounts for them all. The latter approach is preferable since FDIs tend to lack all four As at higher rate than non-FDIs. And among the most promising approaches the state can take is to provide sustained support for capabilities-conducive efforts FDIs already are making to help fellow community members to achieve this goal.

2. Famines, Food Deserts, and Democratic Failure

Sen's empirical research indicates that the occurrence of famine has to do less with food availability decline than with the incapacity of some people in a given society or region, but not others, to obtain available food (see Sen 1981a, 1981b; Drèze and Sen 1989). In order to understand who is most likely to fall victim to famine and under what circumstances, he focuses on *entitlements.* Entitlements constitute ways in which people legitimately gain ownership of commodities via consensual trade, production, and inheritance. Regarded in terms of their entitlements, people fall victim to famine if food becomes inaccessible due either to decreased local supply or price increases from local demand, the inability to cultivate, or the death or dislocation of those on whom they depend. All regularly result from population migrations caused by civil unrest.[1]

Famine victims thus experience the breakdown of their *exchange entitlement.* Among the factors that determine their exchange entitlement are whether they can find sustained employment at a decent wage, are protected by a social safety net, and are able to produce goods themselves. To the extent that the state can support citizens' exchange entitlement, it facilitates their capacity to maintain 'command' over both their legal acquisition and consumption of sufficient food (see Osmani 1995; Sen 1997, 510ff.). This rather than the direct provision of food most effectively prevents and ends famines, Sen contends.

Whether famines occur is thus largely contingent on governance. It is, remarks George Lucas,

> a function of local political and economic policies: taxation, inflationary pressure (especially food prices), unemployment patterns, governmental encouragement of developmentalist programs focused on 'cash cropping,' the absence of even minimal unemployment or welfare relief schemes, or border disputes in emerging nations. (1990, 636)

Major famines rarely occur in functional democracies (see Sen 2000, 16). Fair elections take place at regular intervals, opposition parties are not silenced, and there exists an independent and investigative media. Each of these institutions plays an important *informational role* by keeping tabs on how current policies affect the well-being freedom and agency freedom of citizens. Functional democracies also feature a wider set of rights and liberties supported by the rule of law that play a *protective role.* They shield citizens from conditions that compromise well-being freedom and agency freedom and also support their demands for redress (see Sen 1999, 2009, 335f).

Political leaders of undemocratic regimes may flourish during famines while the public suffers, but the same is unlikely to occur in functional democracies. As Sen states, 'when a government is accountable to the public, and when there is free news reporting and uncensored public criticism, then the government […] has an excellent incentive to do its best to eradicate famines' (2009, 343). Given their desire to retain office, public opposition and media criticism put immense pressure on political leaders not just to respond quickly to famines but also to eliminate the conditions that give rise to them.[2]

Why, by comparison, do food deserts persist in functional democracies? The undernutrition many FDIs experience is due not to a lack of caloric intake but instead to micronutrient deficiencies that result from inadequate access to and intake of nutrient-dense food. Adverse health effects can take many years to manifest themselves among FDIs, while high rates of obesity mask nutritional deprivation. These factors may partially account for the tendency of both the media and political leaders to address episodic famines but not the endemic undernutrition faced by FDIs. Jean Drèze and Sen remark that this is so even though endemic undernutrition 'kills many more people in the long run than famines do'. It 'is also a more complex social condition, involving deep-rooted economic and social deficiencies. Eliminating it is a much more difficult task than preventing famines' (1989, 261).

Sen does not explicitly acknowledge that endemic undernutrition represents a failure of democracy, but he does regard it as a grave injustice (see 2004, 23). Moreover, there is a rough parallel between the entitlement failure experienced by famine victims and FDIs. Both lack ready access to affordable, healthy food in societies in which it is widely available to others. Both lack access to a sufficiently robust social safety net. And as with famines in undemocratic societies, political leaders in democracies largely ignore the plight of FDIs without fear of reprisal. This is especially evident when their actions—including redlining, federal food subsidy policies, and land use policies fostering suburbanization—are the root cause of the deprivation that FDIs experience (see Kirschenmen and Meckerman 1991; Wilson 1996, Chapter 5; Morland et al. 2002; Shelby 2007, 140; Monsivais, McLain, and Drewnowski 2010; Segal 2010; Coates 2014).

Taken together, these dynamics reflect the breakdown of both the informational and the protective roles of democratic institutions. The breakdown of the informational role applies to the poor and middle classes generally (see Bartels 2008). This is also the case with the capacity for effective redress under the protective role. So I set discussion of these matters aside. This leaves us with the task of assessing how the state should discharge the shielding component of the protective role on behalf of FDIs. The conceptual framework the state should use to assess the suitability of programs and policies is a function of the metric of justice that best facilitates the capacity of FDIs to both avoid deprivation and actively ward it off. Three metrics currently hold sway among philosophers: resources, capabilities, and functionings.[3] The debate between resourcists and capabilities theorists is quite complex. I focus on issues that bear directly on the case at hand. I leave discussion of functionings for later.

