The Human Development Paradigm: Operationalizing Sen's Ideas on Capabilities

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THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: OPERATIONALIZING SEN'S IDEAS ON CAPABILITIES

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

ABSTRACT

Amartya Sen's ideas constitute the core principles of a development approach that has evolved in the Human Development Reports. This approach is a ''paradigm'' based on the concept of well-being that can help define public policy, but does not embody a set of prescriptions. The current movement from an age of development planning to an age of globalization has meant an increasing attention to agency aspects of development. While earlier Human Development Reports emphasized measures such as the provision of public services, recent ones have focused more on people's political empowerment. This paper reflects on Sen's work in light of this shift in emphasis. Gender analysis has been central to the development of the new agency-driven paradigm, and gender equity is a core concern. A gender perspective has also helped highlight important aspects of this paradigm, such as the role of collective agency in promoting development.

KEYWORDS
Amartya Sen, human development, capabilities, human rights, gender, democratic governance

INTRODUCTION

The recognition of equal rights for women along with men, and the determination to combat discrimination on the basis of gender are achievements equal in importance to the abolition of slavery, the elimination of colonialism and the establishment of equal rights for racial and ethnic minorities.

(United Nations Development Programme 1995)

The Human Development Reports (HDRs), published annually for UNDP since 1990, have used Amartya Sen's capability approach as a conceptual framework in their analyses of contemporary development challenges. Over time these reports have developed a distinct development paradigm – the human development approach – that now informs policy

choices in many areas, such as poverty reduction, sustainable develop-ment, gender inequalities, governance, and globalization. What, then, are the policy implications of Sen's work on capabilities, development, freedom, and human rights?

Sen's ideas provide the core principles of a development approach whose flexible framework allows policy-makers to analyze diverse challenges that poor people and poor countries face, rather than imposing a rigid orthodoxy with a set of policy prescriptions. This paper identifies the key elements of Sen's paradigm as they have been applied to diverse policy questions. It shows how the emphasis has evolved over the years from the provision of public services to political empowerment and how gender issues have been central to this paradigm shift. Not only is gender equity a core concern, but also gender analysis has shaped some important aspects of this paradigm, such as the role of collective agency in promoting development.

In the discussion below, I will first outline the central features of the human development approach and how it differs from other paradigms such as the basic needs and human rights approaches, including their attitude towards gender. Then I will highlight some of the gender dimensions more specifically.

I. SEN AND THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

The first Human Development Report launched by Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 had an explicit purpose: ''to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people centered policies'' (Mahbub ul Haq 1995). The report is not just *any* report that the UNDP might commission on a given development theme, nor is it a status report for monitoring development. It has a much broader ambition, namely setting out a comprehensive approach to development, including an agenda of policy priorities, tools of analysis and measurement, and a coherent conceptual framework. As Richard Jolly (2003) notes:

> [The] Human Development (HD) approach embodies a robust para-digm, which may be contrasted with the neoliberal (NL) paradigm of the Washington consensus. There are points of overlap, but also impor-tant points of difference in objectives, assumptions, constraints and in the main areas for policy and in the indicators for assessing results.

To launch the HDRs, Haq brought together a group of fellow development economists and friends, among them Paul Streeten and Frances Stewart, who had worked with him on the basic needs approach; Gus Ranis and Keith Griffin, his collaborators in Pakistan; and others, such as Sudhir Anand and Meghnad Desai, who had creative expertise in quantitative methods. Dozens more who shared his vision also contributed (Haq 1995). But it was Sen's work on capabilities and functionings that provided the strong conceptual

foundation for the new paradigm. His approach defined human development as the process of enlarging a person's ''functionings and capabilities to function, the range of things that a person could do and be in her life,'' expressed in the HDRs as expanding ''choices'' (Amartya Sen 1989).[1]

Sen would continue to influence the evolution of the human development approach, refining and broadening the basic concepts and measurement tools as new areas of policy challenges were tackled, from sustainable development (*United Nations Development Programme* 1994) to gender equality (*United Nations Development Programme* 1995), poverty (*United Nations Development Programme* 1997), consumption and sustainable development (*United Nations Development Programme* 1998), human rights (*United Nations Development Programme* 2000), and democracy (*United Nations Development Programme* 2002). In turn, the HDRs have paralleled Sen's own work on freedom, participation, and agency, incorporating more explicit references to human rights and freedoms. With Anand, Sen also played a critical role in developing the measurement tools of human development, starting with the Human Development Index (HDI) and going on to cover issues such as gender equality – the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were developed in 1995 – and the measurement of poverty in human lives rather than incomes through the Human Poverty Index (HPI), published in the 1997 HDR.

