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# **The Concept of Human Development: A Comparative Study of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum**

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis is an examination of the concept of human development and does a comparative study of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Sen rectifies the emphasis on income by welfare economics, and argues for the ‘equality of capability’; a goal that he says can be achieved by means of the intrinsic and instrumental role of democracy. However, the author notes that Sen’s development paradigm is inadequate as an account for what constitutes the kind of well-being that is fully human and asserts that Sen’s framework should be concretized politically. In view of this, the author argues that Nussbaum’s articulation of a ‘threshold of capabilities’, anchored on her reading Aristotle’s concept of human flourishing and Marx’s insight on human dignity, is a politically realistic human development framework. Nussbaum thinks that the essential human capabilities are entitlements that must be constitutionally guaranteed to ensure a decent and dignified human life for all. As a response to the reality of pluralism, Nussbaum says that the universality of these entitlements can be secured by means of an overlapping consensus. Furthermore, the extreme poverty in many nations which exposes women and children to much vulnerability has provoked the author to inquire about the applicability of Nussbaum’s framework to the global arena. As such, the thesis argues for the radical expansion of the Human Development Index used by the United Nations Development Program in measuring the quality of human life, notably the inclusion of political liberties and gender equality. In addition to this, the study puts forward the argument that global human development is best achieved through democracy, and asserts that global institutions have a moral duty to protect and promote the central human capabilities.

## Table of Contents

Abstract:.....	2
INTRODUCTION .....	4
CHAPTER ONE: The Concept of Human Development in Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach: A Critical Assessment.....	8
1.1 Sen’s “equality of what?” as the starting point for human development.....	8
1.2 Freedom as the foundation of human development.....	13
1.3 A critical assessment of Sen’s Capability Approach .....	21
CHAPTER TWO: The Concept of the Human Person in Martha Nussbaum’s Capabilities Ethics: A Discussion .....	31
2.1 Sen and Nussbaum: some contrasts and distinctions.....	31
2.2 Nussbaum’s concept of the human person: A two-fold intuitive idea.....	33
2.3 The threshold of capabilities as a politically realistic framework .....	38
2.4 The universal nature of the ten central human capabilities.....	42
2.5 A critical evaluation of Nussbaum’s list of capabilities .....	46
CHAPTER THREE: From Ethics to the Global Politics of Human Development: An application .....	51
3.1 Measuring Human Development .....	51
3.2 The Inclusion of Political Liberties and Gender Equality as Indicators in the HDI.....	57
3.3 The Role of Global Institutions in Human Development .....	68
CONCLUSION.....	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	81

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about human development. It seeks to examine the possibilities of a better world for the poorest of the poor from the human development framework, relying heavily on the human development paradigm of the Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen which he amplifies in the ever enduring question – “equality of what?”. Born in 1933 and brought up in Dhaka (now Bangladesh), Sen’s childhood has been marked by the horrors of the great Bengal famine and the partition of India (See Corbridge 2006, 230). Sen, who has won the Nobel Memorial Prize for Economic Science in 1998 for his Social Choice Theory, argues that “a strict equation cannot be drawn between primary social goods and well-being because the former cannot always be converted into the latter (Ibid., 232). Sen, in advocating for equality of capability, says that development requires the dismantling of the “major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, as well as intolerance or over-activity of repressive states” (Sen 1999, 3). Sen thinks that human development is a moral imperative and should be realized under the framework of democracy. He believes that democracy empowers the capability of people to assert their rights and entitlements to a life they have reason to value. Capability, according to Sen, is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve the things a person may value doing and being (See Sen 1999, 75).

During the 1980s, Sen collaborated with Martha Craven Nussbaum, who is Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, which resulted in the publication of *The Quality of Life*, published in 1993 by Oxford. In Nussbaum’s version of the Capability Approach, it is argued that the essential human capabilities must be guaranteed by governments for each individual. Like Sen, she believes that capabilities secure for people a life that one has reason to value, but unlike Sen who advocates for equality of capabilities, Nussbaum argues that what is necessary is a threshold of capabilities. Nussbaum thinks that this threshold secures what is essential for a life worthy of the dignity of a human being. She proposes a list of central human capabilities, and says that “if people are below the threshold on any one of the capabilities, that is a failure of basic justice, no matter how high up they are on all the others (Nussbaum 2006, 167). She thinks that a fully human life is only possible if the central human capabilities are constitutionally guaranteed for all. Using her rich insight on Aristotle and

Marx, she asserts that “the capabilities approach is fully universal: the capabilities in question are held to be important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation, and each person is to be treated as an end” (Ibid.).

The thesis will pursue the trajectories of the thought of Sen and Nussbaum in the Capability Approach in order to arrive at a concept of human development that is fully human. The first chapter will investigate and evaluate the work of Sen in welfare economics, where he argues that the problem of inequality should be measured in terms of what people are “able to do and be”, and not merely in terms of income or resource. The necessary condition, within which human development can work for the poorest of the poor, Sen argues, is by means of realizing the intrinsic and instrumental role of democracy, which secures the rights and entitlements of people to political freedoms and equality.

The second chapter intends to put forward the more philosophical task of making development ‘fully human’, and to this I will appeal to the work of Nussbaum, who argues for a politically realistic “threshold of capabilities” which is anchored on the universality of human dignity and human flourishing, both essential according to her, for the individual to live a life “one has reason to value”.

The third chapter, which forms the normative perspective of this thesis, proposes a radical change in the way human development is measured, arguing for the expansion of the Human Development Index (HDI) which should include the categories of political liberties and gender equality in order to provide a more comprehensive way of understanding the extent of human deprivation in the world. To address the problem of global poverty, the thesis argues for the globalization of the Capability Approach. It asserts that global institutions like UNDP, the World Bank, and international Non-Government Organizations have a moral duty to promote and protect the central human capabilities to help in improving the standard of living of the world’s extremely poor. The thesis in this respect hopes to contribute to the concrete realization of the moral ends of human development, putting forward the claim that there is a moral, philosophical, and practical way to address the problems of millions of people in the world’s poorest nations. The thesis offers three points as to how to tackle global poverty. This includes government

transparency in poor countries, gender equality, and the promotion of democracy and sustainable development.

The aims of this thesis are grounded on the moral urgency of human development. In order to understand this moral urgency, first and foremost, the thesis aims to make a critical assessment of the concept of human development. Secondly, it also seeks to determine the ethical basis for human development. Thirdly, in the pursuit of the moral ends of development which guarantees a life worthy of the dignity of the human person for all, the thesis intends to suggest a more concrete, practical, and politically realistic concept of human well-being. Lastly, in view of the difficult realities in extremely poor societies where political repression exists, the thesis also aims to determine the moral responsibility of governments and global institutions like UNDP, the World Bank, and international NGOs to human development.

In view of the above aims, the thesis is posing these research questions. The thesis asks – Between income and capability, what is the ethical basis that makes development fully human? Welfare economics measures development through income and GNP, but for Sen, income does not necessarily translate to a life “one has reason to value”. In addition to this, it is also important to clarify how human development can be made possible in today’s world. Hence, the thesis asks – Between Sen’s equality of capability and Nussbaum’s threshold of capabilities, what accounts for a more concrete concept of well-being? This question is important for I believe that any human development paradigm must be politically feasible, that it must be something that can address the concerns of the poorest of the poor in a more concrete way. Lastly, as a thesis in applied ethics, I will investigate, as a matter of application, whether the criteria for human development in the Human Development Index (HDI) are sufficient. Thus, the thesis inquires – Are there other criteria which are politically crucial in determining human development? This question also hopes to advance the primary concern of this thesis, which is to determine the moral responsibility of governments and other institutions in human development. What is this moral obligation? How should this obligation be fulfilled in order to make development fully human? These questions are essential in order to realize the “moral ends of development”, and thereby make this world fully human for all.

In terms of methodology, the writer does a careful reading and a conceptual analysis of the ideas, premises, and arguments put forward by Sen and Nussbaum. It therefore attempts to make a comparative study of their versions of the Capability Approach. I have relied extensively on Sen's *Inequality Re-examined* (1992) and *Development as Freedom* (1999), two books which I believe explain Sen's ideas this thesis seeks to analyze. I have studied Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development* (2000) which contains the relevant aspects of her version of the Capability Approach for this investigation and her *Frontiers of Justice* (2006) where she elaborates further her version of the theory and applies it to the reality of globalization. I have also examined some materials on the HDI and gathered relevant data on the categories in the HDI to compare and analyze the results between some democratic and socialist countries which I intend to use in order to advance the claim that democracy sets the important condition where human development can be truly realized. Moreover, the World Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit has been very valuable in terms of providing the numerical figures that picture out the political freedoms or the lack thereof in different nations and relate these scores to the concepts put forward by the Capability Approach which Sen and Nussbaum have enunciated.

# **CHAPTER ONE: The Concept of Human Development in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: A Critical Assessment**

## **1.1 Sen's "equality of what?" as the starting point for human development**

There is nothing more immediate than the question of human development. Poverty and global inequality have reached an alarming level that development concepts must be able to address the moral urgency to free the extremely poor from their abject miseries. Development is about real people and should respond concretely to their needs. The 1990 Human Development Report begins with the statement, "people are the real wealth of a nation" (HDR 1990, 1). This claim is meant to advance the idea that "people are not just the means but more importantly, the principal ends of development" (Gasper 2002, 441). Development should be seen "as the extension of the set of attainable and worthy life-options that people have – the notion adopted in the 1990s by the United Nations Development Program and the Human Development Reports" (Gasper 2000, 992) which bears the huge influence of the work of Amartya Sen. The human development paradigm of UNDP, with its emphasis on valuable life-options, is based on Sen's Capability Approach.

Sen's Capability Approach addresses the problem of inequality. It does so by putting forward two crucial arguments in reformulating the concept of well-being in welfare economics. First, Sen argues that primary goods<sup>1</sup>, which he explains are general purpose means that help anyone to promote his or her ends, (Sen 1999, 72), cannot be an adequate informational basis for evaluating well-being. Secondly, he asserts that human capability or the extent of people's freedom has a direct role, the most important indeed, in the achievement of well-being. These two arguments are anchored on the basic idea that freedom is the foundation of human development. It is in view of the need to attend to the "foundational importance of freedom" (Alkire 2002, 6), that Sen makes the paradigm-shifting distinction between equality in terms of primary goods and equality in terms of capabilities. For Sen, evaluations regarding equality "should not solely be based on people's command of resources, sense of happiness or desire fulfillment, but should include features of the way people actually live" (Gore 1997, 236). The

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<sup>1</sup> According to John Rawls, primary goods include "rights, liberties, and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect" (See Rawls 1971, 60-65).



reason for re-examining our judgments about inequality is the fact that “equal benefits to people with unequal needs will not produce equal well-being” (Gasper 2004, 107). Thus, Sen’s use of equality as a starting point is a clear recognition of the value and importance of each person, and the right of each person to equality.

Sen points out that welfare economics evaluates human well-being through indices such as the Gross National Product, the Gross Domestic Product, and per capita income. To address the problem of poverty, policy makers in government look at how economic growth can alleviate the lowness of income of the poor. People who live below the poverty line have a low standard of living and measures based on aggregate national income are utilized to see if economic growth trickles down to the incomes of the poor. This cascading effect to the poor is seen to improve their living standards. Sociologist Des Gasper explains that this process follows from the fact that “economic production creates wealth which is distributed as income. Income is used for consumption which results to personal utility on the part of the earner. In economic terms, utility is judged as economic well-being” (Gasper 2000, 283). This means that economic well-being is construed as the product of income generated from higher production inputs in the economy. Higher input to the process means more labor is needed, thus resulting to employment. People earn their income from this enabling them to consume commodities thereby satisfying personal utility. Welfare economics sees this form of satisfaction as well-being. In this sense, well-being comes from income.

Based on the foregoing, Sen concludes that welfare economics views poverty in a narrow way as the lack of income. He then argues that this concept of poverty is ill-equipped as basis for knowing why people are deprived of their well-being. It does not also tell the extent or the kind of deprivation that people suffer, whether it is so grave or unimaginable, say for instance in the case of homeless orphans or families<sup>2</sup> (i.e., in Manila, the Philippine capital, one does not only see street children but also street families). For Sen, the real extent of deprivation may be underestimated if we concentrate only on the size of incomes (Sen 1992, 113). To buttress his

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<sup>2</sup> The 2006 Philippines Official Poverty Report says that 4.7 million families -- equivalent to 26.9 percent of the total number of Filipino families -- were poor in 2006, marking an increase from 4 million poor families in 2003. It also says poverty incidence -- the proportion of those considered poor to the total number of families -- was at 26.9 percent in 2006, compared to 24.4 percent three years earlier (Source: National Statistics Coordinating Board).

point, Sen says that the income-centered view may be very misleading in the identification and evaluation of poverty (Sen 1993, 41). One reason for this assertion is that equality in terms of income does not guarantee commensurateness in human well-being since there are difficulties that a person (i.e., a pregnant woman, a child, or a person with a physical handicap), may have to hurdle owing to his or her specific condition. He says that “a pregnant woman may have to overcome disadvantages in living comfortably and well that a man at the same age need not have, even when both of them exactly have the same income and primary goods” (Sen 1992, 27). Sen argues that inequality exists in life because people are “deprived of their capabilities, obstructing them from achieving even the most elementary of all functionings” (Ibid., 7). For instance, insensitivity to the health care needs of a pregnant woman affects her well-being and also the full nourishment of her future infant. The inadequate provision for health care is a clear impediment to the achievement of certain ends that a pregnant woman may desire for herself.

To explain the above example, it is important to explain the distinction Sen makes between functionings and capability. According to Gasper, for Sen functionings refer to what a person actually does whereas capability means the ability to achieve certain things (See Gasper 2002, 454). On one hand, functionings correspond to an individual’s physical state of being, for instance, whether he or she has enough food to eat; a mental state of being, say whether she enjoys herself doing creative work which she finds fulfilling, or a social state of being, like whether for instance he or she is free to do certain things like taking part in social gatherings (See Gore 1997, 237). Functionings are therefore the various things a person may choose to attain in his or her life and thereby value doing (Sen 1999, 75). Functionings, according to Sen, are more related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions (Sen 1987, 36). In a way, functionings tell us about the kind of life in which a person lives. On the other hand, capability pertains to an individual’s capacity or power to achieve certain functionings. This capability, according to Sen, “will constitute the person’s freedom – the real opportunities to have well-being (Sen 1992, 40; 1987, 36). The concept of capability intends to “reflect the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another” (Sen 1999, 74). Capability, in this sense, corresponds to human freedom. The 1996 Human Development Report refers to it as the ability to lead the life one values (HDR 1996, 49). In other words, capability concerns what makes a person realize what he can do or to put it basically, the freedom to achieve the

“combination of various doings and beings” (Sen 1993, 31). It is directly concerned about the “things a person is able to do or be” (Ibid., 30).

For Sen, it is important to look at the different diversities of individuals if we seek to enhance their capabilities. These diversities in terms of attributes or qualities can be internal or external. These diversities and heterogeneities determine whether an individual indeed possesses the capability to achieve well-being. The mere focus on income does not say anything about what a person can or cannot do given the complexities of human life. These internal and external diversities are broadly classified by Sen into five areas:

1. Personal heterogeneities – people have disparate physical characteristics connected with disability, illness, age or gender, and these make their needs diverse (Sen 1999, 70).
2. Environmental diversities – variations in environmental conditions, such as climactic circumstances (temperature ranges, rainfall, flooding and so on), can influence what a person gets out of a given level of income (Ibid.).
3. Variations in social climate – the conversion of personal incomes and resources into the quality of life is influenced also by social conditions, including public education and the prevalence or the absence of crime and violence in the particular location (Ibid.).
4. Differences in relational perspectives – the commodity requirements of established patterns of behavior may vary between communities, depending on convention and customs (Ibid., 71).
5. Distribution within the family – the income earned by one or more members of a family is shared by all – non-earners as well as earners. The well-being or freedom of individuals in a family will depend on how the family income is used in furtherance of the interests and different objectives of the members of the family (Ibid.).

Sen explains that these attributes are crucial in determining the success of an individual in actualizing the kind of life he or she may have reason to value. Social inequality cannot be truly understood from the narrow perspective of economic activity because “what people can or cannot do, can or cannot achieve, do not depend just on income (Ibid., 28). Without ignoring the importance of economic growth, Sen contends that we must look beyond it in assessing human

well-being (Sen 1999, 14). With this in mind, Sen's Capability Approach suggests that social arrangements should be evaluated according to the extent of people's freedom (Alkire 2002, 4). The reason for this is that the extent of a person's freedom or his or her capability has a direct connection with the achievement of his or her well-being. The quality of a person's life, or how well that life is lived depends on the person's capability to do various things essential to his or her well-being. According to Sabina Alkire, "if equality in society is to be demanded it should be demanded in the space of capabilities" (Ibid).

Thus, in addressing the issue of human development, Sen argues that focus should be on the extent of human freedom or capability because the achievement of certain functionings relies on the person's capability. Sen notes that "the assessment of good social orders has been concerned directly with achievement, treating the importance of the freedom to achieve as being entirely instrumental" (Sen 1992, 32). The achievement of certain levels of functionings (i.e. nourishment, social participation, etc.), of course, is important. The achievement of things we have reason to value doing gives so much meaning to human life. But in assessing the well-being of a person, it is his or her capability or the extent of his or her freedom that takes priority. This is because first and foremost, it is freedom that a person needs in order for him or her to be able to achieve a certain state of being, say becoming a teacher or a lawyer or a full-time housewife.