3. Resources and Capabilities

I treat John Rawls as the standard bearer for resourcism.[4] He conceptualizes resources in terms of social primary goods, including basic rights, liberties, decent educational and employment opportunities, and wealth and income. These goods provide the 'all-purpose means' (2001, 57)—or a specification of the standard human needs and endowments (1993, 188)—that enable citizens to develop and exercise their two moral powers: their capacity for a sense of justice and a conception of the good life. So they are goods that a rational person would want whatever else they want (see Rawls 1971, 92, 1993, 76).[5]

That a metric of justice specifies *standard* human needs and endowments is critical, according to resourcists. Thomas Pogge contends that this provides the only plausible way to delineate a public criterion of social justice: a criterion by which to publicly assess whether feasible institutional structures are just. It supports the employment of an objective (see Pogge 2010, 51; Kelly 2010, 62) and practical metric for establishing whether the state is, with equal regard, facilitating the two moral powers of all citizens. Moreover, by generally not looking too closely at people's heterogeneous abilities and talents, the state avoids stigmatizing 'natural' inequalities: inequalities resulting from ordinary genetic variations. Resourcists thus argue that they *promote* the right sorts of interpersonal comparisons—between citizens' access to the social primary goods—and *prohibit* the wrong sorts of interpersonal comparisons—between citizens' natural endowments. Pogge asserts that this leaves plenty of room for the state to account for '*socially caused*' heterogeneities (2010, 29), or differences in citizens' mental and physical constitutions that are the product of past inequalities in resource access. Doing so requires avoiding further unequal treatment and providing adequate compensatory resources for the damage already inflicted.

To rectify the democratic failure to which FDIs are exposed, the state at least partially meets the demands of the shielding component of the protective role according to resourcists by repairing the damage done by endemic undernutrition. This must involve having affordable, healthy food readily available: local supermarkets with reasonably priced, high-quality produce; better stocked corner stores and street vendors; and greater access to produce stands, food co-ops, and farmers markets. Other steps can include providing access to meaningful employment and educational opportunities; developing a robust social safety net; restructuring agricultural subsidies that promote the production of unhealthy foods (see Caraher and Coveney 2004); ensuring guaranteed free or affordable access to preventive health care and nutritional counseling; and ensuring convenient access to adequate cooking and refrigeration facilities (see Wicks, Trevana, and Quine 2006).

These various means to deliver on the resourcist metric vary enormously in scope and difficulty of implementation, of course. They simply represent examples of programs and policies that resourcists can advocate to eradicate food deserts. Guaranteeing the availability of affordable, healthy food and delivering resources that aid in its acquisition and consumption would constitute a significant achievement. Yet, numerous studies show that on their own these two factors are not necessarily effective with improving long-term dietary habits of FDIs. Many FDIs lack the skills required to prepare and cook healthy food (see van der Horst, Bruner, and Siegrist 2011; Jacoyou et al. 2013; Saul and Curtis 2013). Many more lack dispositions that public health professionals regard as conducive to healthy eating (Dammann and Smith 2010; Ollberding et al. 2012).[6]

Within the context of his entitlement approach, Sen himself focuses on the guarantee of decent wages, a social safety net, and security against displacement from one's land. This list most prominently highlights the sorts of *assets* that famine victims must have to be able to legally acquire food. Sen presupposes as a matter of form that famine victims have the *ability* to cultivate food if they have the assets available to do so. Moreover, it goes without

saying that they have *attitudes* that incline them to consume nourishing foods. In this respect, Sen makes assumptions about famine victims that cannot be made when assessing how the state is to shield FDIs from conditions that compromise their well-being freedom and agency freedom. We cannot presume that FDIs have abilities and attitudes, any more than that they have assets, commensurate with improving long-term dietary habits (see Shaw 2006). The dimensions, if not necessarily the degree, of their deprivation exceed those of famine victims.

This presents a problem for resourcists. So long as the dietary habits of FDIs remain largely unchanged, the demand for healthy provisions will remain weak. State-supported interventions that encourage retail outlets to stock nutritious food are unlikely to succeed if they have little market-based incentive to continue supplying goods for which there is scant demand. The direct delivery of healthy provisions to FDIs would likely fare no better. Insofar as they are unable to offer means to facilitate long-term healthy eating habits among FDIs, resourcists cannot provide a promising basis for the permanent eradication of food deserts. FDIs would not be in a position to ward off deprivation, which is necessary for the rectification of the democratic failure to which they are exposed.

I now lay out how basing programs and policies on the capabilities approach is preferable in this regard. In accordance with the capabilities approach, people are treated justly insofar as their ability to achieve preferred functionings—ends that they have reason to value—is facilitated by the state. 'Capability reflects a person's freedom to choose between alternative lives', Sen remarks (1992, 83; see also Terzi 2010, 164). Capability makes possible being and doing what one values. It embodies the ability to advance one's welfare and one's conception of a good life (see Sen 1992, 59ff).

Functionings run the gamut from being well nourished, to avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality, to having self-respect and taking part in the life of one's community. So the enjoyment of functionings is the basis of well-being and also a reflection of agency, and capabilities embody the means to achieve well-being and agency. Particularly important is not merely the ability to achieve valued functionings episodically but, stress Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit, to sustain valued functionings. 'To put it another way', they remark, 'exceptional risk and vulnerability is itself a disadvantage, whether or not the feared event ever actually happens' (2007, 9). So to be treated justly according to the capabilities approach entails that one can avoid corrosive forms of disadvantage, specifically sources of deprivation that have an adverse effect on one's quality of life over a whole life. It also requires that one is proof against vulnerability to social causes that can compromise capabilities.