Thus, while Sen helped develop the initial conceptual framework and measurement tools used in the HDRs, the reports carried Sen's work even further as they explored the policy implications of this development approach in areas that are of major contemporary significance.[2]

II. THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH: KEY ELEMENTS

Sen's theory of development as an expansion of capabilities is the starting point for the human development approach: the idea that the purpose of development is to improve human lives by expanding the range of things that a person can be and do, such as to be healthy and well nourished, to be knowledgeable, and to participate in community life. Seen from this viewpoint, development is about removing the obstacles to what a person can do in life, obstacles such as illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, or lack of civil and political freedoms.

It is important to emphasize that the human development approach contains two central theses about people and development, and to distinguish between them. They are what Sen calls the ''evaluative aspect'' and the ''agency aspect'' (Amartya Sen 2002). The first is concerned with evaluating improvements in human lives as an explicit development objective and using human achievements as key indicators of progress. This contrasts with paradigms that focus on economic performance. The

second is concerned with what human beings can do to achieve such improvements, particularly through policy and political changes. The human development approach is commonly associated with the evaluative aspect. The agency aspect is less widely appreciated.

To understand these key elements of the human development approach and their relevance for development policy and strategy, it helps to compare it with other approaches that have influenced public policy debates, such as the dominant neoliberal paradigm and a predecessor to the human development approach, the basic needs approach.[3]

Explicit philosophical foundations and conceptual roots

As Martha Nussbaum (2000) points out, all public policy formulation unavoidably reflects normative positions and so should be subjected to critical philosophical reasoning. An important feature of the human development approach is that it has an explicit basis in philosophical reasoning. Sen has written extensively about the conceptual roots of capabilities in the longstanding intellectual traditions of philosophy, political economy, and economics, dating back to Aristotle and including the works of Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant, among others. Both Sen's own work (e.g., Sen 1989) and the HDRs (*United Nations Development Programme* 1990, 1996) trace these connections.

Not only do the philosophical underpinnings of neoliberalism and the basic needs approach differ from those of the HDA, but they are also less explicit. Although all three approaches are ultimately concerned with human well-being, they give this concept different meanings. Neoliberalism defines well-being as utility maximization. Sen sets out the limitations of this approach (Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams 1982), among which the most significant is the neglect of rights, freedoms, and human agency. The basic needs approach places people at the center of development, but the emphasis on specifying ''basic needs'' in terms of supplying services and commodities points to a commodities basis rather than a capabilities basis in defining human well-being. Although many of the proponents of the basic needs approach, such as Streeten, emphasized people's participation and political constraints, the absence of a strong and explicit philosophical foundation left the approach open to translation into policy that focused mainly on meeting people's material needs, or ''count, cost, and deliver,'' rather than on the human rights, freedoms, and agency emphasized in the human development approach.

Evaluative aspects

The human development approach is unique in its emphasis on assessing development by how well it expands the capabilities of all people. Thus,

economic growth is only a means and not an end in itself. Furthermore, the concern with the well-being of *all* people emphasizes equity as a major policy objective, requiring monitoring not only through national averages, but also via measures of deprivation and distribution.

The establishment of measurement tools for evaluating human achievements was central to introducing human development as an alternative paradigm and to gaining the attention of policy-makers. Haq was convinced that a simple combined measure of human development was essential for convincing the public, academics, and policy-makers that they should evaluate development by advances in human well-being and not only by advances in the economy. Although Sen initially opposed this idea, he went on to help Haq develop the Human Development Index (HDI), a composite index of achievements in human development. Sen was concerned by the difficulties of capturing the full complexity of human capabilities in a single index. But he was persuaded by Haq's insistence that only a single number could shift the attention of policy-makers from material output to human well-being as a real measure of progress (*United Nations Development Programme* 1999).