The concept of human well-being can be clarified further by elaborating on the notion of entitlements. According to Gasper, for Sen a person's entitlement to a certain good, i.e. food, shelter, provides for a certain range of capabilities and functionings or the ability to do or be (Gasper 1997, 283). We do not simply want a commodity for itself, but for the combinations of characteristics or qualities which it provides (Ibid.). Thus, the concept of human well-being tells us that an individual's entitlement to certain primary social goods, i.e. income, is not the final goal. More importantly, if we are to make social arrangements truly egalitarian, each individual entitlement should enable the equality in terms of the capability space. Real freedom as the expansion of human options can only be possible if each individual's entitlements, rights and opportunities help him or her achieve human well-being. For Sen, mainstream economics limits a person's entitlement to a certain standard of living adjudged by means of an individual's level of income. But Sen has shown this to be inadequate. Well-being is achieved when a person's entitlements enable him or her to expand his or her valuable options in life. For instance, it

should matter to a pregnant mother to be entitled to “maternity leave” and to enjoy a certain “freedom” from doing some household chores. For a child to fully actualize a life well-lived, he or she must be entitled to a right to good education and proper health care. Lately, cause-oriented groups are advocating for the entitlement of each family to a decent home or at least to the affordability of acquiring such. In this sense, human development can only be achieved if the notion of entitlements is extended beyond the space of primary social goods to one that takes cognizance of the real needs of the person in order to achieve a life that one has reason to value.

In this regard, entitlements must extend each person’s opportunity to attain equality in terms of the capability space. Entitlements must not be reduced to the notion of income. This is because equality in terms of capability is the one which can truly serve as the proper basis for the evaluation of human well-being. To illustrate this point, Sen makes the example of a destitute who is starving due to famine and an affluent person who chooses to fast (See Sen 1999, 75). Although both individuals are deprived of the “the functioning of being well-nourished, the freedom they possess to avoid being well-nourished is crucially distinct” (Robeyns 2000, 6). The destitute person who is starving due to famine clearly lacks the freedom or capability to achieve nourishment whereas the affluent person who chooses to fast has that option or capability. The difference lies in the fact that the victim of famine lacks the capability or freedom to achieve a certain level of well-being (i.e. being nourished) while the affluent person who chooses to fast possesses such capability or freedom. Their well-being, in this sense, can be assessed in terms of their actual capability or freedom. Certainly, the destitute is not living a life that is well whereas the affluent person who chooses to fast possesses life-options owing to his greater sense of freedom. It can be said that owing to his condition, the destitute should be entitled to certain goods (i.e. literacy, education or a basic skill for livelihood). These will be necessary for a life that is well-lived because these provisions will expand his ability to do certain things.

In the next section, I shall expound on the two roles of human freedom and their value to human development. I hope to show why freedom is the foundation of human development.

## **1.2 Freedom as the foundation of human development**

According to Sen, human development can be defined as “the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen 1999, 3). The Human Development Reports, (i.e. 1990,

1996) emphasize this meaning by redefining development beyond the parameters of a monetized and highly economized world. It can be said that rethinking the concept of equality beyond the notion of primary goods to the real freedoms of people means that people are the most important stakeholder in development. This idea can be seen in the Human Development Reports which accentuate that development should be people-centered, and as such, attention should be given to redefining the kind of life they live.

In support of the above claim, the basic idea is that it can be argued that life can only be lived well when people are free, when people can make real choices. By real choice, I mean that it is something that possesses a transformative effect in the quality of human life. The quality of human life is grounded on the freedom to choose the life that one finds truly worth living. The poor are not ignorant of their condition. But the sense of hopelessness permeates almost all aspects of their lives since they are deprived of the real power of their substantive freedoms to transform their lives. Human development, therefore, should address the problem of expanding the person's capability to make valuable choices in life in order to improve the quality of that life.

Sen says that human development should be founded on freedom and not on economic wealth. The reason for this assertion is the idea that wealth is not equal to well-being or happiness. Sen asserts that "wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else" (Sen 1999, 14). For Sen, income and wealth are desirable only because they are useful in making individuals capable of pursuing certain goals in life. Thus, economic growth must be seen as a means towards human development rather than human development as being for economic growth (Gasper 2002, 441). What this means is that economic growth is only instrumental for people to achieve certain things in life, like for instance, in owning a decent house. But having one's own house cannot be an end in itself. The individual has to make important life-choices to actualize a decent living, i.e. the well-being of one's family is not congruent to the type of house where one dwells.

To clarify the role of freedom to human development, it is important to first explain the difference between positive and negative freedom to highlight the valuable role of capability to human development. The idea of negative freedom "corresponds to what is sometimes called

non-interference rights. These rights can be summed up as freedom from coercion” (Garret 2003, 3). Positive freedom, on the other hand, “refers to real opportunities that can be given to people in terms of the extent of their capabilities” (Ibid.). For instance, a fisherman who has a very small income from his livelihood can be said to live a life that is not well-lived, especially if he is suffering from a recurring ailment. He can feel secure in his simple home, with no threat of violence. It can therefore be said that in this case, his negative freedom may not have been violated. Yet, it can also be argued that his negative freedom has no value to him given his condition<sup>3</sup>. However, this should not be taken as something that undermines the value of negative freedom. We can say that negative freedom is also very important in securing and protecting our democratic rights which may be violated in the absence of such freedom. What we seek to illustrate here, in the case of the fisherman, is that his positive freedom should also be looked into more substantially if he is to seek well-being in life.

For instance, the above suggests that the fisherman is not living a life in terms of his full human potential because his positive freedom or capability has never been really actualized. It can be said that the fisherman has to realize a broader sense of participation in society to optimize or empower his human potential, i.e. learning how to process or market his produce. But in such a case, however, the government must set up mechanisms to empower the positive freedom of the person and make the social condition he is into more conducive for the improvement of his well-being. Thus, positive freedom also connotes the necessity of a democratic government to set up the enabling conditions for people to develop their potentials. The importance of democratic governance in helping people is explicated by Sen quite succinctly when he says that “poverty can be attributed to the presence of dictatorships, systematic social and economic deprivation, and the apparent neglect of provisions for public facilities” (Sen 1999, 3). Sen is suggesting quite clearly that the solutions to the problem of poverty are best pursued under a democracy.

To expound on the above idea, I am making this distinction about the role of freedom on the individual (intrinsic) and the social role of freedom (instrumental), a distinction which comes

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to clarify though that negative freedom is also of great value if seen from the context of society as a whole since without it, regimes can become abusive. While positive freedom enhances the individual’s ability to be the person she desires herself to be, our negative rights protect us from the excesses and manipulative tendencies of other people.

from what Sen points out primarily as the two important aspects to look into with regard to the role of freedom in human development: First, Sen believes that development is the expansion of the positive freedoms of people (freedom as an end in development), and secondly, he contends that freedom plays an instrumental role (freedom as principal means of development) in relation to that description. Here, Sen proposes the concept of “substantive freedoms” to highlight the “foundational view of development as freedom” (Sen 1999, 5), emphasizing the important role that freedom plays in human development. I find it necessary to distinguish the meaning of substantive freedoms in terms of “elementary capabilities” which are intrinsically important and basic to the attainment of the well-being of the individual and substantive freedoms as the “constituent components of human development” which are instrumentally important for human well-being as seen from the greater context of society as a whole. The basic idea is that substantive freedom can be seen from the context of the individual (intrinsic value) and from the context of society as a whole (instrumental value).

First, Sen’s point is that freedom as a primary end in development can be seen as being intrinsically valuable to the well-being of the individual. At this level, Sen says that the attainment of well-being is something that directly depends on the person’s freedom or capability to function (Ibid., 14). This means that freedom plays a direct role in the person’s well-being. Freedom is constitutive of the individual’s real opportunities for well-being. The intrinsic value of freedom dwells in its being able to empower the individual in his or her choices. Human beings are concerned with the enhancement of human life and the freedoms they enjoy (See Ibid.). Expanding freedom, according to Sen, “does not only make the life of the person more unfettered, but more importantly, it allows him or her to experience his or her social life fully” (Ibid., 15). The point of Sen is that freedom, in this sense, is a value in itself, for it is through it that the individual realizes his or her full potential as a member of society, capable of enriching, not only his or her life, but that of others as well. This freedom, which is expressed through the capability of the person, is the ground with which he or she pursues what is worth living for in his or her life. Sen says that “the substantive freedoms include elementary capabilities like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedom being associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech and so on” (Ibid., 14). Sen thinks that ensuring these elementary capabilities as a matter of public policy is to secure the very basis for



the well-being of the individual. Based on this idea, it can be concluded that when the person is well-nourished, gets provisions for health care, enjoys good education and is also given the chance to participate in the affairs of governance, there is no reason for her to live a life of misery. In the absence of these things, it can be said that there is degradation of human life, destitution, and suffering. Henceforth, freedom is pursued as an end in human development precisely because it enables the individual to improve the quality of his or her human life.

Secondly, Sen says that “freedom can also be valued at least for instrumental reasons” (Ibid.). Sen asserts that it is important to note that instrumental substantive freedoms make possible the attainment of well-being in society. The point is that in confronting the complications of modern social existence, these substantive freedoms act as the bridge for any society in achieving human development. Here, Sen explains that the instrumental role of freedom concerns the way different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom as a whole (Sen 1999, 37). In *Development as Freedom*, Sen enumerates the five forms of these substantive instrumental freedoms:

1. Political freedoms, broadly conceived (including what are called civil rights), refer to the opportunities that people have to determine who should govern and on what principles, and also include the possibility to scrutinize and criticize authorities, to have freedom of political expression and an uncensored press, to enjoy the freedom to choose between different political parties and so on (Ibid., 38).
2. Economic facilities refer to the opportunities that individuals respectively enjoy to utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange (Ibid., 38-39).
3. Social opportunities refer to the arrangements that society makes for education, health care, and so on, which influence the individual’s substantive freedom to live better (Ibid., 39).
4. Transparency guarantees deal with the need for openness that people can expect: the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of discourse and lucidity. These guarantees have a clear instrumental role in preventing corruption, financial irresponsibility and underhand dealings (Ibid., 39-40).

5. Protective security provides a social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery, and in some cases even starvation and death. This is necessary because no matter how well an economic system operates, some people can be typically on the verge of vulnerability and can actually succumb to great deprivation as a result of material changes that adversely affect their lives (Ibid., 40).

Let me elaborate on these substantive freedoms. First, freedom of expression, political affiliation and civil rights empower the people. Criticisms and dissent will make government officials careful in doing their work and allows the people to bring their opinions for and against government programs. A vigilant press secures and strengthens the freedom of people and helps in protecting them from human rights abuses. Secondly, the availability of economic facilities will give people the opportunity to have decent employment, and important farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems for instance will help farmers become more productive. Also, an open competition and a solid market exchange will ensure that economic activities are not controlled by a monopoly or a cartel. These mechanisms are vital to economic well-being. Thirdly, social opportunities in education and health will enhance the country's greatest asset – its people. It is the most brilliant investment any government can do, and as we have shown, doing so will enable people to optimize their capabilities and real options in life, and thus become effective contributors to the well-being of society as a whole. Fourthly, transparency is paramount in safeguarding the people from graft and corruption. Transparency deters government officials in committing financial abuses. Thus, government contracts and purchases must be competitive and open to the public. Transparency should also include mechanisms to prosecute those who usurp power. Lastly, protective security is important to answer the concerns of the vulnerabilities of some sectors, especially women, children, and the poorest of the poor. Gender equality is an important concern in many developing nations where women are still subjugated by cultural bias. The alarming problem of child labor needs to be addressed by governments around the world by way of special protection under the law. Safety nets can be set up to help the poor in dire economic circumstances like droughts and flooding which can result to famine. These considerations can only be possible when people are free.

In arguing for these substantive freedoms, Sen emphasizes the argument that no famine has ever occurred under a democratic regime. The reason for this is that any famine is easily

preventable if democratic mechanisms are set in place. A free society can immediately address any need for food basically because of open discussion, transparency and participation. People, when free, can easily voice their concerns and press their government for action. This point translates into a broader and an all-important reasoning that human development can be attained more fully under a democracy. Sen notes, “the people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs” (Ibid., 53).

Consequently, the above argument brings us to the intimate link between democracy and the substantive freedoms of people. To explain this connection, Sen says that the achievement of democracy depend not only on the rules and procedures of democratic processes but also on the way certain opportunities are used by the citizens (Ibid., 155) Basically, it can be said that the importance of democracy lies in the fact that it secures the political freedoms of people and thereby making these freedoms work to their advantage. For instance, we can explain this by pointing out that democracy makes government leaders more responsive to the needs of the people because the people hold them accountable for their welfare. In a democracy, responsible citizens will seek to ensure that development becomes the priority of their national leaders using the mechanisms of democratic governance, i.e. public consultations, referendum, etc. Thus, democracy makes the people vigilant even in intense economic situations since the people value their political freedoms. Democracy, according to Sen, is important to human development and this can be seen in its great impact on the lives and capabilities of people (Ibid., 150).

Sen argues that democracy, by securing our political freedoms, has a pre-eminent importance to human development (Ibid., 148-49). This can be seen from the direct, the instrumental, and the constructive role of our political freedoms to human development (Ibid.). Sen writes:

1. Political freedom is directly important in human living associated with basic capabilities (including that of political and social participation) (Ibid., 148).
2. Political freedom is instrumental in enhancing the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including the claims of economic needs) (Ibid.).

3. Political freedom is something that carries a constructive role in the conceptualization of the needs (including the understanding of economic needs in the social context) (Ibid.).

First, Sen's notion of political freedom as being directly important can be explained by saying that the freedom of political and social participation encourages the people to take part actively in development endeavors. A healthy political and social atmosphere provides the incentives for people to engage in activities which play crucial parts in the enhancement of their lives. Political freedom opens up the possibility of implementing "helpful policies that include openness to competition, the use of international markets, a high level of literacy and school education, successful land reform and public provisions of incentives for investment, exporting, and industrialization" (Ibid., 150). These things are part and parcel of national development. He adds that these policies are not inconsistent with democracy, and in fact, these things have been sustained in authoritarian regimes like China and Singapore (See Ibid.).

Secondly, Sen's concept of political freedom in terms of its instrumental role tells us that it empowers people to press the government to attend to their needs. Appropriate action on the part of the government can only be expected with a vigilant citizenry. Sen says that "governmental response to the acute suffering of people often depends on the pressure that is put on the government" (Ibid., 151). In the absence of political freedom, people cannot expect immediate and efficient public action from their leaders. Again, Sen draws our attention to famines, which have "occurred in ancient kingdoms and contemporary authoritarian societies, in primitive tribal communities and in modern technocratic dictatorships, in colonial economies run by imperialists from the north and in newly independent countries of the south run by despotic national leaders" (Ibid., 153). Democracy, in this sense, secures the greater good of people. Famines, Sen argues, are not natural calamities but human disasters. He thinks that such occurrences are humanly preventable. Sen theorizes that "famines are policy failures" (Sen 1981, 78), and therefore not a real shortage of food. Without an empowered populace to make demands on their leaders, the welfare of the people becomes secondary to the whims of their leaders. For Sen, it is important to have an opposition party voicing out dissent and a free media critical of the actions of bad leaders. Without these elements, people are less empowered, are fearful of political participation, and therefore, can suffer from political oppression.

Thirdly, Sen explains that the exercise of political freedom helps people conceptualize and thereby also understand their social needs more fully (Sen 1999, 153). Democracy makes people realize that they are the integral part of development. If development is to truly address the needs of the people, it must emanate from the people themselves. This means that development is not a mere by-product; in itself it is the reflection of the kind of people a country has. National development only happens if the people are responsible and take part in development planning. Development goals, in this sense, must be an expression of their will. Sen argues, “in a democracy, people tend to get what they demand, and more crucially, do not typically get what they do not demand” (Ibid., 156). In a way, freedom and human development are intimately linked. Only a free people can pursue development that addresses their most pressing needs. As such, in order to secure human development, it is important to advocate for the substantive freedoms of the people under the umbrella of democratic governance.

Notwithstanding all the positive contributions of Sen to the concept of human development, it is still important to examine his framework more closely. Are there important issues that Sen has failed to address? Is Sen’s concept of development, with his emphasis on freedom, fully human? In the next section, I shall make a critical examination of Sen’s concept of human development.

### **1.3 A critical assessment of Sen’s Capability Approach**

Criticisms on Sen’s Capability Approach from social science, development studies, and policy advocacy can be presented in three important arguments. The people from these disciplines are his most important audience. Generally, his critics point out the inadequacy of Sen’s framework as a paradigm for human development. Later, in the second chapter of the thesis, I shall discuss the philosophical critique on Sen’s theory and hope to address the issues identified in this section more holistically using the framework of Nussbaum.

First, Gasper argues that Sen has failed to provide a complete picture of the “human” person in his concept of human development. This claim can be based on Sen’s thin concept of personhood. According to Gasper, “central to Sen’s view is the choosing, reasoning individual, but with little farther specified content of being human, the dominant impression is of people as choosers, their formation only lightly treated, rather than as actors more broadly” (Gasper 2002,

251). Secondly, some critics say that Sen's emphasis on human freedom and the well-being of the individual is tantamount to moral individualism, and that it lacks an adequate account of social responsibility. For instance, it can be said that Sen's theory provides us merely with an abstract sense of the individual whereas in real life, one has to look into many other elements, including communal values, attention to care and other human values, and responsibility towards self and others. Thirdly, other commentators express that Sen's Capability Approach is pre-social. For instance, it can be asked, how does Sen intend to operationalize the Capability Approach? Alkire argues that Sen's abstract framework is insufficient as a policy direction. Sen emphasizes on the importance of democracy and political freedom in securing human well-being, but it can also be pointed out that Sen needs to show how social institutions, national and global, frame their policies and work for human development especially in countries where there is violence and political instability if the concept is too broad. These critiques are crucial and fundamentally important for a fuller human development framework.

The first critique is based on Gasper's comment that Sen only develops a thin concept of personhood, and he argues that Sen's framework lacks concreteness and ontological grounding. For Gasper, Sen does not fully account for an elaborate concept of the person as "being", one whose life matters in an existential way. Gasper thinks that Sen has not found a way out of economism, noting that "mainstream economics is not based on any explicit theory of and evidence on, being" (Gasper 2002, 444). He says that this can be traced to the HDR's commitment to economic growth and the abstracted sense of the "human" can be seen as more humane economic development, rather than of development of and by humans (Ibid.). Gasper explains that people are not just choosers but actors in a much larger context because an individual's way of life is more than a set of private choices because being a person and having an identity have a social grounding (Ibid., 451). For Gasper, Sen's "human" is more of a generalized type, mainly based on a very abstract conception of the human being, one that lacks concrete social and existential perspective (Ibid., 452). This implies that the thin concept of this "human" in Sen is a picture of an individual who has no varied emotions, no belongingness to the other, and no sense of self-criticism. Without the ideas of friendship, enmity, pride and anger, love and fear, Gasper says that Sen gives us a thin and often insufficient basis for a theory of well-being and human development (See Ibid., 453). Moreover, Gasper adds that "motivation,

morale, imagination and self-image also matter to the person, giving her motivation to treasure and value human life” (Gasper 2004, 180).