Note the central distinction between resourcism and the capabilities approach. As Elizabeth Anderson remarks, while the former is focused on the provision of 'goods external to the person, such as income and wealth, job opportunities, and legal rights', the latter is focused on the development of 'states of the person' (2010, 81). Resourcists attend exclusively to the first two of the four As: availability and assets. Capabilities theorists also take account of the facilitation of abilities and attitudes. Pogge accepts this distinction (2010, 18) and for good reason on his account. First, attending to states of the person may unwittingly encourage the state to make invidious interpersonal comparisons of natural endowments, which resourcists seek to prohibit. Second, the capabilities approach requires the state to assess each individual's capacity to convert resources into valued functionings. This necessitates the establishment of a public criterion of social justice that is too demanding to be workable. Without some standardization of what counts as a valuable functioning, those with highly ambitious goals or with severe disabilities may need greater support to facilitate capabilities than the state should provide. Third, even if these matters can be addressed, capabilities theorists themselves acknowledge that putting the capabilities

approach into practice is not a straightforward exercise. There are potential difficulties associated with measuring capabilities, hence with subjecting the success of their facilitation to empirical assessment. Furthermore, Ingrid Robeyns notes that the capabilities approach is 'radically underspecified'. Putting it into practice requires 'the choice of whether to focus on functionings, capabilities, or both; the selection of relevant capabilities; and the decision whether or not trade-offs and indexing are necessary, and if so how to determine their weights' (2006, 373).

Anderson (2010, 95ff.) offers decisive responses to the first two objections, so I address only the third. Recent studies establish that quantitatively measuring the facilitation of capabilities is feasible. The way in which capabilities are measured suggests that the capabilities of FDIs, their attitudes toward them, and changes to both can be specified. Establishing whether policies succeed or fail on these grounds may be more difficult and time-intensive than resourcists are willing to countenance, but this is immaterial as a matter of justice. The capabilities approach provides means to envision how the state can support promising steps already being taken by FDIs who seek to assist fellow FDIs to develop attitudes and abilities that put them in a good position to ward off deprivation. So FDIs themselves can play an active role in the permanent eradication of food deserts in their communities.

4. The Facilitation of Capabilities and Democratic Rectification

One key element that makes the capabilities approach preferable to competing approaches is that it better accommodates harnessing the energy and initiative of FDIs who already seek to transform their communities. Perhaps more than any other factor, this can facilitate the permanent eradication of food deserts. I begin by cataloging fitting examples of programs and corresponding policy suggestions supplied by three respective food activists, all who are currently or previous FDIs. These programs and policy suggestions reflect their efforts to improve attitudes and abilities while also attending to availability and assets. So they exemplify the capabilities approach. I then outline ways in which the state can support these efforts and consider how the success of state support can be evaluated.

Skip Wiener runs the Urban Tree Connection (UTC), an urban farm in a food desert in Philadelphia. Wiener has lived in his community for years. His permanent residency has permitted him to build the sort of trust with locals that episodic intervention does not allow. Indeed, he notes that the sustained, one-on-one connections he has developed are necessary for long-term success with helping to improve the health and welfare of fellow community members (personal communication 2012).[7] He is adamant that for many FDIs these outcomes cannot be achieved only through the appropriation of a given resource set, as important as this is. Nor does he focus just on facilitating the development by community members of a specifiable set of individual skills. In consonance with the capabilities approach, he gives due consideration to a range of personal and social conditions that can enable optimal functioning (see Ruger 2010, 44). This is evident with respect to both implemented and proposed UTC programs.

In terms of making affordable, healthy food readily available, UTC sells produce to residents at such low prices that they rarely use SNAP benefits for their purchases, which they are eligible to do. Additionally, free produce is delivered directly to elderly residents, who often know how to prepare and enjoy consuming healthy dishes, having done so in their youth. This is particularly true of elderly women (see Hughes, Bennett, and Hetherington 2004). The main problems are that elderly residents lack access to fresh ingredients and, for some, adequate cooking facilities at home. For this reason, UTC also routinely shuttles them to its on-site kitchen, where they can brush up on their culinary skills and cook with fellow residents. Wiener asserts that the needs of the elderly hereby can be met

largely by adhering to the resourcist model. They have the requisite attitudes and, with adequate assets, can relatively easily refresh their cooking abilities.

This is not the case for children and non-elderly adults, however. With respect to children, Wiener contends that the most viable approach to avoid the development of poor eating habits—which must involve mitigating susceptibility to predatory advertizing and other such food industry exploits—is to get them growing, preparing, and consuming healthy food at as young an age as possible. The goal is to begin facilitating their development of health-conducive abilities and attitudes before poor eating habits are established.