The HDI had a significant policy impact when first formulated and continues to command policy attention. HDI estimates of countries, as well as the ''disaggregated HDIs'' for different regions or ethnic groups within countries, had the intended effect of focusing greater attention on basic human capabilities, especially those included in the HDI (the capability to survive and be healthy, to be knowledgeable, and to enjoy a decent standard of living). The HDI ranking of countries provoked policy-makers to examine how each country fared in this regard and to ask why some countries and regions, such as Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, or the state of Kerala in India, managed to achieve much higher levels of ''human development'' in comparison to countries with similar income levels. The comparison of a country's HDI rank with its GDP per capita rank became, in this regard, more critical than the HDI itself as a measure of a country's human development.

Two decisions made in devising the HDI were particularly important: one concerned the choice of capabilities to be included, and the other had to do with the focus on national averages rather than disparities.

One of the most difficult tasks in applying the capabilities approach to development policy is deciding which capabilities are most important.[4] The range of human capabilities is infinite and the value that individuals assign to each one can vary from person to person. Even if some capabilities deserve greater public attention than others, the relative importance of capabilities can vary with social context – from one community or country to another, and from one point of time to another. Thus ''the task of specification must relate to the underlying motivation of the exercise as well as dealing with the social values involved'' (Sen 1989).

HDRs have used two criteria in deciding which capabilities are most important: first, they must be *universally valued* by people across the world; and second, they must be *basic*, meaning their lack would foreclose many other capabilities. But the human development approach has deliberately remained open-ended in the choice of capabilities, letting them vary over time and place. This approach contrasts with that of the basic needs approach, which listed the important human needs without an explicit explanation justifying the selection and without providing a rationale for who should be making the list. It also contrasts with other work using the capability approach, such as Nussbaum's efforts to finalize a list of essential capabilities (Nussbaum 2000).[5] But the HDRs have argued that the capabilities given priority within public policy will change over time and from one community to another. As an exercise in the global evaluation of development, the HDRs had to focus simply on those capabilities that are universally valued and ''basic'' (i.e., capabilities on which many choices in life depended), reflected in the three HDI capabilities: to be knowledgeable, to survive, and to enjoy a decent standard of living.

A second significant question that arose in devising the HDI was whether it should reflect equity. Conceptualized as a measure of average achievements, HDI does not take into account the distribution of achievements, which leaves out equity, an essential outcome by which to evaluate progress. Gender disparities were a central feature of the concern with equity, along with other disparities such as those of class, ethnicity, or rural/urban residence. Some argued that to combine a distribution measure with an average achievement measure would be like adding apples and oranges. Moreover, there are many forms of disparities, predicated on gender, ethnicity, race, and so on, and the importance and relevance of particular forms of disparities can differ from one country to another.

Given these difficulties, HDI remains a measure of average achievement and its strength lies in its simplicity: a simple measure is more understandable to the policy-maker and the public, sending a clear message about what makes the measure go up or down (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Kate Raworth, and A. K. Shiva Kumar 2003). But from the beginning, attempts were also made to develop supplementary measures that adjust the HDI by gender disparity, showing that even if two countries have the same average achievement in terms of HDI, this average may hide differences with respect to gender disparity. To make this point initially, HDRs disaggregated HDIs for women and men. Later, an index of human development that incorporated gender disparity was developed. The Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) adjusts the HDI for gender disparity and penalizes countries accordingly (*United Nations Development Programme* 1995 and subsequent issues). The 1995 HDR, which marked the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, concluded that ''human development is endangered unless it is engendered.''

Unfortunately, the human development approach has often been misconstrued as being narrowly limited to the three capabilities included in the HDI, or even more narrowly to their indicators (literacy and schooling, life expectancy, and adjusted income). This, in turn, has led many to conclude that the human development approach has little to offer that is different from the basic needs approach or the concept of human resource development.