For instance, to explicate Gasper’s point, it can be argued that a woman, in the manner by which she frames her choices, sees and considers her being a woman as something beyond the notion of economic welfare. It can be said that she also wants to enjoy life. If a woman becomes a mother, for example, she does not only need nourishment, but also companionship and care. There is a certain joy and excitement in motherhood that economic provisions do not capture. The care and attention from her husband, her self-confidence, and the emotions attached to self-appreciation, all contribute to a greater sense of her being. A woman needs recognition, compassion, and love – existential factors which reveal that her being is irreducible to economic terms. Paradoxically, it can be said that just being oneself can make one happy.

The existential aspect of human happiness does not refer to the utilitarian perspective of needs satisfaction. Gasper’s critique implies that Sen sees happiness only in terms of its utility and for this reason the latter finds happiness as an inadequate basis for well-being. Gasper’s critique simply points out that happiness can be about the “being” of the individual. For instance, Ananta Giri, in expounding this criticism, connects the idea of human happiness to the idea of having an inner peace with oneself. Giri believes that happiness which involves self-acceptance also includes the aspect of having some peace of mind (See Giri 2000, 1007). This peace of mind is connected to being oneself. The poor, she says, cannot be reduced to being mere objects of welfare (Ibid.). Being human, the poor also possess the desire to be happy. This happiness may be attained by simply being oneself. This means that happiness is something that may be experienced when a person finally becomes the kind of being she desires herself to be, i.e. a poor woman finally becoming a mother. Such an experience points to the existential dimension of human life. For Gasper and Giri, it can be said that Sen’s notion of well-being has failed to account for the importance of the existential sense of being oneself. Of course, to be able to function and to possess the capability to achieve is important. But it is one thing to be able to do the things one needs to do in order to live well (or the achievement of well-being), and another to be able to do the things one needs to do in order to live a meaningful life (or the sense of fulfillment). For example, a father may be able to send his children to school and provide for all their needs, but it is another thing to feel fulfilled and happy about it.

Furthermore, Giri argues that the thick dimension of the self, a concept that provides us with an inner view of who the individual is to himself, is lacking in Sen because “the dimension of self-criticism has not been properly habilitated in Sen’s notion of well-being” (Ibid., 1008). Giri’s point seems to be that it is important for the individual to possess the ability to choose and provide for the atmosphere that makes that choice possible. However, it can also happen that the individual can make bad choices. For instance, an individual can squander his freedom to be. Freedom provides us the opportunity to choose a life that can be lived well, but freedom at the same time can make a person lose control of his sense of the good. And this happens when the person is not self-critical. This is the point when Giri says that human freedom can make a person a friend or enemy to oneself. She says:

The self becomes a friend to herself when she takes care of herself and attends to the other, being inspired by the vision and practice of embodied universality. One becomes an enemy to oneself when one does things which are self-destructive, which destroys one’s functionings and capability and also the functioning and capability of others (Ibid., 1009).

It can be argued for instance, that the poor lacks this self-critical attitude. I have observed many community-based programs and projects aimed at helping the poor, Non-Government Organizations and government institutions working together in addressing their concerns, but as a matter of fact, after the initial phase of the program, with the education and other ground-works fairly done, the indigent recipients, when left to themselves, do not find the value of the program for their future. The problem is not only confined to the criteria set by Sen, on what he calls heterogeneities and diversities, i.e., age, gender, health, but also in the person’s sense of being, on whether he or she finds meaning in his or her life. The way the problems of the poor are addressed, with emphasis on their well-being achievement, seems to suggest a big loophole. According to Giri:

Sen’s notion of well-being lacks a notion of a critically reflective, creative, transformative self, and his notion of capability does not embody the seeking and quest for being, becoming, self-development and self-realization on the part of the actors (Ibid., 1004).

This aspect of self-criticism is important because a fuller sense of oneself or of one’s value as a person is very important in the attainment of what it means to be a person. Giri notes that



“the realization of well-being requires the subjective preparation of individuals to be friends to themselves and in the first place not to be enemies to themselves” (Ibid.). Sen does not address this need for self-criticism in his concept of the person. His thin concept of the person is locked up as a “being” striving to attain well-being within the framework of an economized world, but without, as Giri notes “a critical attitude into one’s given situation in life” (Ibid., 1016). For Giri, this ontological striving can only be facilitated by building appropriate institutions of self-learning, mutual learning, dialogue, and the public discursive formation of the will (Ibid., 1015).

My assessment is that to substantiate on what makes us “fully human”, a fuller account of the individual, for instance, on what gives him or her dignity as a human being, is important to be able to advance a more holistic view of human development. There is a need to unravel how and why certain capabilities and functionings make us who we are as persons. Doing so would contribute to self-understanding. It is important to identify the basic capabilities other than the examples used by Sen to be able to judge that at a certain level, a certain kind of life is well-lived, that human dignity is not violated, or that the person is really treated for what he or she is as a person.

The second critique deals with the claim that Sen’s conception of well-being amounts to moral individualism. According to Ingrid Robeyns, moral individualism postulates that the individual and only individuals are the units of moral concern (Robeyns 2000, 16). This means that social existence as a whole matters only in as much as it is for the good of the individual and the individual alone. Critics like Gasper and Charles Gore argue that Sen seems to be pre-occupied with individual well-being. They say that for Sen, individual freedom and life-choices are primary, while interpersonal, family and community values are secondary or instrumental. For instance, Gore asserts that for Sen, “the goodness or badness of social arrangements is evaluated on the basis of what is good and bad for individual well-being and freedom and is also reduced to the good of those individuals” (Gore 1997, 242). This means that the Capability Approach evaluates the morality or “the goodness of social arrangements based exclusively on the properties of individuals” (Ibid.).

There are two things that must be elaborated to evaluate Sen’s moral individualism. First, what we need to show is whether the concept of the good is reducible to what is good for the

individual. Secondly, we need to find the argument that makes moral individualism wrong. According to Gore, “normative practices to the community and culture are various features of the institutional contexts within which people’s lives are embedded (Ibid., 243). Borrowing the term from Charles Taylor, Gore calls these things “irreducibly social goods” which cannot be decomposed into individual occurrences (Ibid.). These goods cannot be attributed to an individual as an exclusive property or possession. These are values which individuals submit themselves into, values which contribute to individual well-being. For instance, one can cite the value of marriage as the union between husband and wife. Neither of the two owns the value of “being one in marriage”, for reducing it to a property attributable to one individual alone will undermine the value of that union. The well-being of both husband and wife also depends on the strength of that union, a fact that strengthens the idea that the family is the basic unit of society. Marriage is a social norm, and as such, it is “a system that defines the legitimacy of actions and normative sanctions” (Ibid., 244). For instance, the idea that pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations are immoral in many societies comes from the context and meaning of marital commitment. In terms of the value of committing oneself to marriage, it seems that it should be judged not as a way of nurturing one party alone, but both parties and the family which comes as a result of this commitment.

It can therefore be argued that the state of affair of marriage or of family life is also dependent on the overall well-being of the socio-political conditions of the people. It can be said that “though human well-being is crucially dependent on functioning and capability of individuals, it also needs a wider supportive social, political, and cultural environment (Giri 2000, 1113). What this means is that human well-being cannot be reduced to individual well-being. Therefore, one can also talk about marital well-being which is interpersonal and family well-being which is social. My argument here is that working on the strength of the family as the foundation of society bodes well for society as a whole including, for instance, what becomes of other social institutions. A well-nourished family and a family grounded on good values can be a solid foundation for future electors and future political leaders.

Sen’s critics argue that moral individualism is problematic because of its tendency to put the individual over and above the social and cultural institutions which give meaning to human life. The overemphasis on human freedom seems to suggest that everything that matters in

human life depends on individual choice, but such “perplexes those who see how important cultural values, institutions, social affiliations, and the rest to the development of really lived lives” (Wells 2006, 7). Critics contend that Sen fails to adequately account for other important aspects in human life other than the value of human freedom. For instance, Sen takes community membership, social and cultural affiliation as instrumental, not central, to human life (Gasper 2002, 452). Gasper means to say here that the human being cannot be limited to a microcosm of his or her choices. The primacy of the good for the individual cannot make the values inherent in the family, in culture, in social affiliations through community membership, play, and other social activities a mere means to an end, a mere instrument to the individual’s well-being instead of being essentially important.

However, Robeyns claims that “a commitment to moral individualism is not incompatible with the recognition of connections between people, their social relations, and their social embedment” (Robeyns 2000, 17). Sen, for instance, says that “the substantive freedoms that we enjoy to exercise our responsibilities are extremely contingent on personal, social, and environmental circumstances” (Sen 1999, 284). This suggests that social conditions influence the choices that people make. Sen elaborates this in the idea that self-interest can include a concern for others. He says, “beyond our broadly defined well-being or self-interest, we may be willing to make sacrifices in pursuit of other values, such as social justice, or nationalism, or communal welfare” (Ibid., 270). Sen develops this in the concept of social commitment, which he identifies in the determined act of the person to help, for instance, a destitute individual beyond the idea of sympathy. To sympathize, according to Sen, is to help because you are moved by someone’s condition. But commitment is “filled with a determination to change a system that you think is unjust” (Ibid.) Commitment is concrete action; it desires more than individual well-being in the sense that its ultimate goal is to change systems when they are detrimental to society as a whole.

But still, I think Sen’s other-regarding ideas are only secondary to the pursuit of individual well-being, which is what freedom is all about. My assessment is that his elaboration on the importance of human freedom to the expansion of life-options means that first and foremost, it is individual well-being that is a priority. For Sen, the individual’s first responsibility is his well-being, and this is obvious in his emphasis on human capability. Human development for Sen means the enlargement of individual well-being, but social well-being or the enhancement of communal welfare seem to be only instrumental, meaning to say, we re-arrange or reform unjust

systems because they do not properly address individual welfare. For instance, his analysis of family relations focuses on the deprivation of an individual due to cultural biases. Women, (i.e. mothers, daughters), are at times voiceless due to many patriarchal ways of living. As such, their capability to be reasonable agents need to be empowered and protected. But empowerment cannot be limited to the empowerment of women's positive freedoms or capabilities. Certainly, emphasis on family values, care for the other, commitment to marriage as a social bond, and a greater regard for inter-personal well-being are also valuable in realizing equality in the family.

The third critique deals with the claim that Sen's concept of human development is pre-social. According to Gasper, it is pre-social because it is a theory that emerges from and in an on-going conversation with mainstream economics, and thus is inadequate as a basis for thinking about important features of one's social life (Gasper 2004, 181). Gasper argues that it is too abstract to identify which specific aspects of one's social life is important to human development and therefore, is inadequate as a norm for policy direction. The third critique will thus focus on the idea that the approach is too broad and fails as a policy guide.

To set the tone of this critique, I would like to point out two important points from Alkire which test the workability of Sen's framework. These points refer to the identification of valuable capabilities and the prioritization of capabilities, both necessary as guide to policy decisions. For Alkire, the first point probes into the policy direction which Sen's framework should provide in identifying valuable capabilities (Alkire 2002, 11). This matter is important because we need to show how emerging issues can be met especially in developing countries. Apart from the examples identified by Sen, i.e., capability of being well-nourished or being literate, it should be noted that it is necessary to identify other important capabilities if Sen's framework is to be advanced by governments, global institutions, and international NGOs as a policy device. This is crucial from a practical point of view since it is necessary to know where to concentrate the use of precious resources for development projects. In the absence of concretely identified capabilities, there's nothing to guide development practitioners. From a political point of view, an abstract policy can suffer from program fatigue, since the lack of concreteness will make policies subject to regime changes. New regimes can mean new policies. Thus, Gasper says that Sen's abstracted individualism renders his work as unreliable as policy

device (Gasper 2002, 452). For Gasper, this is because Sen fails to provide is a concrete “listing of features as core requirements, other than physical subsistence and freedom” (Ibid., 452).

The second point of Alkire brings us to “the importance of knowing which capabilities should be prioritized in matters pertaining to human development” (Ibid.). This point is vital, for instance, in economic decisions regarding poverty alleviation through the enhancement of human capabilities. For Alkire, identifying the basic capabilities is necessary so that the framework’s operational phase may be entered (Alkire 2002, 12). Furthermore, an extension of the theoretical conception of human flourishing, by reference to which a decision to select certain capabilities as basic could be defended (Ibid.). This means that the framework could be strengthened and made applicable, especially regarding policy decisions concerning economic growth and human development. I think that without any priority listing, it would be very difficult to assess which capabilities matter most and which do not. For example, how should a government address the opposition to the establishment of a power plant in a place where a certain cultural minority thrives? What is the moral approach to the problem? It seems that without knowing which capabilities are of great value to people, one cannot find a workable basis for a sound policy decision that is both practical and moral. I therefore argue that the sustainability of certain economic decisions which are not detrimental to human well-being can only be judged if one knows which capabilities must be protected by these policy decisions. It is worth noting that the importance and urgency of making the approach work comes from Sen himself, who says that “deprived groups may be habituated to inequality, may be unaware of possibilities of social change, maybe resigned to fate, and may be willing to accept the legitimacy of the established order” (Sen 1987, 10) The need to institutionalize the Capability Approach and make it really work here becomes obvious.

However, it should be noted that Sen acknowledges the importance of social institutions in promoting human development. As I have elaborated in the previous section, democracy makes possible the institutional mechanisms which protect the people’s welfare. These institutions are essential, and they “cannot be viewed as mechanical devices for development” (Ibid., 158). Their use is conditioned by our values, and by the use we make of the available opportunities of articulation and participation (Ibid.). This can be seen from the value of public discussion. Sen says that as a matter of fact, not only is the force of public discussion one of the correlates of democracy, with extensive reach, but its cultivation can also make democracy itself function

better (Ibid.). Sen acknowledges that the commitment to human well-being needs the efforts of many sectors of society, “political and social organizations, NGOs, community-based arrangements, the media and other means of public understanding and communication” (Ibid., 284).

According to Alkire, the Capability Approach is deliberately incomplete, noting further that Sen has never made a claim that the Capability Approach is meant to be fully operational (Alkire 2002, 10-11). Rather, it is intended to be broadly conceived. Alkire says that the reason behind this is that Sen wants to allow economists and development practitioners to work on important development issues which consensus on fundamentals is not necessary (Ibid.). Gasper explains that the Capability Approach seeks to avoid being culturally contingent and controversial (Gasper 2004, 182). I think the advantage of taking this broadly conceived stance is that from a pragmatic perspective, development work can immediately proceed without having to debate on many divergent points of view between individuals of different cultures. For instance, providing development needs in the area of health, water or literacy needs no controversial cultural debates, because people, regardless of beliefs or philosophies, need to be served by governments in these areas. Gasper notes that Sen’s framework has been advanced by the UNDP, in broad policy analysis and design in the areas of nutrition, education, and health (Gasper 2004, 177).

But then again, I believe there is a need to concretize Sen’s theory to make it work in today’s world. For instance, the reality of violent and abusive regimes and the usurpation of political power make it more apparent that Sen’s framework need to be enhanced. Quite clearly, constitutional guarantees are necessary to safeguard human capabilities since the abstract idea of freedom can easily vanish if people are under constant threat. To this end, it can be said that Sen’s framework is not really an unworkable idea. Indeed, it is a strong foundation which can serve as basis for sound development policies. Generally, I think that Sen’s framework still strongly radiates the basic idea that human development is a moral imperative. What is necessary is to provide it a more solid philosophical grounding, an elaboration of what is truly human in terms of capabilities, and the theoretical framework for establishing constitutional guarantees to make it work. These are matters that the next chapter will seek to address.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Concept of the Human Person in Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Ethics: A Discussion**

### **2.1 Sen and Nussbaum: some contrasts and distinctions**

According to Nussbaum, Sen uses the concept of capability “to make comparisons regarding the quality of life, which intends to advance the idea that it is in asking what people are able to do or to be, and not in their level of satisfaction nor the amount of resources they are able to command that the quality of human life is best understood” (Nussbaum 2000, 12). In contrast to Sen, Nussbaum’s stated goal in her version of the Capability Approach is “to go beyond the merely comparative use of the capability space to articulate an account of how capabilities, together with the idea of a threshold level, can provide a basis for constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments” (Ibid.). We may thus begin by noting in bold strokes some contrasts and distinctions between Sen and Nussbaum. The differences can be illustrated in the following:

First, Nussbaum intends to make her version of the Capability Approach “real and complete rather than abstract” (Ibid., xvi). For Nussbaum, one reason that makes the Capability Approach urgent is the difficult and appalling condition of women, especially in many poor countries. Citing the 1997 Human Development Report, Nussbaum says that “no country treats its women as well as its men according to a complex measure that includes life expectancy, wealth and education” (Ibid., 2). In order to address this issue, Nussbaum attempts to formulate a more realistic framework of the Capability Approach by introducing the idea of a threshold of capabilities or the idea of a social minimum of capabilities, something that is absent in the elucidation of Sen’s “equality of what?”. For Nussbaum, the idea of a threshold of capabilities is important because this makes the Capability Approach applicable as an institutional framework. With the idea of a social minimum of capabilities with which governments can work on, a clear target can be set by policy makers. Distinguishing itself from the conceptual “full capability equality” that Sen promotes, Nussbaum tells us that “Sen nowhere uses the idea of a threshold” (Ibid., 12).

Secondly, although both are in agreement that some form of equality in terms of capability is important in the achievement of well-being for each and every person Nussbaum develops her version in a philosophical by introducing the idea of human dignity and human flourishing, based on her reading of Marx and Aristotle. Nussbaum notes that “Sen has not attempted to ground the Capabilities Approach in the Marxian and Aristotelian idea of a truly human functioning” (Ibid., 13). But it must be noted though, as the preceding chapter has shown that Sen’s version is deliberately incomplete and abstract. As a matter of principle, Sen proposes “a thin ethic so that his concepts can be useful for other types of substantive thick ethic that differs from him in various respects” (Sen 1993, 47-48; also in Gasper 1997, 292). This flexibility thus provides the opportunity for Nussbaum to approach it in a more philosophical way.