Sustainable gardening programs provide children with fresh produce to bring home to their families. As they learn how food is grown and see their efforts pay off, they often take pride in their efforts. They also become more willing to consume the fruits of their labor (see Nolan et al. 2012). Increased gardening ability can itself lead to a preference transformation. Cooking skills improve through regular participation in on-site cooking classes. Doing both with peers can positively reinforce health-conducive abilities and attitudes. So both activities facilitate children's *health capability:* the willingness, states Jennifer Ruger, to 'seek good health *and* the ability to pursue it' (2010, 41).

Non-elderly adults can benefit from gardening and cooking classes as well, along with shopping tours and nutrition programs (see Saul and Curtis 2013). But Wiener acknowledges the difficulty of facilitating health capability among them because of their deeply entrenched poor eating habits. Most non-elderly FDIs have had few if any opportunities to develop abilities and attitudes that lead them to eat better when affordable, healthy food is made available to them. This in turn can undermine the success of Wiener's interventions with children if they lack opportunities to prepare and consume healthy foods at home. For this reason, Wiener is implementing three ambitious programs to connect the development of non-elderly adults' capabilities to community development. Programs like these offer fertile ground for the mutual reinforcement of personal and social conditions that enhance well-being freedom and agency freedom.

First, Wiener has begun organizing visits by local chefs to UTC to cook with young adults. This program creates an access point for gaining employment in Philadelphia's market-based food economy. It provides participants with practical knowledge of how to navigate this economy and hands-on cooking experience with experts. So, aspiration for gainful employment—in a community with chronically high joblessness—is linked with the facilitation of health-conducive abilities.

Second, Wiener envisions establishing a network of community gardens and urban farms throughout Philadelphia that share equipment and more evenly distribute affordable produce within the city's food deserts. This network can provide participants with managerial and organizational skills that enhance their employability. It also promotes community revitalization through the development of an *economy of security.* The production and consumption of healthy food takes place within a wider dynamic of giving and receiving support from one's neighbors. As such, Wiener foresees garden and farm workers strengthening their interest in and concern for the vitality of their communities, which may bolster their interest in honing their own cooking skills and improving their own eating habits.

Third, Wiener is seeking financial support from the city and state for a program that enables community organizers, teachers, pastors, public health professionals, and food producers and vendors throughout Philadelphia to more effectively coordinate their efforts to improve the plight of FDIs. This too can help to better distribute resources to those in need. It also can improve the capacity of these parties to spearhead the transformation of social norms both inside and outside food deserts in ways that may ease the conversion of these resources into valued functionings (see Ruger 2010, 45, for more on the significance of norm transformation).

Perhaps the most direct way to enhance health capability is to provide FDIs with the means to improve relevant skills and attitudes at home. Backyard Beds (BB), a startup also based in Philadelphia, provides raised beds and planting containers to residents. According to cofounder Lindsay Bushong, after visiting the homes of participants to assess their specific needs BB installs their beds; provides free starter seeds, soil, and a beginner's guide to gardening; and offers advice about what to plant and how to tend the bed given available light conditions (personal communication 2014). BB remains in contact with participants throughout the growing season. Early reports on gardening skill enhancement are promising. The approach taken by BB also fosters the establishment of numerous micro-level green spaces in a blighted community, which benefits the health and well-being of residents as well. Both outcomes promote the development of personal and social conditions that are conducive to long-term health.

Like Wiener, Bushong lives in the community she serves. She emphasizes that she does not consider her activity outreach. She has a passion for gardening and enjoys connecting with fellow community members who want to try their hand at it. This corresponds with the approach to addressing the needs of FDIs that Kareemah El-Amin advocates. Director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, El-Amin stresses the importance of engaging with FDIs as they are, where they are, and on their own terms (personal communication 2013). FDIs belong to communities that have been subject to intentional blighting, ignored outright for decades, or, at best, subject to episodic attempts by the state at token forms of assistance. In light of this history, El-Amin maintains that any outsider intent on working with FDIs must take the time to listen to and understand their specific stories. Outsiders must not enter with the mindset—as happens all too frequently—that they want to help but, rather, that they want to learn.[8]

Perhaps, then, state actors and those whom they charge with engaging on their behalf should aim in their interactions with FDIs to form reflective equilibriums: amalgamations of each affected party's views of the sorts of assets, abilities, and attitudes they need to develop long-term healthy eating habits. Serene Khader defends a 'deliberative perfectionist approach' to state intervention when dealing with those with adaptive preferences: self-depriving desires resulting from unjust social and economic conditions. Public institutions should facilitate basic flourishing. But in order not to override people's desires coercively, institutional representatives should 'work *with* deprived people to come up with strategies for change' (2011, 6). This is consonant with what Ruger calls the 'process aspect' (2004, 1077) of freedom, which requires attending to the *self-identified* needs of the deprived. This is perhaps the best way not just to address adaptive preference but also to work through cultural and class-based differences in conceptions of healthy eating and how best to achieve it (see James 2004; Terry 2009; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2010).

I have highlighted just a small sample of the programs developed by FDIs to make healthy food readily available, provide assets to obtain it, improve abilities to make good use of it, and develop attitudes to desire doing so. Taken together, they help some fellow community members to mitigate their deprivation. But their size and scope are currently too limited to make it possible for a critical mass of community members to avoid deprivation entirely, let alone ward it off. The development of a critical mass is what is required to permanently eradicate food deserts, and the permanent eradication of food deserts is required to fulfill the dictates of the shielding component of the protective role.