But the intent of the human development approach was never to limit itself to the narrow definitions of the HDI. The concept of human development is much more complex and broader than its measure; it is about people being able to live in freedom and dignity, and being able to exercise choices to pursue a full and creative life. Development priorities are therefore about removing restrictions. Illiteracy, ill health, and a lack of command over resources restrict choices, but so do many other conditions such as social and political oppression that restrict one's participation in the life of a community, or the exercise of autonomy in making decisions about one's own life. Ironically, the very success of the HDI has contributed to this narrow interpretation of the human development approach, and the absence of indicators for freedom in the HDI and in the HDR statistical tables contributes to a widespread misperception of human development as equivalent to social development combined with equitable economic growth. The human development concept has been trapped inside its reduced measure (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr 2003).

Over the years, however, other human capabilities have received greater attention, especially those linked to freedom from social and political oppression. Gender issues have played a central role in highlighting these issues. The 1995 HDR on gender thus went far beyond education, health, and income outcomes to emphasize the importance of women's equal participation in political and professional life, their autonomy in decision-making, and the unequal sharing of unpaid work with men. The GEM was developed as a measure of ''gender empowerment,'' and more recent HDRs have explored the role of human rights and human rights instruments (*United Nations Development Programme* 2000) and the role of democratic political institutions (*United Nations Development Programme* 2002) in human development. These reports have asserted that enjoying political and civil freedoms and participating in community decision-making processes are as important as being literate and enjoying good health. Even the definition of human development has changed subtly, with a stronger and unambiguous emphasis on civil and political freedoms. In 1990 the HDR stated:

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent

standard of living. *Additional choices* include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect [my emphasis].[6]

In 2001 it stated:

> The most basic capabilities for human development are to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living *and to be able to participate in the life of the community.*

And in emphasizing the freedom to choose, the 1995 HDR specifically recognized the injustice of gender inequality:

> Human development is a process of enlarging the choices of all people, not just for one part of society. Such a process becomes unjust and discriminatory if most women are excluded from its benefits.
> (*United Nations Development Programme* 1995)

The policy implication of this evolution in the prioritizing of capabilities is a corresponding shift in focus from social and economic policies to political institutions and processes. Political reforms have become important aspects of the human development policy agenda. This contrasts with the neoliberal and basic needs approaches. The neoliberal approach emphasizes institutional efficiency – either in the market or in the provision of public services. These concerns dominate the current debates on ''good'' governance, while the human development approach is concerned with governance for social justice, a governance that enlarges the participation, power, and influence of the people, especially those who are disadvantaged, such as women, ethnic minorities, and the poor. From this viewpoint, a measure that reflects disparities, such as the GDI or the disaggregated HDIs developed in national human development reports that show huge differences in human development by region or ethnic group, is particularly powerful.

Agency aspects

The opening lines of the very first 1990 HDR stated: ''People are the real wealth of a nation'' (*United Nations Development Programme* 1990). People are not simply beneficiaries of economic and social progress in a society, but are active agents of change. The human development approach shares with other approaches the idea that investing in people's education and health is a powerful means to achieve overall economic and social progress in societies. But it goes much further in at least two ways: first in its concern with the role of human agency for changing policy, social commitment, and norms that require collective action, and second in its concern with human rights.

Human beings can be agents of change through both individual action and collective action. Individual action shapes development through activities such as the upbringing of children. Collective action is an important force that can pressure changes in policies and bring about political change. Strategies for human development initially emphasized investing in education and health, and promoting equitable economic growth – the three dimensions of the HDI. These mobilize the individual agency of people and strengthen their productive capacity for their own private interest. But to these must be added a third pillar – expanding participation through democratic institutions within stronger democratic governance. Indeed, collective action, especially in the form of social movements, has been the essential motor behind progress in achieving major policy shifts necessary for human development, such as the recognition of gender equality, the need to protect the environment, or the promotion and protection of a comprehensive set of human rights.

The concept of human capital or human resource development is typically about individual agency for material production. For example, a healthy worker is more productive than an ill worker, an educated mother is more likely to have healthy children, and so on. But the idea of agency in human development is also about demanding rights in decision-making. This can be individual in form: for example, the ownership of personal assets would empower women to demand their rights within the household. But it is also about collective agency in the public sphere and in a political process. People aiming to influence public decisions, whether for access to schooling, for the right to vote, or for decent working conditions, can rarely be effective on their own. A good deal of evidence shows that effectiveness requires a process of forming associations, making alliances, and generating public debates. Democratic governance through political institutions that expand the power and voice of people, and ensure the accountability of decision-makers, is an important condition for promoting human development.