Thirdly, while both agree to the idea that aggregate income cannot be an adequate basis for the assessment of well-being Nussbaum goes beyond the use of the Capability Approach in the economic assessments of human welfare by constructing it as a theoretical framework for political and social institutions. She thinks that the Capability Approach serves as a “good basis for a specifically political conception and a specifically political overlapping consensus” (Nussbaum 2000, 14). This addresses the critique which demands that the Capability Approach must provide for a politically and socially applicable framework. Nussbaum intends quite clearly to make the Capability Approach as a policy guide for the solutions that governments seek to implement in order to address the problems concerning human well-being or the lack thereof. The framework, she claims, “helps us to construct basic political principles that can serve as the foundation for constitutional guarantees to which nations should be held responsible by their citizens” (Ibid., 298).

After taking into consideration these basic contrasts and distinctions between the two thinkers, we may now consider on elaborating the very reasons on how and why Nussbaum’s version of the Capability Approach accounts for a development paradigm that is fully human. The task of this chapter is to argue for a politically realistic framework of the Capability Approach which I believe the version proposed by Nussbaum represents. In the succeeding sections, I hope to advance Nussbaum’s version as something that complements Sen’s work. I also hope to put forward the arguments from Nussbaum which will respond to some of the critiques that have been leveled against Sen.



## **2.2 Nussbaum's concept of the human person: A two-fold intuitive idea**

One strategy used by Nussbaum to concretize her version of the Capability Approach is that she personally lived with, observed, and reflected on the reality of women in India during her research work for the World Institute for Development Research (WIDER) in 1986 (Nussbaum 2000, xv). She has fruitfully utilized the experience with women groups in India through WIDER in writing *Women and Human Development*, a book which she published in 2000. The book begins with the statement – “women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have a professional and technical education” (Ibid., 1). Women, according to Nussbaum, are usually burdened by what she calls a “double day”, due to the fact that a woman actually has to do two jobs, one outside her home as an employee and another when she returns home to take care of the needs of her children, and more often than not, her husband too (See Ibid., 1-2). This means that women in poor countries do not have time for self enhancing activities. Due to the taxing and difficult environment they are into where they are less empowered, women essentially “lack the opportunities for play and for the cultivation of their imaginative and cognitive faculties” (Ibid.). In short, women in many parts of the world do not have the opportunity to lead a life they truly value. The reason for this, according to Nussbaum, is that they lack support for leading lives that are fully human and this lack of support is frequently caused by their being women (Ibid., 3). In the light of this reflection, there is a need to understand how society may be able to give women a life that is worth living. The Capability Approach, in this sense, should be able to provide people in general, and women, in this particular example, the real opportunities for a life worthy of their humanity. In addressing this concern, Nussbaum presents a two-fold intuitive idea as the foundation for a Capability Approach that considers each individual life in a fully human way. She says,

The intuitive idea behind the approach is two-fold: first, that certain functions are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life and second, this is what Marx found in Aristotle – that there is something that it is to do with these functions in a truly human way, not merely an animal way” (Ibid., 72).

What the above passage means is that, on one hand, the first part of this intuitive idea has something to do with what constitutes “the good life” and thus requires an understanding and elaboration of the concept of “human flourishing”. On the other hand, the second part is meant to emphasize the notion of a life lived in a truly dignified way, and thus needs an elucidation of the meaning of human dignity. Nussbaum’s concept of the human person, in this sense, is anchored on two basic ideas – the notion of human flourishing and the concept of human dignity.

Let me discuss the first part of the intuitive idea above – the concept of human flourishing. Following Aristotle, Nussbaum says that “in general, people seek not the way of their ancestors, but the good” (Politics 1269a, 3-4; also in Nussbaum 2000, 49). We need to examine, in this regard, what the good life means for Aristotle. For Aristotle, ‘the good’ is a question about what it means to flourish, and thus Nussbaum asserts that we want an account that is respectful of each person’s struggle for flourishing (Ibid., 68). Let me state that the idea of human flourishing is connected to the notion of living well as the ultimate end of human life. For Aristotle, the ultimate end of human life is *eudaimonia* which he describes as the state of living well (Nussbaum 1986, 6). To explain this, we quote from Nussbaum,

To the Greeks, *eudaimonia* means something like “living a good life for a human being”; or as a recent writer, John Cooper has suggested, “human flourishing”. Aristotle tells us that it is equivalent to “living well and doing well” (Ibid.).

The above passage means that the good life for each individual consists of a life that is well-lived – the kind of life that “each person has reason to value” because it is a life that flourishes with noteworthy human activity. Nussbaum gives us an account that emphasizes on human flourishing as “an evolving picture of the proposed essential components of a life that is fully human” (Gasper 1997, 293). She says, “we believe that human life is worth living only if a good life can be secured by effort, and if the relevant sort of effort lies within the capabilities of most people (Nussbaum 1986, 320). This is something that Nussbaum has learned from Aristotle, who writes in *Nicomachean Ethics* that “it is evident that *eudaimonia* stands in need of good things from outside, as we have said: for it is impossible or difficult to do fine things without resources” (1099a 31-3). Thus, this implies that primary social goods only possess real value for the individual if and only if they help the person achieve the highest end of human life, which is *eudaimonia*. This claim reminds us of the idea that having a certain amount of income is

only a means to the achievement of well-being (as Sen elaborates in his version) and must not be sought as an end in itself or misconstrued as well-being per se. Sen is thankful to Nussbaum for drawing the latter's attention to this Aristotelian connection (Sen 1987, 23). When Sen speaks of a life that one "has reason to value", in drawing this Aristotelian connection, it can be said that Sen therefore speaks of the good life for the human person which for Aristotle is a life of essential flourishing.

Aristotle also meant to say that living well is not being in a static condition. *Eudaimonia* is something that is fully expressed in dynamic human activity. Thus, for Nussbaum, the good life should be assessed in terms of what the person is actually "able to do and to be". She says that "*eudaimonia* is seen to be of good living and good acting" (Nussbaum 1986, 323). Living well, in this sense, is connected with doing or being able to "act out" what is necessary to realize the good life. Nussbaum, for instance, makes an analogy to athletic conditioning, saying that "good athletic conditioning, is a kind of preparation for an activity; it finds its natural fulfillment and flourishing in activity" (Ibid., 324). We can find this in Sen who writes that well-being is concerned with evaluating it in terms of a person's actual ability to achieve various functionings as a part of living (See Sen 1993, 30). Both versions of the Capability Approach, in this sense, prescribe the important ingredients for the realization of the good life, which is rooted in the ability of the individual to attain *eudaimonia* through dynamic activity, which is "the coming forth of that good condition from its state of concealment or mere potentiality; it is its flourishing or booming" (Nussbaum 1986, 324). For instance, some women are deprived of the chance to flourish or express themselves creatively because they lack the opportunity for education and other imaginative activities. When women are prohibited by their culture to attend school (as in the case of the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan) or are forced to marry (as in the case of arranged marriages in some cultures), these scenarios are substantial impediments to attaining *eudaimonia*. Due to the absence of capabilities that empower women to choose the good life, one can render the judgment that they cannot really attain *eudaimonia* or the state of living well.

Now, we turn to the second part of the intuitive idea – the notion of human dignity. According to Nussbaum, "we judge, frequently enough, that a life has been so impoverished that it is not worthy of the dignity of the human being, that it is a life in which one goes on living, but more or less like an animal, unable to develop and realize one's human power" (Nussbaum 2000,

72). In this passage, Nussbaum provides us with a more philosophical concept of the human person, and therefore a stronger basis for an ethics of human development based on the idea that each individual is an end in itself. Nussbaum draws a connection to Karl Marx, whose theory of labor elaborates a concept of human dignity, based on the idea that each human person is an end in itself and therefore cannot be reduced to being a mere ‘means to an end’. Marx explains the reality of how alienated labor degrades or dehumanizes the human being such that he or she is merely used by the capitalist to gain profit. In this view, Marx says that the person is reduced to the level of a thing, capable only of exercising his or her animal functions, and not the full potential of his or her self-expression. Nussbaum, in capturing this insight on the dignity of the human person from Marx, says that “the core idea is that of a human being as a dignified free individual who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a flock or herd animal” (Ibid.). Nussbaum, in advancing the respect for the dignity of each person, argues for the notion of entitlements that each individual must have under a free society, with the notion of equality of capability as a matter of right in just political arrangements. The parallelism with Sen can be drawn in the essay *Freedoms and Needs*:

The importance of political rights for the understanding of economic needs turns ultimately on seeing human beings as people with rights to exercise, not as parts of a stock or a population that passively exists and must be looked after (Sen 1994, 38).

In the above quote, Sen is expressing the thought, one that Nussbaum puts forward, that human life is valuable in itself, although I think Sen says it in a more abstract way. The passage implies that each individual is entitled to certain rights, i.e. education, health care, and housing in order to live a life that is worth living, a life that can be fully human, and that life is irreducible to being a mere number in a census data, which is the case in many poor countries. Here, we can certainly add that for Nussbaum, in grafting her claim from Marx, “the senses of a human being can operate at a merely animal level – if they are not cultivated by appropriate education, by leisure for play and self-expression, and by valuable association with others” (Nussbaum 2000, 72). Nussbaum draws our attention to the importance of enhancing the full human potential of the human person to emphasize that each human life is an end in itself, which she finds as useful in putting forward the truly egalitarian message of the Capability Approach. Thus, she asserts that we must “notice that the Capability Approach makes each person a bearer of value and an

end” (Ibid., 73). This means that “it is profoundly wrong to subordinate the ends of some individuals to those of others, that is, at the core of what exploitation is to treat a person as a mere object for the use of others” (Ibid.). To explain this, we can refer to the reality of women and children who are victims of abuse, and to the fact that they suffer at the receiving end of a society that does not treat each person equally. Thus, Nussbaum says that “what this approach is after is a society in which persons are treated as each worthy of regard, and in which each has been put in a position to live really humanly” (Ibid., 74).

Nussbaum uses the concept of human dignity as an important foundational principle for what constitutes a life that is most choice-worthy under just constitutional arrangements. She asserts, “we may thus rephrase our principle of each person as end, articulating it as a principle of each person’s capability: the capabilities sought are sought for each person and every person” (Ibid.). In terms of the political application of the approach, Nussbaum seeks to promote the idea of each person having the capabilities at a certain social minimum necessary to lead a life in a truly dignified human way. This means that to give value to the life of each person, political arrangements will have to ensure that each person has the basic capabilities for him or her to achieve his or her full human potential. This proceeds from the idea, for instance, that “human beings are creatures such that provided with the right education and material support, they can become fully capable of all these human functions” (Ibid., 83). Nussbaum says for a woman, “a life without dignity and choice, a life in which she can be no more than an appendage of someone else, is a type of death, death of her humanity” (Ibid.). So what then is a life of dignity? Nussbaum writes,

It arises naturally from the recognition that each person has just one life to live, not more than one; that the food on A’s plate does not magically nourish the stomach of B; that the pleasure felt in C’s body does not make the pain experienced by D less painful (Ibid., 56).

What the above means is that each individual life is valuable. The well-being of each person must be looked into, for each human life is worthy of respect. As such, social arrangements must take into consideration the dignity of the human person for each person has a life he or she lives as uniquely his or her own. Impliedly, in advocating for a truly people-centered development approach, one has to put the dignity of the human person as the grounding

principle. By emphasizing the point that each individual has to live a life with dignity and that each individual person is entitled to a life of essential flourishing that enables each to express himself or herself more fully as a human being, Nussbaum responds to the need for a more elaborate concept of human development that sees the “human” in human development concretely. The bigger challenge, of course, is to argue for the applicability of this approach to politics. Suffice it to say that “to treat everyone as an end we will have to take a stand on some values that will be made central for political purposes” (Ibid., 58).

### **2.3 The threshold of capabilities as a politically realistic framework**

Human development is urgently needed in the third world. This necessitates the creation of a workable political paradigm. The developing world has urgent and difficult problems. The lack of respect for human dignity and the low regard for women exacerbate the problem of poverty. For Nussbaum, poverty and gender inequality results to the acute failure of central human capabilities (Ibid., 3). In answering the critics who accuse Sen’s Capability Approach as pre-social and in order to concretize the abstract framework of Sen, Nussbaum proposes instead the idea of a social minimum, or a threshold level of capabilities. What this threshold provides is a sufficiently adequate level of capabilities necessary for the achievement of a decent kind of life and the well-being worthy of the dignity of the human person. Nussbaum’s argument is this: “In certain core areas of human functionings, a necessary condition of justice for a public political arrangement is that it delivers to citizens a certain basic level of capability” (Ibid., 71).

Our task here is to be able to characterize this threshold and to argue that it is politically justifiable. First, let me discuss the characteristics of this threshold. The threshold refers to a set of basic capabilities that must be secured for each person in society. Securing the basic capabilities of people according to Nussbaum is the task of our political and social institutions. This means that government structures, i.e. offices and constitutional guarantees, are to ensure that people are given the minimum, seen as necessary for them to be able to flourish and to live a life of dignity. This requires identifying a set of capabilities which people must have. This list can serve as guide for policy makers and governments. Nussbaum writes that her goal is “to provide a philosophical underpinning for an account of core human entitlements that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations” (Nussbaum 2006, 70). It can be

recalled that Sen thinks that the entitlement to these basic capabilities are necessary for well-being achievement. What Nussbaum specifically does here is to enhance this idea by proposing something workable in a highly diverse global order. She says that “these capabilities are then presented as the source of political principles for a liberal pluralistic society” (Ibid.). Nussbaum, in my assessment, is suggesting that a minimum or a threshold level is what is acceptable given the context of the diverse cultures around the world. The threshold level, in this sense, can be described as something that should be required for just forms of social and political arrangements. A clear distinction is hereby established – Sen develops a paradigm that accounts for “equality of capability” whereas Nussbaum advocates for “a threshold of capability”, which she believes, if pursued, gives us a “benchmark as we think about what it really is to secure a right to someone” (Ibid., 287). This benchmark for an entitlement to a decent life or a life of dignified existence means that each individual has a right or is “entitled to not only mere life, but to a life compatible with human dignity, and this means that the relevant goods must be available at a sufficiently high level” (Ibid., 292).

In order to establish that the idea of a threshold of capabilities is politically justifiable, we need to show that it is something that can be implemented by governments in different societies and cultures. For Nussbaum, the answer to this is the claim that a social minimum of capabilities can be constitutionally guaranteed and implemented as a result of an overlapping consensus<sup>4</sup>. For Nussbaum, Rawls’s overlapping consensus is intended as a principle “to accommodate a wide range of traditional views and practices” (Nussbaum 2006, 295). For Nussbaum, “the Capability Approach remains focused on the person as the ultimate focus of justice, and thus refuses to compromise on the justification of the capabilities list” (Ibid.). But she acknowledges the differences of cultures, both “within and across nations” (Ibid.). An overlapping consensus, given the diversities of nations in terms of religious and political beliefs, is intended to serve as a political conception for just social arrangements. For Nussbaum, it can serve as a fundamental principle in advancing the idea of a social minimum of capabilities.

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<sup>4</sup> An overlapping consensus, says Nussbaum, quoting from John Rawls, means that people may sign on this conception as the freestanding moral core of a political conception, without accepting any particular metaphysical view of the world, any particular comprehensive ethical or religious view, or even any particular view of the person or of human nature (Nussbaum 2006, 76).

Nussbaum's proposal of an overlapping consensus on a social minimum makes the Capability Approach politically realistic and applicable. This suits the need for a starting point in discussing important development policy issues. The deteriorating states of affair in many poor countries of the world today make it an imperative for governments to make human development a priority. Nussbaum's proposal hopes to address this concern. Nussbaum puts forward four arguments for a threshold of capabilities, enunciated in her list of central human capabilities. She says,

1. The list is intended as open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking. This open-endedness is even more important if we extend the approach to the international community, because we are more likely to hear in such debates good ideas that we did not hear before, or criticisms of our own ways of life that we had previously not taken seriously (Ibid., 296).
2. The items in on the list are specified in a somewhat abstract way and general way, precisely in order to leave room for the activities of specifying and deliberating by citizens and their legislatures and courts in each nation (Ibid).
3. The list represents a freestanding 'partial moral conception' introduced for political purposes only, and without any grounding in metaphysical ideas of the sort that divide people along lines of culture and religion (Ibid.).
4. The major liberties that protect pluralism are central items of the list: freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of conscience. A nation that does not protect these is halfhearted about pluralism, or worse (Ibid., 297).

Let me elaborate. The first argument intends to accommodate cultural diversity. It also prescribes dialogue and openness among people of a nation and between peoples of different nations. Through this open-endedness, differences in value orientations between cultures and societies can be taken into consideration in formulating and re-formulating the contents of a basic threshold of capabilities necessary for human development.

The second argument hopes to advance the role of political deliberation with the intention of finding what is appropriate for people in terms of capabilities, and this task belongs to governmental structures and institutions. Public deliberation will enable people to raise important



concerns relative to the choice of capabilities. Democratic engagements through a legislative agenda on the capabilities that people should have will strengthen the political resolve of government leaders regarding human development.

The third argument adheres to Rawls's formula as to how political consensus can be arrived at in society, given the plurality of our beliefs. Thus, the threshold of capabilities is intended as a principle for political purposes only, and not as an all-encompassing moral prescription. This means that the list can be the focus of government institutions and policy makers who should ensure that each citizen in the country regardless of religious background or belief has an opportunity to achieve a decent and dignified life.

The fourth argument puts forward essential items that ensure respect for pluralism in society, thereby protecting the important freedoms that guarantee such. Governments must respect freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of conscience to make an overlapping consensus work.

One important role of this overlapping consensus on the threshold of capabilities is that it guarantees and secures the pursuit of a benchmark of capabilities for well-being achievement. Such a benchmark ensures that each and every person lives a life that is fully human even in the midst of cultural diversity. For instance, "governments cannot make all women emotionally healthy; but it can do quite a lot to influence emotional health, through suitable policies in areas such as family law, rape law and public safety" (Ibid.). Constitutional guarantees to protect the vulnerability of women and children, for instance, can be a product of an overlapping consensus. By providing such mechanisms, the well-being achievement of women at its most basic level can be secured.