In terms of state intervention, it is clear that substantially increased financial support is warranted, which can be earmarked specifically to initiate and expand programs like those I highlight. The more money that is available to UTC, BB, and the like, the more opportunities they have to develop self-sustaining networks of local food production, distribution, and consumption. So too can they offer more programs aimed at enhancing

employability. Second, as Wiener's third pilot program indicates, the state should assist with the organization of cross-disciplinary coordination among FDIs and those who work on their behalf. This takes considerable time and effort. State institutions have the necessary scale to be of great assistance, so long—El-Amin stresses—as their representatives remain attuned to the avowed interests and needs of FDIs. Third, urban farms are most likely to be found in food deserts because they are located where vacant lots are plentiful. Given that urban farms are on the front lines of the struggle to eradicate food deserts, the state should fund their establishment and expansion. It also should decrease red tape that obstructs the purchase and conversion of vacant lots. Fourth, Wiener's considerations underscore the efficacy of banning predatory advertizing and related tactics by the food industry that seek to thwart the attitudinal changes that are required to eradicate food deserts (see Bittman 2012; Graff, Kunkel, and Mermin 2012; Quilliam, Rifon, and Weatherspoon 2012). Fifth, again in line with El-Amin's suggestion, the state must regularly solicit and be attentive to feedback from FDIs as it evaluates which programs and policies are working and which require alteration or elimination.

Taken together, steps like these would go a long way toward fulfilling the shielding component of the protective role. As with the resourcist programs and policies, which they complement rather than supplement, they obviously vary widely in scope and difficulty of implementation. But they are achievable. Furthermore, recent research indicates that capabilities are measurable, which supports the proposition that a public criterion of social justice that operates in the interest of FDIs and functions in accordance with the capabilities approach is feasible.

Paul Anand has spearheaded the effort to develop quantifiable and empirically testable capability indicators. Anand and van Hees (2006) and Anand et al. (2009) use survey data to compile measurements of people's satisfaction with their levels of capability with respect to an array of 'quasi-objective' variables. Each variable is universally valuable (hence *objective*), they claim; but how much and the way in which each matters differs from person to person (hence *quasi*-objective).[9] They include health, intellectual stimulation, fulfilling social relationships, a clean and pleasant environment, and a sense of personal integrity (Anand and van Hees 2006, 280). Analysis of their results includes ordinal logistical regression models of individuals' satisfaction with their overall capability set, rank correlations between their self-reported capabilities and views about the interpersonal distribution of capabilities, rank correlations between their capabilities and achievements, and ordered logit models of achievements as a function of corresponding capabilities.

Robeyns (2005) contends that the development of a single universally applicable capabilities list is unlikely to be useful for policy analysts. But this creates no obvious difficulty for establishing a public criterion of social justice that accounts for the specific needs of FDIs. Indeed, it motivates carefully assessing with FDIs the capabilities they should develop: from facility with growing, preparing, and cooking food; to knowledge about nutrition, how to navigate the market-based food economy, and how to network; to the development of economies of security and green spaces; to the identification and expression of needs, interests, and potential sources of culture- and class-based conflict. Robeyns (2006) also suggests that measuring satisfaction with capabilities is 'second-best' if researchers intend to measure individuals' capabilities per se. There may be discrepancies between what respondents claim they can achieve and what they actually can achieve. For this reason, both she and Anand et al. (2009) urge caution with the interpretation and application of their data.

But it is worth noting that Anand's studies provide a clear indication that both a sense of how capabilities are distributed interpersonally and the freedom that a person takes herself or himself to have should be included in the determination of their utility function (see also Carter 1999). Insofar as resourcists fail to take account of these considerations, they

maintain an incomplete view of what constitutes a satisfactory life. They overlook the value that people attribute to both opportunity and distributive justice.

There is an additional reason to give special attention to the measurement of capabilities when assessing what the rectification of democratic failure requires for FDIs. Richardson (2000) suggests that while measuring capabilities is important, there are many cases in which individuals' level of functioning deserves normative primacy over their level of capability to function. In these cases (Richardson points specifically to anti-smoking policies), what should matter to the state is what people *do* achieve rather than what they *can* achieve.

But taking this approach gives inadequate attention to *how* functionings are to be achieved, which is particularly important when endeavoring to permanently eradicate food deserts. That FDIs become healthier matters greatly, but that they are healthier *because they can ward off deprivation* matters more.[10] Insofar as the facilitation of capabilities is critical for this to take place, measuring capabilities should take normative precedence in the case at hand. Furthermore, it is worth once again emphasizing El-Amin's main point. The long history of the state denying FDIs agency obligates those acting on its behalf to attentively listen to and learn from them. So, implementing programs that aim primarily to achieve functionings may be problematic as a matter of justice and perhaps even counterproductive. It is much easier to reject state support if one is uncertain that it respects one's agency or tracks one's avowed needs and interests.