In this context, examining development through the lens of gender has been especially important in bringing out the importance of collective agency in the human development approach. The 1995 HDR (p. 1) proclaimed: ''One of the defining movements of the 20th century has been the relentless struggle for gender equality, led mostly by women, but supported by growing numbers of men. . . . Moving toward gender equality is not a technocratic goal – it is a political process'' (*United Nations Development Programme* 1995). In subsequently devising measures for the gender dimensions of human development, the HDR 1995 developed both an evaluative measure (GDI), which assesses achievement in human development with gender equity, and an agency measure (GEM). The GEM measures the extent to which women have influence in decision-making, in politics, in professional life, and in organizations. The GEM has been used

widely in advocating women's empowerment, for example, in debates over reserving seats in parliament for women.

The recognition and promotion of human rights, and the legal frameworks that guarantee these rights, are important in the human development approach, not only for their intrinsic value, but also for their instrumental value in promoting agency, both individual and collective. A human right is a claim on society that carries obligations for others to promote, protect, and respect that right (*United Nations Development Programme* 2000). These obligations require the accountability of the ''duty bearers,'' enforceable by law. This provides a powerful basis for public policy that can facilitate human agency. The legal guarantee of a freedom of speech and association is critical for people to bring issues up for public debate, whether they are demands for priority attention to health facilities or for holding corrupt officials to account.

A comparison of approaches

The differences between the human development approach, the neoliberal alternative, and the human development approach's precursor, the basic needs approach, are summarized in Table 1.

III. POLICIES FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A FIVE-POINT AGENDA

The ideals of human development have great appeal to many policy-makers and practitioners, such as parliamentarians, ministers, government officials, and the staff of donor agencies or NGOs. Having bought into the values, they invariably ask, ''So what do we do? What policy priorities do we follow?''

The human development approach is not a recipe of policy prescriptions with a set of ''destinations'' and a list of ingredients on how to get there. It claims to be instead a ''robust paradigm'' that can be used over time and across countries as development challenges and priorities shift. Nonetheless, in the context of the current challenges that face most countries today, five elements of a general human development agenda can be proposed. They constitute what might be called a ''New York consensus,'' as these points are reflected in many UN agreements:

1 Priority to ''social development'' with the goals of expanding education and health opportunities.
2 Economic growth that generates resources for human development in its many dimensions.
3 Political and social reforms for democratic governance that secures human rights so that people can live in freedom and dignity, with greater collective agency, participation, and autonomy.

Table 1 The human development approach, the neoliberal alternative, and the basic needs antecedent: comparing key features

	Human development	Neoliberalism	Basic needs
Philosophical underpinnings			
Normative assumptions	Explicit	Implicit	Not fully specified
Concept of well-being	Functionings and capabilities	Utility	Meeting basic needs
Evaluative aspect			
Leading criterion for evaluating development progress	Human capabilities, equality of outcomes, fairness and justice in institutional arrangements	Economic well-being, economic growth, efficiency	Poverty reduction in terms of income, access to basic social services
Measurement tools favored	Human outcomes, deprivational and distributional measures	Economic activity and condition, averages and aggregate measures	Access to material means, derivational measures
Agency aspect			
People in development as ends and/or means	Ends: beneficiaries; means: agents	Means: human resources for economic activity	Ends: beneficiaries
Mobilizing agency	Individual action and collective action	Individual action	Concern with political will and political base
"Development strategy"			
Key operational goals	Expanding people's choices (social, economic, political)	Economic growth	Expanding basic social services
Distribution of benefits and costs	Emphasis on equality and on the human rights of all individuals	Concern with poverty	Concern with poverty
Links between development and human rights and freedoms	Human rights and freedoms have intrinsic value and are development objectives. Current research on their instrumental role through links to economic and social progress	No explicit connection. Current search for a link between political and civil freedoms and economic growth	No explicit connection

4 Equity in the above three elements with a concern for all individuals, with special attention to the downtrodden and the poor whose interests are often neglected in public policy, as well as the removal of discrimination against women.
5 Policy and institutional reforms at the global level that create an economic environment more conducive for poor countries to access global markets, technology, and information.