Nussbaum insists only on a threshold, and so she finds this proposal incomplete. But it is something that provides for an adequate and a sufficient level of human decency for people to live in a truly human way. Let us cite housing for the poor as an example. Nussbaum says, "an adequate house or other shelter seems to be inherent in the idea of human dignity, and it seems right that constitutions all over the world are beginning to recognize the right to housing as a constitutional entitlement" (Ibid., 293). In my view, the idea of providing decent housing to the poor is manifests the fact that governments value the dignity of each individual and his or her

family. Moreover, it also gives the individual an opportunity to flourish in a truly human way. When a government implements a housing program for the poor, it provides people with the opportunity to have peace of mind (security from outside elements, i.e. crimes and bad weather), a healthy living (many people in the Philippines live in shanties near garbage dumpsites so it is a must to relocate them), and a conducive learning environment (housing must be near schools where children can have access to education). Each individual in society, regardless of his or her beliefs or convictions, must be entitled to a right to have his or her own house and must be supported by his or her government so that he or she may be able to live decently.

## **2.4 The universal nature of the ten central human capabilities**

Setting a threshold of capabilities requires the identification of a basic set of capabilities. We have established in the prior chapter that Sen refuses to make a list in a deliberate way in order to allow for some kind of flexibility, although he often cites examples like literacy and health care to demonstrate his point. Critics find Sen's approach inadequate because of such, and they argue that to make the approach work as a policy guide, Sen must at least identify a capability set. Sen's reason for not making a list or identifying a basic set of capabilities is in deference to pluralistic cultures and the need for a wider audience. But to make the approach politically applicable, Nussbaum tries to find a universal ground, something that can serve as the content of an overlapping consensus in terms of what really is important for "each citizen, in each and every nation, if each is to be treated as an end" (Ibid., 6). The argument of Nussbaum runs this way – "that certain universal norms of human capability should be central for political purposes in thinking about basic political principles that can provide the underpinning for a set of constitutional guarantees in all nations" (Ibid., 35). The need for such is in order to confront the issue of cultural differences, and succeeding in a highly pluralistic environment is a great challenge for human development.

In order to justify the list of central human capabilities, one must argue for the universality of the capabilities contained in the list. Nussbaum says, "we have some good reasons to think that universal values are not just acceptable, but badly needed, if we really are to show respect for all citizens in a pluralistic society" (Ibid., 60). In an essay entitled, *Human Functioning and Social Justice: In defense of Aristotelian essentialism*, Nussbaum asserts the need of an account

that shows what is essentially ‘human’ in human life, which she characterizes as a “thick vague theory of the good” (Nussbaum 1992, 215.) This thick notion of the good, which prescribes some features of human life as universal, can be the ground for what is truly “human” in human development. Nussbaum writes,

For it begins from two facts: first, that we do recognize others as humans across many divisions of time and space. Whatever the differences we encounter, we are rarely in doubt as to when we are dealing with a human being and when we are not. The essentialist account attempts to describe the bases for these recognitions; by mapping out the general shape of the human form of life, those features that constitute a life as human wherever it is. Second, we do have a broadly shared general consensus about the features whose absence means the end of a human form of life (Ibid.).

What the above passage implies is that this essentialist view of what is truly human tells us that there are features which account for a life that is fully human. These features, as the above tries to put forward, must be universal in character. For Nussbaum, these features refer to the set of central human capabilities. The lack thereof or the serious inadequacy of any one of these central human capabilities can be construed as a failure in enabling people to attain a fully human existence. From a political end, the inability of any government to secure these essential features can make the quality of human life of its citizens less human.

Nussbaum subsequently names these features in her list of Central Human Capabilities. Human life can only function well and lived fully if each of the ten central human capabilities is satisfied. The Central Human Capabilities are as follows (Nussbaum 2000, 78-80):

1. Life (Being able to live for the span normal for the species)
2. Bodily health (Being able to have good health and in order to obtain this, adequate nourishment and shelter)
3. Bodily integrity (Being able to be physically secure, and with rights over one’s own body, e.g. not forced to lose capacity for sexual satisfaction or forced to conceive or bear children)
4. Senses, imagination, and thought (Being able to use the senses, imagine, think and reason, and to do this in a truly human way: adequately educated, informed and free from repression)

5. Emotions (Being able to have attachments for other people and things)
6. Practical reason (Being able to ‘form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection for the planning of one’s life)
7. Affiliation (A. Being able to interact well with other people, and to imagine and empathize with their situation; B. Having the social bases for self-respect and non-humiliation; not being subject to discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, etc.)
8. Other species (Being able to live with concern for the natural world)
9. Play (Being able to play and laugh)
10. Control over one’s environment (A. Being able to participate in political processes; B. Being able to have possessions and seek employment)

My assessment is that our immediate task is to show, following Nussbaum, that each item in the list is a universal value. The basic idea, Nussbaum says, with regard to each of these is that when one imagines a life without the capability in question such a life is not worthy of human dignity (Nussbaum 2006, 78). The universal character of each of the above suggests that each of these capabilities is important for every person wherever that person is, if one is to treat that person as an end in itself. Thus, each individual is entitled to every capability in the list. The whole idea of universality here points to the fact that a life deprived of any of these, according to Nussbaum, “would be too lacking and too impoverished to be human at all” (Nussbaum 1992, 220). For example, even if an individual has all nine capabilities, but there is constant threat to his or her life that there is always danger of losing it, say from terrorism, it can be said that his or her well-being is compromised. On the other hand, if a person is suffering from a serious ailment and is not given the due medical care, one can make the judgment that the well-being of that person’s life is threatened. Bodily integrity, for instance, is very important. I will use an example to illustrate my point. In some areas in the Philippines, some people sell their kidneys without the full knowledge of its negative effects, and it goes without saying that their ability to lead normal lives is adversely compromised. Because some of them do not have the requisite knowledge to be able to make an informed judgment on the matter, poor people become susceptible to exploitation. This means that essentially, due to the lack of basic capabilities and most importantly, the capability for critical reasoning, poor people sometimes mistake monetary well-being for real human well-being. Moreover, the issue on illegal organ selling gives us a perspective as to what a government should do in order to secure bodily integrity for its citizens.

For instance, laws and policies can be set up or strengthened to control the proliferation of unlawful organ transplants in medical facilities. In this regard, law enforcement agencies should exercise their mandate of serving and protecting the welfare of the people. Poor people exchange an organ for a large sum of money, which in the end, due to their lack of entrepreneurial skills, will all be spent and gone. Beyond this, the fact is that they are simply exploited due to their ignorance of the health risks relative to organ extraction. Thus, the government as an institution whose *raison d'etre* is the promotion and the protection of the welfare of the people should give importance to the protection of the people's bodily integrity so that people are not subjected to any form of exploitation.

The central human capabilities are therefore essential for a life that is fully human. As an Aristotelian essentialist, Nussbaum is saying that a life that lacks any one of these, no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness (Ibid., 222). The point is that a life that is truly human can only be lived if it has all these universal values, for removing any of the above can severely alter how one lives his or her life. For instance, women must be allowed self-creativity in terms of their thoughts, emotions and imagination, including that of practical reason, in order to live truly well. They need to be heard, choose their own career, and plan the kind of life they want to live. The item on affiliation, for example, is necessary to express our sociality. Human life is greatly enriched by means of our social functions through group membership where we develop important relations. Moreover, the idea of play is not only important for children but to adults as well, since play essentially breaks monotony in human work. In addition to this, the inclusion of other species as something important to human life can be explained by saying that if the future generation will be deprived of all the beautiful birds, animals, and even flowers, then their lives can be seen as deeply disadvantaged. Lastly, control over one's environment suggests that human beings must have the power to have access to their political entitlements, such as voting rights and freedom of speech, for denying the individual his or her rights severely affects his or her capacity for rational choice and creative self-expression.

According to Nussbaum, the argument is that once we identify a group of especially important functions in human life which is what the list of central human capabilities does, we are then in a position to ask what social and political institutions are doing about them (Ibid., 214). Nussbaum, in this sense, tells us that this concrete framework can be a basis for policies on

human development. In support of this idea, Gasper says Nussbaum's list sets a relevant starting point for discussion and public action (Gasper 2004, 186). Also, the approach, I think, serves as a political basis in identifying what must be prioritized in terms of human development. By establishing the universal appeal of the central human capabilities, Nussbaum's framework suits the need for a politically justifiable approach that responds and is sensitive to cultural differences and pluralism in society. Gasper adds that the list can serve as an "element for shared acceptance between ideologies that can otherwise differ" (Ibid., 185). My judgment is that the list implies that there is something basic in our humanness. Nussbaum points to it by identifying and elaborating on certain features that makes us truly human, "giving us a conception of human well-being that arises from the investigation into 'human be-ing' – into the meaning of 'human' and the contents of 'being' (Ibid., 182).

## **2.5 A critical evaluation of Nussbaum's list of capabilities**

What seems controversial in Nussbaum's framework is not the idea of a threshold of capabilities. Certainly, people should be entitled to a basic set of capabilities. Thus, critics direct their attention to Nussbaum's procedure in coming with a list and the standards she sets relative to it. Objections to Nussbaum's list of capabilities can be anchored on two arguments – one, according to critics, Nussbaum's version is 'monological' since it fails to account for certain exceptions due to the complexity of human life and cultures, and two, that it sets a 'high standard' for human well-being. For instance, Gasper asks, "why make a list of universal capabilities?" (Gasper 2004, 186) It can be recalled that Sen's version advocates for a restricted 'thin ethic' so that his concepts can be useful for various types of more substantive 'thick ethic' (See Gasper 1997, 292), such as Nussbaum's. I have shown that Nussbaum's list seeks to provide the universal criteria for that which is essentially human. But according to Gasper, Nussbaum's setting of the criteria assumes that "a deep thinking individual could rationally determine what is rationally binding in a situation" (Ibid., 296). This means that for Gasper, Nussbaum seems to prescribe what is good for all people in all places at all times in an arbitrary way. This first critique therefore concerns procedure. Nussbaum's way of constructing a proposal for a list of capabilities can be construed as neglecting cultural differences. The question is that - should one party prescribe the baseline criteria for what the good life is all

about arbitrarily without the involvement of the many sectors who are also stakeholders in the issue?

To improve on this procedure and to answer the above claim, Alkire for instance advocates for a participatory procedure in identifying important human values. She says that participation plays a constructive role in clarifying values and value priorities” (Alkire 2002, 136). For Alkire, “participation refers to the process of discussion, information gathering, conflict and eventual decision-making, implementation, and evaluation by the groups directly affected by the activity (Ibid., 129). In this instance, it is the participants themselves who make the decisions. This is important because they are the most affected by the issues, and as such, this method allows the parties to be empowered. In Sen and Dreze, the intrinsic value of participation in a democratic society has some implication for the quality of life. We quote,

Participation also has intrinsic value for the quality of human life. Indeed being able to do something not only for oneself but also for other members of the society is one of the elementary freedoms which people have reason to value. The popular appeal of many social movements in India confirm that this basic capability is highly valued even among people who lead very deprived lives in material terms (Sen and Dreze 1995, 106; quoted in Alkire 2006, 131).

In the issue of human development, the practice of participation gives citizens an opportunity to learn from one another, and helps a society form its values and priorities (Ibid., 133). This method allows people to see the worthiness of their ideas in advancing better ways of changing their lives. The procedure in this regard enables people to value social relations and involvement. This I believe is the spirit of democratic governance which provides the conditions for meaningful participation, allowing people to have a say in the things that matter to their lives. The danger, according to Gasper, is that Nussbaum’s monological approach can “override individual preferences and rights to construct the meaning of their life as they see fit” (Gasper 1997, 297).

But in defense of Nussbaum, I believe that her approach to the problem of ensuring the threshold of capabilities for the people is consistent with the idea of democratic participation. Nussbaum indicates that the list remains open and can therefore be subject to further deliberation and evaluative assessment, thus, it is revisable (See Nussbaum 2006, 78). What she has done in

principle is to suggest a universal concept of what it means to be fully human, and she concretizes the same by making the central human capabilities as a starting point. Hence, the direction forward can be carried out by people themselves and their government in order to realize the goals of human development.

The second critique deals with the lofty standards Nussbaum sets for what is truly human. According to Gasper, Nussbaum seems to set standards for decency (or humanity) rather very high, in effect bringing in aspects of flourishing (Gasper 2004, 188). This means that Nussbaum seems to combine dignified existence with human flourishing, and that a life below the latter is insufficient to be judged as “fully human”. One aspect worth noting is the requirement of practical reason, which for Nussbaum should encompass critical thinking and reflection. This, according to Gasper, encompasses the “ability to form the notion of the good, not only to function competently in terms of a socially given conception” (Ibid.). This means that for Nussbaum ‘the good’ seems to be Western in terms of its values and the insistence on the “critical powers to know the good is excessively individualistic” (Ibid.). Gasper’s view points to people whose critical thinking may not be fully utilized in the pursuit of their everyday activities, i.e. carpenters, masons, electricians, due to the monotonous nature of their work. He seems to say that it is unfair to suggest that these people are not living a ‘good life’ or are living a life that is ‘less than human’. A full compliance of the ten central human capabilities in order to live a fully human life is deemed too difficult. However, it can be argued that what Nussbaum points to, in line with Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, is that a well-lived life is the direction that each individual, no matter what the nature of his or her work is, can aim at and each society can fully support.

In this sense, it can be counter-argued that the list must not be criticized in terms of its being unjustifiably essentialistic, for according to David Crocker, Nussbaum’s list should be seen “not as conditions, but as relevant criteria” (Crocker 1998, 173). This precisely is the reason why Nussbaum hopes for an overlapping consensus in order to give opportunities for all parties to be heard. What the list provides, I believe, is a sound starting point for different societies. It can be said that it does not argue for something essentialist in an arbitrary way, for the whole point is that Nussbaum is simply “advocating for the promotion of capabilities and not the enforcement of capabilities” (Gasper 1997, 293). As such, in terms of what serves well for a particular society or a particular culture, people can discuss and deliberate on how to concretize the items in the list



in a more substantial manner, depending on the situation and contexts of their societies. Thus, according to Gasper, “the list can be interpreted according to context” (Gasper 2004, 186). As Nussbaum notes, the list remains open-ended and humble; it can always be contested and remade (Nussbaum 2000, 77). The list, therefore, being incomplete, is “always subject to on-going revision and re-thinking” (Nussbaum 2006, 78).

Most criticisms against Nussbaum focus upon the list, but according to Gasper, there is more to Nussbaum’s philosophizing than the list (See Gasper 2004, 187-188). But basically, what Nussbaum calls for is an ethics that centers more on the idea of what is “fully human”, and “certain key roles are underemphasized in a purely philosophical discussion around lists (Ibid., 188). Gasper adds that the list should be understood in this way – “it looks at the content and potentials in diverse important areas of people’s lives, with attention to holistic cases and to a broad range of evidence, and using rich pictures of mind, personhood, emotions, and language” (Ibid.) This means that Nussbaum uses a picture of the human person in a broader sense, beyond the economical conception, and certainly above cultural conceptions, for instance, cultural biases against women, which may undermine the meaning of personhood. For Gasper, this is important in establishing a concrete ethical theory that gives worth to every human person. Moreover, such a theory exhibits real concern for the plight of the vulnerable sectors of society, especially women and children. This is necessary, according to Gasper, for “motivating and sustaining action” (Ibid.). The list of capabilities, therefore, does not set a standard for human well-being, but indicates the basic criteria that must be met, which social and political institutions are duty-bound to promote. In my view, the list of central human capabilities helps assess the situation of people, especially the poor, so that policies are adjusted subsequently if these policies are not addressing the urgent and the real concerns of people in the issue of human development.

Having established the importance of the essential human capabilities in creating just and humane social and political conditions which ensure a decent way of life for people, the next chapter will attempt to apply the Capability Approach to the global development paradigm and see if it is a feasible hypothesis that seeks to answer the problem of extreme poverty. I believe that the Capability Approach can play a greater role in the global arena, and that Sen’s emphasis on democratic governance is important in order to address the reality of extreme poverty, one of the most pressing problems of our times. This will require, I think, major global institutions to

commit to the ideal of human development. Hence, I ask, is there a way to globalize the Capability Approach? Is it possible to make it work in a world marked by repressive regimes and extreme poverty?

## **CHAPTER THREE: From Ethics to the Global Politics of Human Development: An application**

### **3.1 Measuring Human Development**

In his foreword to the 1990 Human Development Report, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Administrator William Draper says, “we live in stirring times. An irreversible wave of human freedom is sweeping across many lands. Not only political systems but economic structures are beginning to change in countries where democratic forces had long been suppressed” (HDR 1990, 4). These words connote the premise where the Human Development Report is grounded, and that is – “the basic objective of development is to create an enabling condition for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives” (Ibid.). The 1990 HDR puts forward the basic idea that human development, as Sen proposed, goes beyond the notion of income and wealth accumulation. The seminal 1990 HDR cites two reasons for this: “First, national income figures, useful though they are for many purposes, do not reveal the composition of income or the real beneficiaries, and secondly, people often value achievements that do not show up at all, or immediately, in higher measured income or growth figures: better nutrition, greater access to knowledge, better working conditions, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, and a sense of participation in the economic, cultural, and political activities of their communities” (Ibid., 9).

An important component of the Human Development Report is the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI, which was developed in 1990 by the Pakistani economist Mahbub Ul Haq, is used by UNDP to measure the quality of human life around the world. According to Sen, Mahbub explained that a measure is needed of the same vulgarity as the GNP – just one number – but a measure that is not blind to social aspects of human lives as the GNP is (See Power 2006, 267). The HDI measures human development, though admittedly not in a comprehensive way, by means of key indicators focusing on three important aspects of human life – longevity, knowledge and real purchasing power. The HDI carries the impetus of Sen’s Capability Approach, but the challenge for this thesis is to apply Nussbaum’s thick ethic of central human capabilities to the HDI. The way to do so, I will argue, is by effecting a radical change in the global human development framework, notably by expanding the categories used in the HDI. The use of the HDI by the UNDP as a barometer for human development must be more attuned

to the socio-political situation in the world that has taken place since 1990. In particular, I would like to cite events in recent memory, for example, Iraq after the U.S. Invasion, the events in Myanmar, Sudan, Somalia, and Angola, the AIDS Pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, and very recently, the food crises in poor countries around the world. These events have rendered UNDP's development paradigm inadequate in confronting the serious challenges of the global human development agenda.