5. Conclusion

The steps recommended by resourcists provide a fitting starting point for the compensation and reparation of the democratic failure to which FDIs are exposed. As a matter of justice, the achievement of functionings surely deserves consideration as well. But envisioning how to eradicate food deserts is best conducted from within a conceptual framework that gives normative primacy to the capabilities approach. Is a public criterion of social justice that meets the requirements of this framework demanding? It certainly is, particularly because there may be no obvious ways to determine in advance of engagement with FDIs how best to facilitate long-term healthy eating habits. But is this criterion too demanding? I do not believe so. Not only can it be met with sustained effort, but, properly carried out, it also can give FDIs the capacity not just to avoid deprivation but also actively to ward it off. This is critical if the eradication of food deserts is to be self-sustaining, which must be so if the state is to fulfill the dictates of the shielding component of the protective role. Of course, whether the approach outlined here proves adequate for facilitating the health capability of FDIs must be subject to ongoing evaluation. But with the employment of a fitting metric for the delivery of justice, we have a clearer vision of how to rectify a critical failure of democratic governance.

Notes

1. I will not address criticisms and counter-criticisms of the entitlement approach. For representative criticisms, see Bowbrick (1986), de Waal (1990), Gore (1993), Devereux (2001), and Elahi (2006). For replies, see Sen (1986), Osmani (1991, 1995), Tiwari (2007), and Rubin (2009).
2. If Sen is suggesting that a functional democracy provides a sufficient condition for the prevention of major famines, both Myhrvold-Hanssen (2003) and Rubin (2009) provide evidence that challenges this proposition. Kent (2005) suggests—pointing to Sen (2000, 16)—that Sen asserts only that functional democracies greatly facilitate prevention of major famines.
3. Sen (1985b) offers a decisive argument to reject well-being as a viable metric. Several commentators—including Arneson (1990), Cohen (1993), and Roemer (1998)—defend regarding opportunities for well-being as yet

another viable metric. Vallentyne (2005) contends that the most plausible version of it is essentially identical to the most plausible version of the capabilities approach.

4. Arnsberger (1997) suggests that this honor should fall to Dworkin (1981). Pogge (2010) defends what he takes to be a more 'sophisticated resourcist' approach inspired by Rawls. See also Bojer (2006).
5. Pogge argues that even though resourcists defend reliance on a conception of standard needs and endowments, they still can 'take full account of the full range of diverse human needs and endowments' (2010, 31). See Anderson (2010) and Oosterlaken (2013) for criticisms of this claim.
6. Wilkerson (2010) contends that public health professionals often adhere to norms of beauty that lead them to privilege specific body types whether or not they correlate with health. This highlights the importance of fostering sustained deliberation among all affected parties, as I discuss below.
7. On the perils of episodic intervention, see Chamberlin et al. (2002) and Sonneville et al. (2009).
8. For more on the perils of entering at-risk communities with too rigid a preconceived agenda, see Wrieden et al. (2007) and Guthman (2008).
9. For more on the use of quasi-objective variables, see Sen (1985a), Griffin (1986), and Qizilbash (1997). Nussbaum's (2000) well-known capabilities list is intended to provide a universalizable delineation of constitutional essentials.
10. See Alkire's (2002, 144ff.) corresponding discussion of autonomy-compatible approaches to poverty reduction.

References

Alkire, S. 2002. *Valuing Freedoms*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Alviola, P. A., R. M. Mayga Jr., and M. Thomsen. 2013. "Food Deserts and Childhood Obesity." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 35 (1): 106–124.

Anand, P., and M. van Hees. 2006. "Capabilities and Achievements: An Empirical Study." *Journal of Socio-Economics* 35: 268–284.

Anand, P., G. Hunter, I. Carter, K. Dowding, F. Guala, and M. van Hees. 2009. "The Development of Capabilities Indicators." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 10 (1): 125–152.

Anderson, E. S. 2010. "Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice." In *Measuring Justice*, edited by H. Brighouse and I. Robeyns, 81–100. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Arneson, R. 1990. "Liberalism, Distributive Subjectivism, and Equal Opportunity for Welfare." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19: 158–194.

Arnsberger, C. 1997. "Reformulating Equality of Resources." *Economics and Philosophy* 13 (1): 61–77.

Bartels, L. M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bittman, M. 2012. "The Right to Sell Kids Junk" *The New York Times*, March 27. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/the-right-to-sell-kids-junk/?_r=0

Bojer, H. 2006. "Resources versus Capabilities: A Critical Discussion." *Memorandum* 8. http://www.capabilityapproach.com/pubs/5_2_Bojer.pdf

Bowbrick, P. 1986. "The Causes of Famine: A Refutation of Professor Sen's Theory." *Food Policy* 11 (2): 105–124.

Caraher, M., and J. Coveney. 2004. "Public Health Nutrition and Food Policy." *Public Health Nutrition* 7 (5): 591–598.

Carter, I. 1999. *A Measure of Freedom*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Chamberlin, L. A., S. N. Sherman, A. Jain, S. W. Powers, and R. C. Whitaker. 2002. "The Challenge of Preventing and Treating Obesity in Low-Income, Preschool Children: Perceptions of WIC Health Care Professionals." *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 156 (7): 662–668.

Coates, T. 2014. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic,* May. http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

Cohen, G. A. 1993. "Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods, and Capabilities." In *The Quality of Life*, edited by M. Nussbaum, and A. Sen, 9–29. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Dammann, K. W., and C. Smith. 2010. "Race, Homelessness, and Other Environmental Factors Associated with the Food-Purchasing Behavior of Low-Income Women." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 110 (9): 1351–1356.