This five-point agenda contains a mix of old and new priorities. Social development continues to be important, given that illiteracy is still high, and basic health and survival is far from guaranteed in most developing countries. Economic growth also continues to receive attention, since low growth in developing countries is a major obstacle to human development: over sixty countries ended the decade of 1990–2000 poorer than at its beginning. At the same time, the human development approach has seen a notable evolution. In the early 1990s, the HDRs emphasized public expenditure allocations in health and education; today priorities in those areas are on service quality, efficiency, and equity of delivery (for which governance reforms are often a precondition), as well as on the level of resources – in education, today's competitive global markets require higher levels than basic primary schooling. Institutional reforms that enable the poor to monitor the use of local development funds also are playing a significant role in ensuring the equitable and efficient delivery of basic services. Most importantly, the HDRs have placed an increasing focus on social and political institutions that would ''empower'' the poor and disadvantaged groups (such as women) so that they have more voice in public policy-making and can fight for their interests. Gender equity in particular (as outlined in the next section) has received prominent attention in this ''New York consensus.'' Finally, it is increasingly apparent that the global environment matters, raising such issues as access to global markets, dealing with the spread of global diseases, the creation of global public goods, and so on. It is imperative that global policies and institutions cease favoring only the rich countries. A critical question now is whether global institutions be restructured or created to function on democratic principles mandating the inclusion and participation of all countries and all people.

The changes in the human development approach over time highlight its openness to accommodating new concerns and taking up new policy challenges. Evolving significantly over the last decade, a period that has seen dramatic changes in the world as globalization has sped forward, the HDRs have reflected these changing circumstances. They have shifted emphases in the policy priorities of the human development agenda from public investments to incentives, from

economic measures to democratic politics, from education and health to political and civil liberties, and from economic and social policies to participatory political institutions. They also recognize that people's capabilities to undertake collective action in today's era of rapid globalization will play an increasingly important role in shaping the course of development.

It is not surprising that in 1990 advocacy for human development focused on shifts in planning priorities and on state action: what the state could do to expand capabilities in education and health constituted an important pillar of a human development strategy, for both the intrinsic and the instrumental values of education and health. Today, economic liberalization and political democratization are dominant influences in most countries, which shifts priorities for human development. Capabilities to participate in social action have now become more important. In the same way that economic entrepreneurship drives markets, social entrepreneurship is expected to drive policy debates on issues that matter for people's well-being. A consensus is emerging on the importance of collective action by actors other than the state, notably people and civil society groups, for promoting development.

The political shifts of the 1980s and 1990s have also built greater consensus about the intrinsic value of political freedoms and all human rights, in principle, if not in practice.[7] In 1990, the legacy of the Cold War still divided the world on the importance of political freedom and public participation. In today's context of economic and political liberalization, and growing global interdependence, political freedom, public participation, and collective agency have gained greater universal acceptance as important human goals.

IV. GENDER EQUITY AND THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Gender equity has been a prominent aspect of equity concerns in public policy. The gender dimension has led to widespread advocacy and focused attention on equity in other than economic areas, such as education and political participation. The women's movement and studies by feminist scholars have contributed to this expansion of the notion of equity.

The human development approach offers a capability-based approach to gender equity in development that is a departure from traditions focused on income and growth. The analytical framework for gender equity that it provides encompasses the following aspects:

- the philosophical foundation of equality of capabilities and freedoms, focusing on individuals as the objective of gender in development;
- the evaluative aspect of capability expansion;

- the agency aspect of capability expansion;
- measurement tools of the above.

This framework contrasts with the gender equity agenda seen from a growth-oriented development perspective. Compare, for example, the different measures of gender equity. Other approaches measure women's ''poverty'' by the income gaps between female-headed and male-headed households. Women's ''poverty'' in the human development approach goes beyond the lack of income to deprivation in capabilities, such as lack of education, health, and the channels to participate in economic life and in decision-making (Sakiko Fukuda-Parr 1999). GDI accordingly provides an evaluative measure of development that includes gender equity, while GEM measures gender equity in women's agency. The human development approach also provides an alternative framework to those that justify improving women's health and education as ''human resource development,'' instrumental to the well-being of others and to economic growth. The capability-based framework for gender equity argues for parity rather than equity.