I have stated in the previous chapter that economic growth is only instrumental to human development. The goal of development is the well-being of each individual. Development should benefit people. Thus, development indicators should aim at providing a picture of human development that economic numbers like GNP do not sufficiently capture. For Ian Miles, "the aim is to map out an alternative that reflects the dynamism of the real-world processes (captured in the word development) and the rich potentials of humanity, rather than the frozen configurations of a blueprint of an ideal social order" (Miles 1985, 10). The ideas put forward by the Capability Approach relative to a life that is lived with dignity and flourishing, of course, play a vital role in this blueprint. As Nussbaum notes, "ideas shape the way policy makers do their work. That is why, from its very inception, the Capability Approach has contested the ideas of development as economic growth, insisting on the idea of human development" (Nussbaum 2006, 306). In terms of the policy making process, Miles contends that "indicators should be useful for guiding and monitoring policies, as well as giving a better basis for assessing the costs and benefits of the different stages of economic and social development" (Miles 1992, 284). Indicators, in a way, help explain the ethical implications of economic and social development policies, especially on economic and social programs which have an impact on important aspects of people's lives. Generally, this thesis aims at looking at that. Sen, for instance, notes that "the study of ethics can also benefit from a closer contact with economics" (Sen 1987b, 89).

It is in view of the role of social indicators in uncovering these ethical implications that I find it necessary to focus on expanding the HDI. How does a given social indicator show such ethical implication? For instance, if the score on longevity is rather low due in part to high child mortality rate, such shows the reality of the lack of enough health provisions in a given country. This implies that a government should do more in order to promote and protect the health of its people. Moreover, it also highlights the important role of the international community in helping

a country, especially the part of the population who are most vulnerable, and in this case children who may need vital and life-saving provisions like vaccines, food, and other nutrition requirements. Another instance is that in some countries, literacy scores in the HDI would show that men have higher literacy rates than women. This reveals the reality of gender inequality. It manifests the fact that men are favored over women in the area of education. Such a condition, I believe, tells us that governments have to do its moral duty of securing gender equality. As Nussbaum has shown, women have been disadvantaged in some cultures, and she strongly calls for gender equality to empower women. Literacy rates thus show gender bias in the area of education. But there is also widespread bias in some cultures against women which happens, for instance, in the area of work, family life or marital choice. Sen notes that “the freedom of women to seek employment outside the family is a major issue in many third world countries. This freedom is systematically denied in many cultures, and this in itself is a serious violation of women’s liberty and gender equity” (Sen 1999, 115). Hence, a category on gender equality is something that can be desired in order to show the difficult condition of women in some societies and thereby address such a problem. Social indicators, based on the above points, highlight the moral responsibilities of governments in securing a decent and dignified life for its people. In addition to this, social indicators also point to the important role of global institutions in helping people who are affected by high health risks and gender inequality.

Today, human development confronts huge obstacles around the globe. The problem of extreme poverty and gender inequality for instance, have been exacerbated by the emergence of political conflicts, greater physical violence due to military and sectarian conflicts, widespread graft and corruption, and severe deprivation because of food security issues and destructive natural calamities. These things have a crippling effect not only on the economic infrastructure of a nation but to people’s freedoms as well. It is in view of these things that Nussbaum’s proposal of a politically realistic Capability Approach becomes more plausible. For this reason, the HDI needs some form of expansion to be in synch with Nussbaum’s proposal which is anchored on constitutionally setting a threshold of central human capabilities. This is not to be seen as over-extending the social indicators in the HDI, which according to Miles, “were proposed as tools for monitoring unpredictable patterns of national development, for providing data to help simplify decisions about complex social issues” (Miles 1985, 25). The whole point is that expanding the HDI will make it more reflective of the difficult situation of many poor

countries in the world today and thereby help policy makers at the global and national levels come up with better decisions that address human development concerns in a more concrete way.

Before we proceed, some historical background on the choice of development indicators might help. According to Farhad Noorbakhsh, as early as 1954 a report by the United Nations Social Policy and Planning regarded economic growth as a requirement for better living standards rather than the ultimate policy aim (Noorbakhsh 1998, 589). This shows that development should be seen beyond income. The real goal of development is the well-being achievement of people. Noorbakhsh also adds that in 1969, “experts on social policy warned that the fact that economic development leaves behind or in some ways even creates, large areas of poverty, stagnation, marginality, and actual exclusion from economic and social progress is too obvious and too urgent to overlook” (Ibid., 589). To provide UNDP and policy makers with a picture of the world’s socio-economic conditions, the HDI was henceforth developed. The HDI, although limited to the categories that picture out people’s health, education, and purchasing power, reveals in a way the socio-economic reality of people worldwide. More than that, the indicators in the HDI also aim at providing a more holistic way of looking at human development, revealing the social aspect of people’s lives as Mahbub proposed. This way of evaluating human development, Miles contends, looks at “the harmonious relationship between persons, society and nature, insuring the fullest flowering of human potential without degrading, despoiling or destroying society or nature” (Miles 1985, 11). The HDI is necessary, I believe, because there are economic development patterns which put some aspects of human well-being in jeopardy. For instance, wealth creation does not necessarily mean equality in terms of the quality of life. There are huge trade-offs and the costs to human life and human relations are enormous. I can mention, for instance, the situation of Filipino overseas workers in the Middle East especially domestic helpers who are oftentimes abused and discriminated.

I will cite some countries in the 2006 HDI rankings to point out that economic growth does not necessarily result to human well-being. For example, Bahrain has an income twice the average of Chile but despite recent progress, a lower HDI rank because it underperforms in education and literacy (HDR 2006, 264). The 2006 HDR also states that Vietnam is still relatively poor but has a high HDI ranking than many countries with higher per capita income (Ibid.). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania has an average income one third that in Angola but has a similar HDI rank – an outcome that reflects the high human cost of the conflict in Angola

(Ibid.). These examples indicate that in assessing the true state of human development, one has to look beyond income as an indicator in measuring the quality of human life.

Now, let me discuss the three indicators in the HDI. First, longevity is measured by life expectancy at birth. The 1990 HDR notes that “the importance of life expectancy lies in the common belief that a long life is valuable in itself” (Ibid.). Items such as good nutrition and a healthy life correlate with higher life expectancy. Low life expectancy suggests a serious gap in a country’s effort to address the health problems of people, especially the needs of children to be immunized from diseases. Also, it reveals country specific problems, notably the AIDS pandemic which threatens the adult population and the newly-born.

While measuring life expectancy reveals that rich countries have efficient and effective health programs because of their high score in this area, I think the most crucial thing to reflect upon is the fact that many poor countries have very low life expectancy. Consider this data from the 2006 HDR: “The average life span in the world in 1980 was 60 years; in 2005 it was 66 years. For High Income countries, in 1980 the life span was 72 years; it grew to 80 years in 2005. For East Asia and the Pacific, the life span in 1980 was 61; it was 71 in 2005. However, in the world’s poorest region, Sub-Saharan Africa, the average life span in 1980 was 44 years; in 2005, it stagnated at 45 years” (HDR 2006, 265). These data show how poverty affects longevity, and therefore the quality of human life. The data also provide us a picture of the serious lack of resources for health programs in very poor nations. According to the 2006 HDR, 10.8 million children died in 2004, most of these cases from preventable diseases. The same report says that “the average child mortality rate for the world in 1980 was 6 per 1,000 live births; in 2004, it was 12 per 1,000 live births. For Eastern and Central Europe, child mortality rate was 3 in 1980; it was 4 in 2004. For Sub-Saharan Africa, it was 12 in 1980 – the average in the world today. However, for 2004, it rose to 28 per 1,000 live births” (Ibid.). The mortality rate in impoverished Sub-Saharan Africa has a very sharp increase even with the advances made in medical science and the discovery of important and life-saving vaccines in the West. This just goes to show, again, the lack of access to life-saving medicines and medical facilities in the world’s poorest region.

Secondly, knowledge is assessed through the country’s level of literacy. The 1990 HDR states that “the literacy figures are only a crude reflection of access to education, particularly to

the good quality education so necessary for productive life in modern society” (HDR 1990, 12). The HDR considers literacy as the individual’s “first step in learning and knowledge building, so literacy figures are essential in any measurement of human development” (Ibid.). It can be assumed from the HDR that education is essential to the improvement of human capital. The inadequacy of provisions in poor countries for educational facilities and training in the many fields of human knowledge, notably in math and the sciences is seen as a hindrance both to economic growth and human development. Low literacy levels hamper the capability of people to find work and earn income. Not only that, illiteracy also contributes to the serious curtailment of the individual’s capability to choose a life he or she has reason to value. The HDR in this sense believes that education expands the options of people, not only economically but also in terms of leading a life well-lived. Let me cite some data. The 2006 HDR reports that “world literacy rates increased from an average of 75% in 1990 to 82% in 2004. However, in 2004, 115 million children are still out of school, 62 million of them girls” (HDR 2006, 267). The gap between affluent and poor nations is more pronounced in terms of the percentage of students who finish tertiary or college education. For instance, in Finland the rate is 90% but in Bangladesh, it is 7% and in Mozambique, just around 2% (Ibid).

Thirdly, real purchasing power is measured through the Gross Domestic Product - Purchasing Power Parity. The GDP-PPP adjustment means that per capita income is adjusted to “provide better approximations of the relative power to buy commodities and to gain command over resources for decent living standards” (Ibid.). The reason for using GDP-PPP as an indicator is the fact that an aggregate income measurement like GNP hides many forms of social and economic deprivation. This is due to the difficulty of determining who has what in terms of the aggregate income of a nation. The 1990 HDR further notes that “the presence of non-tradable goods and services and the distortions from exchange rate anomalies, tariffs and taxes per capita income make per capita income data not very useful for international comparisons” (Ibid.). To reflect in a better way the economic capabilities of people in terms of real access to economic resource, which is essential to the achievement of a decent living standard, the GDP-PPP reveals the capacity of people in terms of access to land, credit, income and other important resources.

The three indicators in the HDI provide a picture of the life situation of people in affluent and poor nations. But the greater question is, of course, in what way will the HDI help policy



makers, global institutions like the UNDP and the World Bank, international NGOs and rich donor nations shape their strategies in fighting extreme poverty in the world and make human development a real possibility?

### **3.2 The Inclusion of Political Liberties and Gender Equality as Indicators in the HDI**

This section hopes to show that the present HDI is not adequate as basis in making strategic policy plans at a global level to eliminate extreme poverty. Change is necessary to make it more comprehensive and thereby help global institutions like UNDP produce immediate, real and effective results in very poor societies. Nonetheless, the HDI partly shows some of the real needs of people in poor countries. But the HDI should not only be a reflection of the states of affairs in the areas of health, education, and access to resources. More importantly, the HDI should be of help in the design of urgent policies to address extreme human deprivation in very poor countries. This can be done by recognizing the instrumental role that political freedoms play in human development. The fact of the matter is that poverty and the lack of access of the world's poor to medical facilities and good education is also because of the reality of abusive and manipulative regimes. Moreover, this is complicated by political conflicts and traditions that subjugate, for instance, women's rights to equality. The realization of the individual's true potentials through his or her capabilities – and a life lived in dignity – can only be made possible if we pose the question of human development from the perspective of ethics to the realm of global politics.

We can begin by assessing the current HDI. According to Raymond Apthorpe, the HDI does not represent or measure human choice (Apthorpe 1997, 24). He adds that the HDI “is not a measure of human development, not of human choice, but of human capital” (Ibid.). Thus, although the HDI reveals the crucial socio-economic aspects of human well-being, it however fails to assess how the absence of political liberties affects people's chances of attaining their true potentials. In an essay *On Measuring the Quality of Human Life*, Partha Dasgupta and Martin Weale make this distinction regarding human development measures:

Measures of the quality of human life can take one of two forms: they can reflect the constituents of well-being, or alternatively, they can be measures of the access people have to determinants of well-being (Dasgupta and Weale 1992, 119).

The HDI is an instance of the first (Ibid.). But it matters that the HDI should be expanded to make it more attuned to the present socio-political conditions in the world where poverty, gender inequality, suppression of democratic rights, and issues pertaining to corruption and human security have stymied efforts by UNDP and other global institutions to make human development a real possibility in countries where the urgency of such is apparent. One argument on why the current HDI needs to be expanded, as Dasgupta and Weale note, is that “indices of general well-being currently in use in such institutions as the World Bank and the UNDP is that they are restricted to the socio-economic sphere of life; the political and civil spheres are for the most part kept separate” (Ibid.). The HDI tells us that poor countries have low life expectancy, problems pertaining to illiteracy, and difficult economic conditions, but as to the reason why such is the case, the HDI seems silent. The basic idea, therefore, is to combine indices of political and civil liberties and gender equality to the HDI’s socio-economic indicators to reflect “a pluralist measure with which to compare the quality of life across nations, or with which to measure changes on the quality of life over time within a nation” (Ibid., 119-120). The reason for this is that in looking at the socio-political situation of a country, including the reality of regime changes over history, and the effectiveness for instance, of democratic governance in countries with high HDI scores will in a very positive way enable UNDP, the World Bank, and governments in countries with poor HDI scores to assess their human development projects. More than that, a measure which considers the crucial role of political liberties and gender equality can help shed light on the present situation of countries whose people are under constant threat of violence and oppression. The 2004 HDR admits, for instance, that the HDI is not in any sense a complete gauge of human development, for “it does not, for example, include important indicators such as respect for human rights, democracy and inequality” (HDR 2004, 263).

In particular, I would like to argue for the inclusion of political liberties and gender equality in the HDI. To understand how important the empowerment of the political freedoms of people is to human development, I argue for items like transparency in government and human security to be included in the category for political liberties in the expanded HDI. In addition to this, to reflect on the significance of women empowerment to human development, I also

propose the inclusion of gender equality as a category in the HDI. The purpose with which I consider political liberties and gender equality as important is that many governments in developing countries usually usurp power to the detriment of the whole population. The only way to arrest the overall decline of the value of human life in these countries is to have a politically realistic way of looking at the situation. Rich donor countries, global institutions like the World Bank and UNDP can use a re-invigorated HDI in identifying and prioritizing the countries where human development projects can be implemented. Why is this necessary? The reason being is that if civil and political liberties and rights to gender equality in recipient countries are grossly violated, then development projects will mean nothing to the people of these countries. Politically, therefore, it is necessary to have the effective mechanism with which global institutions like the World Bank and UNDP can operate in order to address the morally urgent issue of global poverty. Improving the HDI can be, in this sense, a first step in the right direction.

First, let me defend the inclusion of political liberties as a category in the HDI, most especially transparency in government and human security. Transparency in government is an important factor in human development efforts in many developing nations with some relative peace and order and where governments are at least functional. On the other hand, human security would be most crucial in countries where political conflict is prevalent. Generally, Dasgupta and Weale would say that “rights to political liberty are taken to be citizens’ right to play a part of in determining who governs their country, and what the laws are and will be” (Ibid., 120). But this right is severely curtailed in many poor nations, whose leaders do not respect the right of the people to just and democratic governance.

Why should governments be transparent? Graft and corruption renders useless human development projects. The current HDI does not reflect this and therefore UNDP, the World Bank, and other global institutions have no tool in assessing how corrupt regimes deprive people of their entitlements to a just, dignified and decent standard of living. The very instance I can cite is that the prevalence of graft and corruption due to the lack of transparency in government transactions, for instance in a country like the Philippines, has rendered development programs and projects ineffective in fighting poverty. For example, in the Economist Intelligence Unit

Democracy Index<sup>5</sup> for 2006, the Philippines scored a measly 5.36 (10 being the perfect score) in the Functioning of Government. Rich countries like Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland scored a perfect 10 in this category. I think this reflects that the prevalence of graft and corruption is in view of the fact that the lack of transparency in government is not given serious attention. It is the people's right to be served by a well-functioning government. If this right is severely violated, there will be tremendous consequences to people's well-being.

Sen, for instance, says in *Development as Freedom*, that “the intensity of economic needs adds to – rather than subtracts from – the urgency of political freedoms” (Sen 1999, 148). The government, in this sense, should be the very institution that makes human development at the forefront of its goals. The only way to make sure that a government acts for the sake of the well-being of the people is for it to be transparent in all its transactions. According to Nussbaum, “institutions are made by people, and it is ultimately people who should be seen as having the moral duties to promote human capabilities” (Nussbaum 2006, 307). This means that government leaders affect how the promotion and the enhancement of the human potential in terms of what people can do or be. The only way to determine if institutions are acting to enhance human well-being is to evaluate the behavior of public officers handling such institutions. Measuring transparency in government then is all about making sure that the well-being of people is really attended to by their government leaders.

Why measure human security? It can be argued that human security is an important issue, if not the most important, in the world today. Miles defines human security in terms of survival, both physical and economic (Miles 1992, 296). Human security, Miles explains further, refers to the absence of violent disruptions and threat to life and livelihood (Ibid., 294). Human security therefore addresses the concern for human vulnerability in the face of serious threats engendered by some groups, who use violence as their main weapon in causing serious harm to people's welfare. The lack of attention to this reality in the HDI necessarily makes it insufficient in making manifest the reality that poor countries and regions are victims of some atrocities

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<sup>5</sup> According to Laza Kekic of the Economist Intelligence Unit, there is no consensus on how to measure democracy, but generally, she says that democracy can be seen as a set of practices and principles that institutionalize and thus ultimately protect human freedom (EIU 2007, 1). The Democracy Index of EIU uses five categories, namely, electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, and political culture.

perpetuated by harsh dictatorships and fundamentalist groups. Let us go back to the Democracy Index. Iraq, which is the center of sectarian violence in the world today, suffers from severe problems pertaining to its Electoral Process and Pluralism (4.01) and the curtailment of Civil Liberties (4.12). The consequence of this is unimaginable, for Iraq has a non-functioning government (0.00). Let us take Angola and Sudan, two countries under authoritarian regimes. In these countries, people almost have no say on government and public issues, and are thus in the most vulnerable of all situations. Sudan scored 1.67 for Political Participation while Angola scored 1.11. In the area of Civil Liberties, Sudan scored 3.24 while Angola scored 2.65. A huge number of people in these two countries are in serious danger, and the conflicts in these countries have brought hundreds of thousands dead. Their governments are almost helpless with Sudan scoring 2.36 and Angola scoring 2.14 (See Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2006, 3-7).

