

**Removing Unfreedoms  
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Speaking on the Livelihoods Approach**

I am Jo Beall, director of the Development Management Programme from the Development Studies Institute here at LSE. I've been asked to draw some links and make some comparisons between the sustainable livelihood approach and development as freedom. I think I have been asked to do this because I was involved in an evaluation of urban governance approaches through using a Sustainability Livelihoods Approach. This was the sustainable livelihoods approach utilised by Care International alongside DFID's approach to livelihoods. I'm inevitably going to come at this from the position of an academic and as one who shares some scepticism along with Nabeel about how easy it is to apply complex ideas in practice. To do so successfully it is useful to try and trace the social and theoretical roots of these different concepts.

I think the first thing to say about the Development as Freedom approach and the Sustainability Livelihoods approach is that they are both very similar. They both come from very similar social theoretical roots. Although the development as freedom approach comes after the **Sustainable Livelihoods** framework took root in development practice, nevertheless, sustainable livelihoods as an approach to development owes much to the earlier works of Amartya Sen.

Ok so what are the similarities. The sustainable livelihoods framework starts by focussing on the vulnerability context, the situation of the poor. And in that it shares with Sen the concern to recognise and address condition of social disadvantage. But while Sen is concerned with deprivation understood in the sense of multiple disadvantage, sustainable livelihoods its very much focused on

one aspect of deprivation which is poverty. So that's one issue that we can tease out.

The second is that both approaches seek to undo wrongs. For Sen, development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms. For him the expansion of freedom is viewed as the primary end and the principle means of development. The **Livelihoods Approach** similarly starts with the focus on removing obstacles, obstacles to the poor, thereby enhancing their assets.

Both the **Development of Freedom and Sustainable Livelihoods** frameworks share, and this is I think the primary philosophical similarity between them, a starting point that emphasises individual freedom. Sen sees individual agency as central to addressing the deprivations of the poor. He stresses that responsible adults must be in charge of their own well-being. And it's for them to decide how to use their capabilities. He says that his basic concern is, and I quote, " the capability to lead the kinds of lives we have reason to value."

The sustainable livelihoods approach is concerned with the poor as active agents of their own destiny, and from a livelihoods perspective, the goal of development, as Romi said earlier, is to build on the wealth and on the capacities of the poor. The **Sustainable Livelihoods** approach sees individuals and the households in which they live and operate as working towards protecting and increasing individual or household asset bases. It is concerned very much with the micro level. And so the poor become, as Caroline Moser has suggested, managers of their own complex asset portfolios.

I'm now going to draw out some of the differences. I think while both approaches look at individual agency, the **Sustainable Livelihoods** approach doesn't disaggregate the challenges and contributions of the poor on the basis of gender.

It doesn't look at particular issues facing the men and women and the relationships between them in building up their asset base. It doesn't articulate a gender perspective and for Sen that is a very crucial part of Development as Freedoms, a recognition of women's role - as one that warrants noting that some variables relate directly to women's agency and structural position. For example female literacy, or the fact that women themselves play a very important part in increasing household well-being through contributing to household income at the same time as caring for their families.

Another difference is the link between micro- and macro-level analysis which is an important goal of the livelihood's framework but isn't often realised in practice. Within Sen's approach there is much more of the linking between the micro and macro. Another difference stems from Sen's philosophical rootedness in Aristotle and a position that recognises a deep complimentary between economic well-being, individual agency and social arrangements. He stresses that it simply is not adequate to take as our basis objective just the maximization of wealth, which is, as Aristotle noted, merely useful for the sake of something else.

Now there are some similarities in the Livelihood's perspective, which recognises not just financial capital, but also social capital and social linkages. But there are some differences I hope to spell out. One is in Sen's notion of capabilities, which has its roots in the notion of feasible functioning's and here he focuses on the issue of choice.

From the perspective of the Sustainable Livelihood approach the focus is also on the capabilities of the poor to exercise choice. There is a focus on whether you have just the choice to engage in coping strategies or whether you have the assets to engage in more adaptive strategies. And indeed both Sen and the Livelihoods approach are concerned with what undermines choice. But I would

argue that the Sustainable Livelihood's approach draws a less direct link between agency and structure. And that is because it has less focus than does Sen on politics and political institutions. **For Sen the overall achievement of development as freedom is deeply contingent on political and social arrangements and the way they come together. And there is a big difference between seeing institutions as intervening variables, as happens in the sustainability and livelihood approach, and seeing democracy and public action as a fundamental developmental need.**

Now some would argue that the **Sustainable Livelihoods** approach recognises social capital, which could lead to political capital. And indeed in the UNDP variety of the livelihoods approach, within social capital you have participation and governments. You've got others arguing, and I count myself amongst them within the context of an evaluation of urban governance I did for DFID, arguing for a sixth capital, a political capital. But I think this feels like a blunter analytical and operational instrument than the argument that is advanced in Development as Freedom, which it is concerned with development goals such as democracy and social justice-- right up there, right up front.

I think I would like to conclude now by just talking about some of the differences between both **Development as Freedoms** and **Sustainable Livelihood** on the one hand, with their rootedness in a concern with individual freedom, and the kind of philosophical roots that underpin the approach that Sheila and Jockin were talking about this morning. Their philosophical roots come not out of a concern for individual agency and individual freedom, but come out of a concern with a *collective agency* and public engagement in collectivities. Now just as the focus on individual freedoms and rights represents a wide intellectual waterfront, so does the philosophical terrain embracing notions of collective engagement – with social contract at one end, through communitarianism, socialism to the more

slippery end of the scale on the other. I think one of the challenges that we have got to look at in our deliberations today, is how do you marry or engage with such philosophically different starting points, one based on notions of collective action and one based on notions of individual freedom?

And I would say that Sen offers an interesting hyphen between those two philosophical starting points through his notion of public action. This involves an understanding of individual interests and interest groups involved in collective processes of public engagement. I will finish with an anecdote which made me come to this conclusion, not just through reading Sen's work but through seeing something in practice that says much about his ideas. And that is, I was at a conference last week that was attended by someone from Calcutta who is involved in working with sex workers. She is involved in developing a trade union to support and advance the livelihoods of sex workers. And in that process they are engaging and making links with other trade unions. So this example demonstrates collective action for livelihoods in operation. The interesting part of the anecdote for our purposes, is that when she went into one of the meeting rooms of the trade union group in Calcutta, there on the wall were pictures, in a row, of Marx, of Lenin, and of Amartya Sen.

Laughter ..... perhaps this is illustrative of how Amartya Sen does provides us with a bridging, with links between individual freedoms and collective action that we need to go forward with.