Devereux, S. 2001. "Sen's Entitlement Approach: Critiques and Counter-Critiques." *Oxford Development Studies* 29 (3): 245–263.

Drèze, J., and A. Sen. 1989. *Hunger and Public Action*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Dworkin, R. 1981. "What Is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10 (4): 283–345.

Elahi, K. Q. 2006. "Entitlement Failure and Deprivation: A Critique of Sen's Famine Philosophy." *Journal of Development Studies* 42 (4): 541–558.

Gallagher, Mari. 2006. "Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago." Gallagher Research and Consulting Group. http://www.marigallagher.com/projects/4

Gore, C. 1993. "Entitlement Relations and 'Unruly' Social Practices: A Comment on the Work of Amartya Sen." *Journal of Development Studies* 29 (3): 429–460.

Graff, S., D. Kunkel, and S. E. Mermin. 2012. "Government Can Regulate Food Advertizing to Children because Cognitive Research Shows It Is Inherently Misleading." *Health Affairs* 31 (2): 392–398.

Griffin, J. 1986. *Well-Being*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Guthman, J. 2008. "Bringing G. Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practices." *Cultural Geographies* 15 (4): 431–447.

Hayes-Conroy, A., and J. Hayes-Conroy. 2010. "Visceral Difference: Variations in Feeling (Slow) Food." *Environment and Planning A* 42: 2956–2971.

van der Horst, K., T. A. Bruner, and M. Siegrist. 2011. "Ready-Meal Consumption: Associations with Weight Status and Cooking Skills." *Public Health Nutrition* 14 (2): 239–245.

Hughes, G., K. M. Bennett, and M. M. Hetherington. 2004. "Old and Alone: Barriers to Healthy Eating in Older Men Living on Their Own." *Appetite* 43 (3): 269–276.

Jacoyou, M., D. C. Pattieson, H. Truby, and C. Palermo. 2013. "Social Health and Nutrition Impacts of Community Kitchens: A Systematic Review." *Public Health Nutrition* 16 (3): 535–543.

James, D. 2004. "Factors Influencing Food Choices, Dietary Intake, and Nutrition-Related Attitudes among African-Americans: Application of a Culturally Sensitive Model." *Ethnicity & Health* 9 (4): 349–367.

Kelly, E. 2010. "Equal Opportunity, Unequal Capability." In *Measuring Justice*, edited by H. Brighouse, and I. Robeyns, 61–80. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Kent, G. 2005. *Freedom from Want*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Khader, S. J. 2011. *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kirschenmen, J., and K. M. Neckerman. 1991. "'We'd Love to Hire Them, But … ': The Meaning of Race for Employers." In *The Urban Underclass*, edited by C. Jencks, and P. E. Peterson, 203–232. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Lucas, G. 1990. "African Famine: New Economic and Ethical Perspectives." *Journal of Philosophy* 87: 629–641.

MacIntyre, S. 2007. "Deprivation Amplification Revisited; Or, Is It Always True that Poorer Places Have Poorer Access to Resources for Healthy Diets and Physical Activity?" *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 4: 32.

Monsivais, P., J. McLain, and A. Drewnowski. 2010. "The Rising Disparity in the Price of Healthy Foods: 2004–2008." *Food Policy* 35 (6): 514–520.

Morland, K., S. Wing, A. Diez-Rouz, and C. Poole. 2002. "Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22 (1): 23–29.

Myhrvold-Hanssen, T. L. 2003. "Democracy, News Media, and Famine Prevention: Amartya Sen and the Bahir Famine of 1966–67." Unpublished Manuscript. http://www.disasterdiplomacy.or/MyhrvoldHanssenBiharFamine.rtf

Nolan, G. A., A. L. McFarland, J. M. Zajicek, and T. M. Waliczek. 2012. "The Effects of Nutrition Education and Gardening on Attitudes, Preferences, and Knowledge of Minority Second to Fifth Graders in the Rio Grande Valley Toward Fruits and Vegetables." *HortTechnology* 22 (3): 299–304.

Nussbaum, M. 2000. *Women and Human Development*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Ollberding, N. J., C. R. Nigg, K. S. Geller, C. C. Horwath, R. W. Motl, and R. K. Dishman. 2012. "Food Outlet Accessibility and Fruit and Vegetable Consumption." *American Journal of Health Promotion* 26 (6): 366–370.

Oosterlaken, I. 2013. "Is Pogge a Capability Theorist in Disguise? A Critical Examination of Thomas Pogge's Defence of Rawlsian Resourcism." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (1): 205–215.

Osmani, S. 1991. "Comments on Alex de Waal's 'Re-assessment of Entitlement Theory in the Light of Recent Famines in Africa." *Development and Change* 22 (3): 587–596.

Osmani, Si. 1995. "The Entitlement Approach to Famine: An Assessment." In *Choice, Welfare, and Development*, edited by K. Basu, P. K. Pattanaik, and K. Suzumura, 253–294. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Pogge, T. 2010. "A Critique of the Capability Approach." In *Measuring Justice*, edited by H. Brighouse, and I. Robeyns, 17–60. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Qizilbash, M. 1997. "Pluralism and Well-Being Indices." *World Development* 25 (12): 2009–2026.