The second category I find important is gender equality. Nussbaum and Sen have both observed how women have been put at a disadvantage because of the mere fact that they are women. Let me thus mention the case of women, which both Nussbaum and Sen have also highlighted in their work. Sen for instance has pointed out the case of “one hundred million missing women” in the world due to gender bias largely because in some cultures like China and India, a boy is preferred to a girl. This is in view of the fact that in some family traditions across Asia, a boy is one who is perceived to provide his family some economic benefit. On the other hand, a girl is one whom the family will lose to her future husband. In India, Sen says that the “main culprit would seem to be the comparative neglect of female health and nutrition, especially – but not exclusively, during childhood” (Sen 1999, 106). The seminal 1990 HDR has taken notice of the suffering of women, when it asks, “do women remain invisible in statistics because little value is attached to what they do?” (HDR 1990, 32). The answer of the report is a clear “yes” (Ibid.). The economist Jeffrey Sachs for instance also cites the experience of women in Bangladesh “who have grown up in the countryside, extraordinarily poor, illiterate, un-schooled and vulnerable to hunger and hardship in a domineering patriarchal society” (Sachs 2005, 12). In addition, we must consider the fact that in view of the difficult situation the world is into right now, women mostly suffer due to the atrocities committed by evil regimes or the hardships caused by political conflicts. Women are the ones who are usually responsible in caring for the children and the household, and the reality of huge socio-economic deprivation

and political conflicts thwart their sense of happiness and overall well-being to a very great extent, especially when they lose their children or husband to violent conflicts.

Human development reporting in view of the above must take a stronger stance for it to reflect in a more precise way the urgency of alleviating people from the condition of extreme poverty and human deprivation in the various parts of the world. Improving the conditions in poor countries starts with correcting their policies regarding human development through the guidance of social indexes. Miles notes that “social indicators may be used to set targets for social development, to monitor the consequences of policies or programs, and even as part of exercises in forecasting the effects of different interventions and in the comparative evaluation of policies” (Miles 1985, 75). The HDI as a social indicator thus helps us understand the problem of human poverty. The complex political realities in the world today demand that the HDI should also be reformed to reflect in a more comprehensive way the extent of human deprivation. The aim is clear, and that is to secure human development for all.

In the absence of a stronger HDI, UNDP and other global institutions, including rich donor nations would not be able to put forward realistic development assistance strategies for the people in these vulnerable regions. Apthorpe, for example, suggests that “human development reporting in the countries most affected might want to include consideration of the effects of natural disasters and complex emergencies” (Apthorpe 1997, 29). The current HDI do not cover such issues, particularly matters like vulnerability and food security (Ibid.). Therefore, addressing the need for transparency, human security and gender equality will prove useful. The present HDI reflects the socio-economic picture of peoples’ health, education, and real purchasing power, but the problem is that the HDI says nothing about “the reliability, regularity, vulnerability and risk” (Ibid.) people have relative to these items. Furthermore, in the absence of a real account of the difficult situations some countries are into, the HDI fails to consider the fact that certain gains relative to these items can be easily wiped out by violent regimes and gross violations of human rights, necessarily making human development efforts in these countries futile and hopeless.

But basically, two objections can be raised on the above. First, an objection can be posed on the basis that including civil and political rights would be too controversial to sustain (Gasper

2004, 167). Gender equality can also be difficult to sustain in some societies and cultures. Thus, the inclusion of these new categories can be viewed as an intrusion into the internal affairs of a sovereign country. Necessarily, examining the status of political freedoms and gender equality of a country will put a certain country into a less comfortable situation especially if the human rights situation of that country is suspect. This will also put less democratic and culturally patriarchal countries into a lower HDI rank since they will have lower scores in the areas that concern civil and political liberties. A second objection can come from the fact that extending the HDI in order to accommodate political freedoms and gender equality will complicate the measurements. According to Gasper, there is a “danger in thinking that all values can be measured and compared in ways that do not undermine the values themselves” (Ibid., 168). There is then in this regard the danger of over-simplifying things and reducing everything into numerical values. It can be said that the areas identified by the current HDI are sufficient enough to give policy makers some basis on how to assess human development issues in a certain country and how governments can formulate their programs in order to fit the needs people have in the areas of health, education and economic well-being. But to initially answer this critique, the urgency of the issues I have enumerated requires a more comprehensive way of understanding things, to which measurements are indispensable scientific tools to be able to come up with prudent and correct judgments regarding these problems.

The objection to democracy and political liberties as important pre-conditions for human development becomes quite interesting when we begin to compare certain scores in the categories of the 2005 HDI rankings among different countries. For instance, in what follows, I have grouped countries into two categories – authoritarian and democratic. I then consider their scores in terms of life expectancy, literacy rate and later, per capita income. In the first group are Cuba, Venezuela and China; in the second group are Japan, Sweden and the United States. For Cuba, life expectancy is 77.7 years and literacy is 99%; for Venezuela, life expectancy is 73.2 years and literacy is 93%; for China, life expectancy is 72.5 years and literacy rate is 91%. On the other hand, a wealthy democratic country like Sweden has a life expectancy of 80.5 years and 99% literacy rate; Japan has a life expectancy of 82.3 years and a literacy rate of 99%; the United States has a life expectancy of 77.9 years and a literacy rate of 99% (Source: UNDP.org).

Now the question is – should authoritarianism be more desirable than democracy in view of the scores above? The high scores of some authoritarian countries in the category of health and literacy reveal that an authoritarian government like Cuba may somehow give priority to basic health programs and education. In a way, it may also show the commitment of the central government to the basic needs of the people. Mona Rosendahl in her study on Cuba mentions for instance that the appeal of the revolution which put Fidel Castro to power is in view of the idea that “the state could provide for the people for guaranteeing them work or social security through low rents and access to free medical care and schooling” (Rosendahl 2001, 100). But is there something that authoritarian regimes hide? What effects does the curtailment of political liberties have on people’s real chance of attaining their full potential?

The problem is that health and literacy are only pre-conditions to a full human life. The reality whether people flourish or attain their full human potential or whether people’s human rights are protected in authoritarian societies is something questionable. The possibility to further one’s potential under an authoritarian regime can thus be held suspect. I will cite Cuba as an example. For instance, Rosendahl points to the economic crisis that struck Cuba in 1990 (See *Ibid.*, 88). During that time, “most people had a job with a salary, the peso equivalent of \$7-10 per month” (*Ibid.*). She goes on to add that “during 1992-94, scarcity was severe, people starved at times and often went hungry; there was little to buy and especially shortage of cooking fat and protein became critical” (*Ibid.*, 89). In the area of health care for example, Rosendahl’s study reveals that “quite a few doctors and nurse left their jobs to work in the tourist sector in order to earn dollars. Also, it seemed as if scarcity and stress in the wake of the crisis made people fall ill more frequently, such that the pressure on hospitals and doctors was great” (*Ibid.*, 1995). This suggests the fragility of human life under an authoritarian regime where people don’t have rights to participate in political decisions that affect them. Rosendahl’s study thus reveals the difficulties of living in a society where political and civil liberties are non-existent.

Let me discuss in a few words about the macroeconomic aspect of this matter. In the same 2005 HDI rankings for instance, in terms of GDP-PPP (real purchasing power), authoritarian countries like Cuba has \$6,000, Venezuela \$6,632 and China \$6,757 of average real purchasing power per person while Japan has \$31,267, the United States \$41,890 and Sweden \$32,525 (Source: UNDP.org). I believe that under a democratic system, people have an ideal condition to



attain a life of human flourishing where one's potentials can attain its real fruition, i.e. better economic well-being which can also, undeniably, translate to a higher standard of living. I argue that such is least possible under authoritarianism. This suggests that democracy is still more desirable than an autocratic government where power is centralized. China, for instance, is reaping unprecedented economic growth these past few years, but whether people enjoy their lives or whether they live fully human lives without the threat of human rights abuse under authoritarianism is still suspect. In *The End of Poverty*, Sachs mentions that political reform is a vital concern for China (See Sachs 2005, 166). Arguing for China's need for democratization, Sachs says that "it will not be necessarily a smooth process unless China's leadership understands that both domestically and internationally, democratization is vital to China's well-being" (Ibid.). Human rights have always been a concern in China. Moreover, China's growth is not uniformly high and growth is concentrated mostly in the eastern part of the country while the western provinces have been growing much less rapidly (See Sachs 2005, 164). Sachs, in this sense, puts forward the case for democracy. First, he argues that "China will experience powerful forces for democratization from within as the rate of literacy and the level of private wealth grows, and as various interest groups in the society having more standing and greater eagerness to participate politically" (Ibid., 166). Secondly, Sachs says that "China's centralized apparatus, which extends over such a large area is not compatible with the dynamism of a decentralized and diverse market economy and a market-based society" (Ibid., 167). In my assessment, the argument stands that democracy is the ideal platform for the greater freedom and well-being achievement of the people.

Sen would argue that the "failure of bureaucratic socialism cannot be fully grasped merely in terms of the economic problems like generating incomes and other results, such as life expectancies" (Sen 1999, 114). Thus, in order to show how the lack of freedom in certain societies curtails one's human potential, expanding the HDI to measure political liberties is certainly most helpful. The basic idea is that UNDP can begin to consider measures used by the Economic Intelligence Unit and other groups in measuring the situation of political freedoms in various parts of the world. This seems to be the politically right thing to do given the moral urgency of the matter in view of the fact that at present millions of lives are in danger. In its current form, the HDI is inadequate and fails to account for the failure of human development due to political conflicts and the absence of authentic democratic governance in many poor

countries. The lack of people empowerment makes the poor prone to the abuses of their leaders.

To quote Sen:

It is often asked whether the freedom of political participation and dissent is or is not conducive to development. In the light of the foundational view of development as freedom, this question would seem to be defectively formulated, since it misses the crucial understanding that political participation and dissent are constitutive parts of development itself (Sen 1999, 36).

Since development concerns people and is geared towards their well-being, then that implies that politically, the people's participation in the decision making process is crucial in identifying what their real needs are. When this framework is absent, there is severe human deprivation. Human capabilities, which the use of the HDI promotes, will be rendered incapacitated in view of the violation of political liberties and the lack of respect for gender equality in many poor countries. Sen adds, "individual capabilities critically depend on, among other things, economic, social, and political arrangements. In making appropriate institutional arrangements, the instrumental roles of distinct types of freedom have to be considered, going well beyond the foundational importance of the overall freedom of the individual" (Ibid., 53). I think that people-centered development, the battle-cry in the use of the HDI, can only be realized if human choice is secured by just institutions where civil and political liberties are protected. To be truly sensitive to the real life situation of peoples in various parts of the world whose lives are at risk and in constant vulnerability, UNDP should now consider taking into account important civil and political liberties, notably the two categories I have discussed above. For Apthorpe, this should be necessary, otherwise, the use of the HDI would merely be a reflection of "human capital theory, human resources policy, through and through" (Apthorpe 1997, 25). For him, "human development reporting with the use of the HDI is still seen mainly as a version of the physical quality of life reporting" (Ibid.). Including civil and political liberties in the set of indicators of the HDI would make it more sensitive to the real socio-political conditions of people, especially the extremely poor, in today's world. Apthorpe writes

What economic development writing and policy terms social indicators are not social indicators but sectoral and demographic. They are virtually never about social institutions, social classes, social organizations, social movements, or other social activities (Ibid., 27)

The presence or absence of political freedoms and gender equality in any given nation will make manifest the real chances of people in achieving human development. In this sense, measuring the state of civil and political liberties or democracy will enhance the picture put forward by the present HDI. According to Miles, the presence of civil and political liberties is important to a country's organizational capital (See Miles 1992, 298). The importance of organizational capital to human development points to the all-important task of promoting the respect for the rule of law. A society that respects the rule of law has a greater chance of advancing the development of people. In such a society, people participate in elections, there representativeness of election results, there is representation of women and minorities, there is freedom of information, there exists access to the legal system and fair legal processes, there is freedom from harassment, and guarantee of human rights (See Ibid).

Moreover, gender equality is vital for the promotion and protection of the rights of women. Many countries do not treat their women fairly, for instance in the Middle East, and so it should be important that there is a way to measure such in order to allow the global community to understand the condition of women in these countries and thereby make an international effort to enhance and promote the welfare of women in countries where their rights are not protected. This should prove valuable, for instance, in view of the many migrant women workers to seek employment in some countries with bad records in terms of gender equality. Nussbaum has written about the right of women to self expression and critical reflection which are vital components of her central human capabilities. Without securing the rights of women to these essential capabilities, women will be in a situation where life is not treated in a truly human way.

In addition, Dasgupta and Weale argue that political and civil liberties can be correlated with the current indicators in the HDI. In the same text cited here, they claim that "political and civil liberties are positively and significantly correlated with real national income and its growth, with improvements in infant survival rates and with increases in life expectancy at birth" (Dasgupta and Weale 1992, 128). This means that in countries where people enjoy to a great extent certain political and civil liberties, improvements in the area of people's access to economic resources, life expectancy and infant survival rates are clearly present. In contrast to this, people in regimes where political liberties are non-existent or suppressed, human deprivation and other forms of oppression are clearly prevalent, resulting to poor health, hunger and deaths.

Improving the HDI is important but the real challenge is eradicating extreme poverty in the world. What then should global institutions, the United Nations, UNDP, the World Bank, international NGOs, including rich donor nations do in order to help the approximately 1.1 billion of the world's people live a decent and dignified life? How does one make human development a real or practical possibility?

### **3.3 The Role of Global Institutions in Human Development**

Globalization has put many countries at different crossroads. The new global order means that countries cannot alienate themselves and must interact with other countries in the global arena through international trade in order to advance the welfare of people. UNDP, for instance, advocates for global competitiveness and has encouraged developing nations to get the necessary implements in order to understand the rules of international trade for the benefit of their own people. But on the other hand, the advent of globalization has also resulted to certain problems due to unfair trade barriers and unjust competition where smaller countries are disadvantaged in one way or another. These interconnected issues and concerns highlight the need for a more dynamic form of international cooperation between nations, and also points out to the ethical duty of some nations, especially those with great wealth to help in promoting and protecting human capabilities in countries where people need to achieve a decent level of well-being.

In the light of the need for greater economic cooperation at a global level, Sachs mentions that “social progress should be universal and not restricted to a narrow corner of the world” (Sachs 2005, 350-51). He believes in the idea of “the essential equality of humanity, and the ability of societies in all parts of the world to share in economic progress” (Ibid.). Sachs explains that for the third world to emerge from its economic woes, it must not close itself from global economic progress and the advance of technology (Ibid., 48). Most third world societies are beset with problems like corrupt governments, demographic problems, and the lack of innovation in the area of science and technology. These problems are also compounded by the difficulties I have cited in the previous section. Thus, globalization poses a challenge for global institutions on how to respond to the problem of extreme poverty.

In the current global order, according to Nussbaum, the question that must be confronted is “the question on how to allocate duties in promoting human capabilities in a world that

contains nations, transnational economic agreements and agencies, and other national agreements and agencies, NGOs, political movements and individual peoples” (Nussbaum 2006, 307). For her, globalizing the Capability Approach is the way to advance the “moral goals for human development” (Ibid., 320). Nussbaum argues that human development issues are collective problems, and as such, they must be addressed at the level of institutions. She says, speaking of this duty, that “these are collective action problems. It is far better to create a decent institutional structure than to regard individuals as having delegated their personal ethical responsibility to that structure” (Ibid.). Nussbaum argues that global institutions are more powerful than individual persons in pursuing the moral ends of human development. Nussbaum tells us that “institutions have both cognitive and causal powers that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility” (Ibid., 308). This means, therefore, that human development must be an institutional global effort. From the point of view of global politics, Sachs would say that “the end of poverty will require a global network of cooperation among people who have never met and who do not necessarily trust each other” (Sachs 2005, 226). Geopolitics plays a role in human development, whether good or bad. But what is morally urgent in the global arena, I believe, is that rich governments and global institutions should fulfill the moral duty to help arrest the problem of extreme poverty<sup>6</sup>.

Hence, in view of the above, the next urgent task is to identify the duty of global institutions to human development. In this regard, following Nussbaum, I therefore argue that global institutions, for instance the World Bank, UNDP, and international NGOs, including rich donor nations, have the moral obligation to promote and protect the central human capabilities of people. Securing the threshold of central human capabilities which is crucial to human development should be the benchmark for global institutions in helping extremely poor societies. Assisting poor societies in this way will help people to a very large extent attain a life worthy of being human. Thus, assistance to poor nations must not only in line with the economic well-

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Sachs makes this definition of extreme poverty: Extreme poverty means that households cannot meet the basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry, unable to access health care, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children, and perhaps lack rudimentary shelter (Sachs 2005, 20). The World Bank simplifies this by saying that the extremely poor are those who earn a \$1 income per person per day, measured using the GDP-PPP.

being of a society, but should also be on the essential ingredients that make life truly worth living for all.

I will now argue on three crucial points regarding how this can be done. First, that UNDP, the World Bank, and other global institutions, including rich donor nations should require developing countries to set laws against graft and corruption and evaluate the implementation of the same to ensure transparency in government. Secondly, developing or underdeveloped countries should be encouraged to promote gender equality in order to protect the rights of women. Thirdly, recipient countries should commit themselves to democratic governance, an effort that should be duly complemented by sustainable development.