Overall, the human development approach provides a more gender-sensitive agenda to public policy than its alternatives. First, gender equity is a central concern of the approach, which emphasizes the importance of expanding the capabilities and functionings of all individuals. The fact that discrimination continues to be widespread is a priority concern. Second, the human development approach is sensitive to aspects of discrimination that are particularly important in women's lives, but are unrelated to incomes and economic growth, such as lack of autonomy in decisions about their lives and the ability to influence decision-making within the family, community, and nation. Third, the human development approach has the scope to delve into complex issues, such as the unequal sharing of unpaid work, that constrain women's life choices.

Gender analysis and the issues that feminists have raised have kept the approach vibrant, contributing particularly to the development of its agency aspects. Gender concerns have given the approach the power and flexibility to encompass aspects of inequality that would otherwise go unremarked. Its sensitivity to gender in turn has made it sensitive to a range of potential inequities and unfreedoms that can affect all people. The fact that progress in equal rights for women has come about largely through the efforts of women has highlighted the essential role of collective agency in human progress. Moreover, given the constraints on women's agency in almost all societies by political institutions such as male-dominated political parties, social institutions such as the family, and social norms such as women's responsibilities for care work, these issues and their underlying causes clearly must be tackled head on.

314

V. CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, the human development approach has evolved in directions that pay more attention to the agency aspects of human development – to political freedoms and institutions as well as political processes. Advocating equal rights for women has been and will continue to be an important factor underlying this evolution.

Many challenges remain in refining the conceptual underpinnings of the human development approach, developing better measurement tools, and above all making the approach useful for policy purposes. They include, for example, more conceptual clarity about the role of groups and about environmental sustainability, better measures of human development that take account of political freedoms, and better measures of gender equality, especially in the area of empowerment. Over the last decade, the human development approach has evolved as a result of a rich academic debate. The hope is this will continue into the next decade.

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NOTES

[1] It is unclear why the term "choices" replaced "capabilities" in the HDRs. This replacement can cause confusion, since "choice" is a common term that means different things to different people.

[2] Amartya Sen and Sudhir Anand provided the background papers for many (though not all) of the conceptual chapters and measurement tools of the HDRs: in 1990 on human development, concept and measurement (HDI) (Sen and Anand 1990); in 1994 on sustainability and environment (Sen and Anand 1994a, 1994b); in 1995 on measuring gender equality and human development (Sen and Anand 1995); in 1996 on

defining human poverty and the human poverty measure (Sen and Anand 1997); in 1998 on consumption and human development (Sen and Anand 1998); and in 2000 on human rights and human development (Sen and Anand 2000). In 2002 (the HDR on democracy), while Sen did not provide a written text, his writings on democracy, freedom, and development provided the conceptual framework for the report, and his careful reading and comments on draft texts had a decisive influence. Sen's role in the HDR, however, should not be misinterpreted: the reports should not be attributed to Sen, although he has made decisive contributions.

[3] Richard Jolly (2003) develops the contrasts between neoliberalism and the human development approach.

[4] The capabilities approach to development and its application in terms of human development leaves open the final definition of valuable ends to social and individual values. According to Sen (1989), ''there are many ambiguities in the conceptual framework of the capability approach,'' and these ambiguities are in fact part of the concept (see Sen 1989 for elaboration).

[5] There is a rich debate in the literature on whether or not to explicitly identify a list of the most important capabilities. See, for example, Nussbaum (2000) and Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993).

[6] It is unclear whether ''additional choices'' meant these were less important than the three others listed. By 2001 the HDR had removed this ambiguity.

[7] In the third wave of democracy of the 1980s and 1990s, some eighty countries took significant steps towards democratization. Progress has been uneven, however, and some countries have reverted back to less democratic governance. Human rights continue to be deplorable in many countries. Nonetheless, now more than ever before there is a greater overall recognition of the principles of democracy, human rights, and freedoms. This is reflected, for example, in the dramatic rise in the ratification of major human rights instruments, in the number of countries undertaking democratic reforms, and in the emphasis on democracy and human rights in the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations adopted in September 2000 (*United Nations Development Programme* 2002).

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