Quilliam, E. T., N. J. Rifon, and L. Weatherspoon. 2012. "Integrated Tactics for Marketing Food to Children: Below the Belt and Regulation Radar." Presented at the American Public Health Association meetings, October 2012.

Rawls, J. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rawls, J. 1993. *Political Liberalism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Rawls, J. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Richardson, H. S. 2000. "Some Limitations of Nussbaum's Capabilities." *Quinnipiac Law Review* 19: 309–322.

Robeyns, I. 2005. "Selecting Capabilities for Quality of Life Measurement." *Social Indicators Research* 74: 191–215.

Robeyns, I. 2006. "The Capabilities Approach in Practice." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14 (3): 351–376.

Roemer, J. 1998. *Equality of Opportunity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Rubin, O. 2009. "The Merits of Democracy in Famine Protection—Fact or Fallacy?" *European Journal of Development Research* 21 (5): 699–717.
Ruger, J. P. 2004. "Health and Social Justice." *The Lancet* 364: 1075–1080.
Ruger, J. P. 2010. "Health Capability: Conceptualization and Operationalization." *American Journal of Public Health* 100 (1): 41–49.
Saul, N., and A. Curtis. 2013. *The Stop*. Toronto: Random House Canada.
Segal, A. 2010. "Food Deserts: A Global Crisis in New York City." *Consilience* 3 (1): 197–214.
Sen, A. 1981a. "Ingredients of Famine Analysis: Availability and Entitlements." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 96: 433–464.
Sen, A. 1981b. *Poverty and Famines*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Sen, A. 1985a. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Amsterdam: North-Holland.
Sen, A. 1985b. "Well-being, Agency, and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984." *The Journal of Philosophy* 82: 169–221.
Sen, A. 1986. "The Causes of Famine: A Reply." *Food Policy* 11 (2): 125–132.
Sen, A. 1992. *Inequality Reexamined*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Sen, A. 1997. *Resources, Values, and Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Sen, A. 1999. "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10 (3): 3–17.
Sen, A. 2000. *Development as Freedom*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
Sen, A. 2004. "Why Health Equity?" In *Public Health, Ethics, and Equity*, edited by S. Anand, F. Peter, and A. Sen, 21–34. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Sen, A. 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Shaw, H. J. 2006. "Food Deserts: Towards the Development of a Classification." *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* 88 (2): 231–247.
Shelby, T. 2007. "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35 (2): 126–160.
Sonneville, K. R., N. La Pelle, E. M. Taveras, M. W. Gillman, and L. A. Prosser. 2009. "Economic and Other Barriers to Adopting Recommendations to Prevent Childhood Obesity: Results of a Focus Group Study with Parents." *BMC Pediatrics* 9: 81.
Terry, B. 2009. *Vegan Soul Kitchen*. Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press.
Terzi, L. 2010. "What Metric for Justice for Disabled People? Capability and Disability." *Measuring Justice*, edited by H. Brighouse and I. Robeyns, 150–173. New York, MA: Cambridge University Press.
Tiwari, M. 2007. "Chronic Poverty and Entitlement Theory." *Third World Quarterly* 28 (1): 171–191.
Vallentyne, P. 2005. "Debate: Capabilities versus Opportunities for Wellbeing." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (3): 359–371.
de Waal, A. 1990. "A Re-assessment of Entitlement Theory in the Light of the Recent Famines in Africa." *Development and Change* 21: 469–490.
Whitacre, P., P. Tsai, and J. Mulligan. 2009. *The Public Health Effects of Food Deserts*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
Wicks, R., L. J. Trevana, and S. Quine. 2006. "Experience of Food Insecurity among Urban Soup Kitchen Consumers: Insights for Improving Nutrition and Well-Being." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106 (6): 921–924.
Wilkerson, A. 2010. "From the Land of the Fat to the Fat of the Land: The Thin Contract, Food Cultures, and Social Justice." In *Whose Weight is it Anyway*, edited by S. Vandamme, S. van de Vothorst, and I. de Beaufort, 143–157. Leuven: Acco Academic.
Wilson, W. J. 1996. *When Work Disappears*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
Wolff, J., and A.De-Shalit. 2007. *Disadvantage*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Wrieden, W. L., A. S. Anderson, P. J. Longbottom, K. Valentine, M. Stead, M. Caraher, T. Lang, B. Gray, and E. H. Dowler. 2007. "The Impact of a Community-Based Food Skills Intervention on Cooking Confidence, Food Preparation Methods, and Dietary Choices—An Exploratory Trial." *Public Health Nutrition* 10 (2): 203–211.
Wrigle, N., D. Warm, B. Margetts, and A. Whelan. 2002. "Assessing the Impact of Improved Retails Access on Diet in a 'Food Desert': A Preliminary Report." *Urban Studies* 39 (11): 2061–2082.

About the Author

Andrew F. Smith is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Drexel University, specializing in social and political philosophy. His published work includes *The Deliberative Impulse* (Lexington Books 2011) and articles on deliberative democracy, democratic theory, political liberalism, pragmatism, and religion in the public sphere.