Let me tackle the first point. Releasing development fund to corrupt regimes, it can be argued, implies indirectly supporting the corrupt practices of its leaders. Supporting corrupt regimes will essentially render useless the development aid intended to help a poor country. The money to be spent on efforts to uplift the health condition of the people, or educate them or provide them the means to have better access to important agricultural or livelihood inputs will never reach the intended beneficiaries if government officials are corrupt. For instance, the Official Development Assistance given to the Philippines amounting to several billions of dollars in the last two decades has not in fact translated to human development. Poverty incidence in the country has even increased from 24.4 to 26.9 percent and the number of poor families grew in the period covering 2003 to 2006 according to the National Statistics Coordinating Board (Source: NSCB 2006). Nussbaum notes,

Since corruption is one of the problems in modern nations that most severely threaten capabilities, mechanisms to detect and prevent corruption, both in government and in business, are absolutely essential to the stability of the capabilities and the conceptions based on them (Nussbaum 2006, 312).

Nussbaum strongly insists that the whole public order be designed so as to prevent gross inequalities of access to power (Ibid.). This means that nations must see to it that people have equal opportunities of taking part in the affairs of government, i.e. free and honest elections. In many poor countries, the electoral process is something controlled by powerful politicians and several wealthy personalities in business who directly influence political decisions and make them friendly to their interests. The instances I can cite are crony capitalism and cartels in vital

industries which corrupt leaders are in a very large way responsible for. These anomalous economic mechanisms drive people to great poverty. Apparently, this imbalance in the socio-political structure of a country makes it impossible to realize the threshold of capabilities for each citizen. It is in this view that global institutions, the UNDP, the World Bank, and rich donor nations should make the establishment of legal mechanisms which protect people against graft and corruption a serious requirement before granting development assistance to governments in developing countries. Why is this necessary? We can cite one of the eight reasons Sachs provides on why some nations do not escape the poverty trap. Sachs, who has advised the governments of Bolivia, Poland, India, and many others, and who acts currently as adviser to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, tells us that one reason people do not escape the poverty trap is because of government failure. “Economic development”, he says, “requires a government oriented towards development” (Sachs 2005, 59). Government leaders with vested self-interests for material aggrandizement are inimical to human development. Thus, Sachs adds, “governments must exercise self-restraint in demanding bribes or side payments” (Ibid., 60). This means, therefore, that governments can stifle its own mission of alleviating the poor from the dungeons of poverty because of the abuses perpetuated by public officials to whom power is entrusted by the people.

Economic growth is vital to the development of a nation and the realization of the potential of its people. Sen, for instance, says that “economic growth can help not only in raising private income but also in making it possible for the state to finance social insurance and active public intervention. Thus, the contribution of economic growth must be judged not merely by the increase in private incomes, but also by the expansion of social services, including in many cases social safety nets, that economic growth may make possible” (Sen 1999, 40). However, under a corrupt regime, economic growth may not necessarily result to better social services. This is because the aggregate national income may be concentrated on a select sector in society, usually the elite and those who are in power. It is for this reason that nations who will score low in government transparency in the expanded HDI should be pressured to correct the wrong practices of corrupt public officials. This should result to improved governance and socio-political reforms in a country. It is for this reason that a serious commitment to end the corrupt practices of some regimes must be amplified at a global level.

Let me pose a possible objection to the above. An objection can be based on the fact that giving sanctions to governments do not actually hurt the leaders but actually punish the people. It can be argued against the proposal that withholding funds for development projects and other important programs will affect the people to a very large extent as it will put to a halt the momentum of a developing country. In a way, it can be the case that postponing the release of vital funds will only contribute to the degeneration of people in the area of health, education and in their other vital needs like access to clean water and sanitation. For Des Gasper, this should not happen. He says, “besides the huge scale of absolute poverty in a world of vast wealth and inequality, nearly all of the suffering is undeserved. It is borne by people – half of them children – who have no chance of anything better” (Gasper 2004, 3). In this sense, any proposal that requires strict conditions before development programs and projects are granted to a recipient government will only contribute to the misery of the whole populace, especially those who belong to the vulnerable sectors who are actually the ones badly in need of development aid. It can be seen, therefore, as a “conscious sacrificing of the well-being of certain groups” (Ibid., 8). Gasper adds that priority, in this regard, must be on reducing the suffering of certain people than advancing certain objectives (Ibid., 7). The argument, therefore, is that postponing or restricting development assistance because of a government’s non-compliance can be detrimental to the people.

In response to the objection above, to mitigate the impact of withholding funds to corrupt regimes, UNDP, the World Bank, and other global institutions including rich donor nations can in the mean time utilize NGOs like Oxfam, local NGOs or credit facilities like the Grameen Bank, for example, and other credible people’s organizations in a particular country to help the poor and vulnerable. Rather than release the money to corrupt governments, funds can be used directly to help the poor in the areas of health, basic livelihood, education, gender sensitivity and women empowerment, and sustainable development. I argue therefore that global institutions go directly to NGOs and other cause-oriented local institutions that work in communities rather than go through government structures which are enveloped by bureaucratic red tape and graft and corrupt practices. The argument therefore is to go directly to the people where the needs exist. In view of massive fund abuse by many governments, non-government structures should be utilized instead to effect real human development.



Another reason which has hampered development efforts in the third world is the fact that global donor institutions and recipient governments go through a lot of negotiations which take so much time. Sachs believes that formalistic negotiations, which run back and forth, result to tremendous consequences to people (Sachs 2005, 80). Sachs tells us that current development practices are judged whether or not a certain government carries out a proposal, i.e. cutting its budget deficit, and “not on whether the measure produces faster growth or a reduction of poverty, or a solution to a debt crisis” (Ibid.). To solve this problem, while guarantees for the efficient and honest use of development assistance is being negotiated, certain development programs must and should already be implemented through local NGOs to help the people. People-centered projects by NGOs must be supported by the UNDP, the World Bank, and other global institutions to empower communities and the people. Hopefully, this kind of empowerment can help people to evolve into some kind of political maturity. An empowered populace will serve, in this regard, as a stronger foundation for a more effective and people-centered government in the future, a government that will be sensitive to the needs of the people.

The second point brings us to the importance of gender equality. The central human capabilities presuppose the equality of all human beings. Gender equality is important in securing a life where women are allowed to flourish. Human flourishing, as Nussbaum has elaborated, enables the realization of the potential of each person. In order to highlight the importance of gender equality to human development, I will use a policy from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) as a model. In October 2005, SIDA released a policy called Promoting Gender Equality in Development Cooperation. The policy highlights the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in the area of economic development, believing that it will “create conditions that will enable the poor to improve their lives” (SIDA 2005, 4). The policy argues that “mainstreaming gender equality is a strategy for achieving sustainable development for all, by supporting rights of choice, empowerment and provision of resources” (Ibid.). The Swedish agency is aware that despite many declarations that seek to end gender discrimination, notably the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, “women and men still have different levels of access to power, resources, and possibilities of making choices in their lives” (Ibid., 5). This means to say that without gender equality, human development is difficult to attain. Gender discrimination puts women at a disadvantage, and unless governments work in order to eliminate such, a life well-

lived for women where they have the freedom of choice of terms of the kind of life they want would not be possible.

In this sense, global institutions have a moral responsibility in helping secure a world where there is no bias against women, where both men and women have access to political participation and economic well-being. Sen calls our attention to gender inequality (Sen 1999, 104) and Nussbaum argues for women's right to political participation, because women according to her, "are threatened with violence should they leave the home" (Nussbaum 2006, 287). The Swedish Policy for Global Development can serve as a model policy on how overcoming gender inequality in the world can help promote and sustain human development. The policy advocates for a perspective of helping the poor that has gender equality as one of its central component elements (See SIDA 2005, 5). Gender equality according to the policy "is a necessary building block for eliminating poverty" (Ibid.). Echoing Sen and Nussbaum's contentions on gender equality, the policy asserts that "gender equality is crucial in order to reach sustainable democratic development" (Ibid., 6), thereby amplifying the contention that the empowerment of women is very crucial not only in the attainment but also in the sustainability of human development.

Let me discuss the third and final point which centers on the promotion of democratic governance and sustainable development. Human development is most difficult, or even almost inconceivable, if we think of situations like Iraq, Sudan or Somalia. But of course, there must be a way to address these difficult situations, for after all, it is the general mandate of the United Nations and all its governing bodies, the UNDP in particular, to promote the welfare of the whole of humankind. According to Nussbaum, "any theory of justice that aims to provide a basis for decent life chances and opportunities for all human beings must take cognizance both of inequalities internal to each nation and inequalities between nations, and must be prepared to address the complex intersections of these inequalities in a world of increased and increasing global interconnection" (Nussbaum 2006, 227). What is obvious is that in regimes where lawlessness reigns supreme there are serious violations of human dignity and an almost zero chance for human development. What should be done then? I believe that global institutions have the duty to promote democratic governance. Democracy provides the enabling and most conducive environment for people to realize their human potentials because democratic

participation gives meaning and substance to the fact that people are the primary stakeholders in development. Nussbaum thinks that democracy promotes and protects the central human capabilities which all citizens are entitled to. For instance, she makes the suggestion that justice in society can be accounted for by means of thinking “what human beings require in order to live a richly human life – a set of basic entitlements for all people – and by developing a conception of the purpose of social cooperation that focuses on fellowship as well as on mutual advantage” (Ibid.). A truly rich human life where human capabilities will enable people to flourish is something that democracy secures. Its basis, I believe, is that a democratic government protects the all important respect for the dignity of the human person, which means that human rights and equality are both highly valued. A democratic government founded on a just constitution, Sen would argue, is one that protects and promotes the welfare of the people. The new global order, I believe, morally demands that the UN through UNDP and powerful nations do their moral duty to help the people in countries like Sudan, Angola, Myanmar, and Somalia by promoting democracy in order for people to retrieve their sense of human dignity.

Sustainable development should complement democratic governance. According to the 1990 HDR, “promoting faster economic growth, without effective social safety nets to protect human development, especially after a sustained period of human progress, can damage the invisible bond between the people and the government and lead to considerable social and political turmoil” (HDR 1990, 50). To explain this, Sachs mentions the importance of a “self-sustaining economic growth” (Sachs 2005, 73) after a country shall have climbed the first step to the ladder of development. I have argued that prosperous nations have a duty to help very poor countries, but they should do so in such a way that the resources given to a country will fall into the right beneficiaries. Countries which do not have mature democracies sometimes have to endure the challenge of maintaining its precarious peace and order situation. Helping them develop will call for sustainable development efforts to make sure that the fruits of an initial overlapping consensus for a threshold of central human capabilities among people and warring factions are secured. This means, therefore, that rich nations, global institutions, the World Bank, and the United Nations should see to it that human development is sustainable in order to protect the gains of an initial agreement for peaceful co-existence in societies previously in conflict. Sustainable development also takes into consideration, for instance, environmental protection and resource management, including providing provisions for food security through investments

in agriculture and food production. Moreover, sustainable development also entails improvement in human resource management in order to ensure equality and respect for human rights which are vital factors in maintaining peace and order in the face of pluralism. Political conflicts stifle the capabilities of people, especially women and children, and one way to avoid such is by means of sustaining economic growth.

Promoting democracy ensures a people-centered approach to the problem of extreme poverty, and considers primarily the fact that development concerns each and every single person, thus, it is an ethical responsibility that must be fulfilled. Understanding the real conditions of people in extremely difficult circumstances is necessary, and promoting democracy and sustainable development is essential in making human development possible. Democracy empowers people and should make people realize, to paraphrase the great Abraham Lincoln, that development is something that can be achieved in their lifetime, that development is something that can be made possible by them, and that development to be truly human is essentially for them.

## CONCLUSION

Amartya Sen's attempt to rectify the short-sighted concept of well-being in welfare economics has shown that development cannot be limited to the notion of income. The problem of poverty cannot be solved by throwing money to the poor. It requires an understanding of the very meaning of our humanity – on what really makes us 'fully human'. Humans, as Sen has correctly shown, are beings who choose, therefore free. Freedom means that life is something we can expand by actualizing what we are able to do and be. What is needed, and to this end, our socio-political structures must respond to, is to have the essential capabilities so that we may be able to realize our true human potentials. Development, in this sense, should go beyond conventional measures like GNP and GDP and should look at the ingredients necessary to make the individual actualize his or her freedom – access to good health, education, and real purchasing power. Moreover, beyond this individual capacity, it is important to put emphasis on the constructive and instrumental role of democracy to human development. For Sen, it is only under a democratic regime that human freedom, the main ingredient to a life one has reason to value, can thrive.

But beyond the idealism of Sen's epoch-making proposal, this thesis hopes to have shown how Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Ethics provides a development framework that is fully human. Using her understanding of Aristotle and Marx, Nussbaum grounds the Capability Approach on the concepts of human flourishing and human dignity to be able to prescribe a universal concept of what it means to be human. Moreover, her idea of a threshold of human capabilities concretizes the approach to inequality in society. In contrast to Sen, Nussbaum's work in the field of human development has provided a broader sense and understanding of pluralism in society and her proposal for an overlapping consensus on basic entitlements and rights to essential human capabilities seeks to address the problems brought about by a world divided by different beliefs and norms. The list of central human capabilities tells us that there is something basic about human existence and that to value human existence means that each government must guarantee that all citizens are provided with these entitlements and rights which seek to make life for each individual decent and dignified. To do this, a threshold of basic capabilities is politically necessary and is the practical thing to do in order to secure a just and peaceful co-existence among people in all societies.

Today's world is immersed into a lot of moral urgencies. One of which is finding the way to alleviate more than one billion people who are extremely poor. From a practical end, the thesis hopes to convey that one way to understand the real conditions of the extremely poor is to make a radical change in the way policy-makers measure human development through the HDI. There is a need to create a more comprehensive picture of the extent of human deprivation in the world. I believe that it is necessary to expand the HDI in order to understand the problem of extreme poverty fully well. Currently, the HDI measures development using three categories – longevity, literacy and income adjusted to real purchasing power. But in view of the vulnerability of millions of people in conflict-laden countries, especially women and children, it is now time to look at the inclusion of political liberties and gender equality in the field of human development reporting and see how the curtailment of these freedoms affect the real life chances of people in attaining a life that is fully human. First, the argument of this thesis is to include two important items in the category for political liberties – transparency in government and human security. These items will help explain the failure of governance or the weakness of the political structures in a particular country. Secondly, the inclusion of gender equality as a category will help reveal the extent of deprivation women experience in terms of their rights and entitlements. Understanding such will help global institutions design measures that empower women to enable them to choose a fuller human life.

Solving extreme poverty and making human life decent for the poorest of the poor is a difficult task. But from a normative point of view, the task is clear – we have to pursue “the moral ends of development”, as Nussbaum urged, and it is this task where the human development framework must respond to. The basic idea is that global institutions like the World Bank and UNDP, including international NGOs, have the moral obligation to promote and protect the central human capabilities of people. The thesis proposes three points to answer this challenge: the strict requirement of transparency, gender equality, and the commitment to democratization and sustainable development. This will require global institutions in the area of human development like UNDP and the World Bank to play a greater role in order to bring real human development to those who have suffered. Regimes which have committed atrocities to their own people shouldn't be supported indirectly by disbursing funds to the bureaucracy, and I have argued that development assistance be given directly to the people by way of local NGOs.

This is necessary so that the money that should uplift their lives and their chances of survival will directly benefit them.

What the thesis prays to have accomplished is to show that development can go beyond economics in order to attain a ‘fully human’ face. I have also attempted to show how global inequality can be addressed, and I believe that the practical thing to do is to make global institutions fulfill their moral obligation to help the poorest of the poor by promoting and protecting the essential human capabilities in order to effect the urgent changes necessary to make human development a real possibility. Therefore, I believe that a fully human world is morally desirable and I base this on three truth-claims which I hope the thesis has shown: First, all human beings, regardless of color or race, religion or nationality, men and women, the young and the old, have equal moral worth. In this sense, human dignity is the ground and norm with which development policies and constitutional essentials must be anchored to make human development a possibility for all. Each individual, in this sense, is entitled to a full human life – a life free from the bondage of poverty, violence and gender discrimination. Sen’s eloquence in *Development as Freedom* may have failed to fully capture the universal appeal of human dignity but more importantly, I believe that he has laid the very groundwork of an ethical framework in the field of development economics.

Secondly, the argument stands that democracy works and provides the best possible political arrangement where respect for civil and political liberties and gender equality can be secured. The two proposed categories for a revitalized HDI are important conditions to ensure a decent standard of living for all and makes possible the flourishing of human capabilities which will enable each human being to choose a life he or she has reason to value. However, the real challenge is that democracy in many developing countries remains in a fragile state, and extreme poverty ignites the fire in people that makes socialism all-too tempting. But the case of Cuba’s economic crisis in 1990 shows how populist programs hide the severe curtailment of human freedom severely affects the chances of people to achieve a life that is worth living. Authoritarian regimes somehow focus on programs that target literacy and health. But literacy and health are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are pre-conditions to a full human life where one can express his or her dignity as a person – something that democracy secures for each individual. Critical faculties and human creativity, two things that human freedom can secure,

also help empower people to attain higher economic well-being, which I believe will also translate to a better standard of living. People should have the option to flourish in order to achieve a higher standard of living. But such is something that is least likely to occur under authoritarian regimes where political freedoms are limited by the state. The main contention of Sen is that democracy makes possible the triumph of human freedom. Democracy therefore serves as the fertile ground for human development. In support of this, Sachs has articulated in *The End of Poverty* (2005) the argument that democracy is indeed the most ideal condition for human development to come into fruition. Sen says that “there is rather little general evidence that authoritarian governance and the suppression of political and civil rights are really beneficial in encouraging economic development” (Sen 1999, 150).

Lastly, the reality of globalization must be seen from the perspective of human and moral responsibility. This means that the ultimate goal is to create a global community where all men and women will live with their dignity intact and their potentials realized by means of mutual cooperation between rich and poor nations. This requires, first and foremost, that wealthy societies help the extremely poor, not only by giving aid or engaging in beneficial trade, but in seeing to it that the vulnerable in some societies benefit directly from development programs by ensuring that their governments promote and protect political freedoms and gender equality. The commitment to the realization of this ethical responsibility ensures a life worth living for all and a truly human world for each and every single person. The way forward, I think, is to appeal to the importance of this ethical responsibility, which means that the obligation of global institutions to the extremely poor and vulnerable is not merely economic or political, but human and fully human. The task at hand, therefore, is to make globalization work in the best interest of all humanity.



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