

FROM RESULTS TO AGENCY. EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES FOR AN OPERATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR CONCEIVING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Given a background of complexity, dynamism and uncertainty, this paper assumes that, rather than being oriented towards achieving preconceived results, aid programmes and projects should be oriented towards strengthening the agency of actors with the potential to influence and support development processes and social change dynamics.

Therefore, we draw on the idea of collective agency based the notion of responsibility and the two-way relationship with structure. This leads us to suggest some key elements in the project process for expanding collective agency such as: 1) incorporating the relational perspective between actors, 2) generating deliberative processes and 3) introducing critical reflection and power analysis.

While examining the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and stating its limitations in relation to promote collective agency, we point out some possibilities for a new framework for conceiving development programmes and projects as instruments to support development processes through the expansion of collective agency.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore possibilities of the Capability Approach (CA) for the configuration of an operative framework for conceiving, designing, managing and evaluating development programmes and projects.

On the assumption that projects are not an end in themselves but instruments for promoting and supporting complex processes of change and transformation, we assume that the CA provides us with the elements required to broaden our vision and enables us go beyond specific results that usually steer development action management.

As we argue in the paper, considering agency instead of results and products is an appropriate approach to strengthening the link between development projects (specific, partial and temporary) and development processes (complex, continuous and long term).

This conception of development processes requires considering not only uncertainty and unpredictability as an essential issue (Eyben, 2006; Korten, 1980; Hardi & Zdan, 1997; Bagheri & Hjorth, 2007; Newman, 2007) but also power relations and dynamics amongst actors who often do not share the same interests or agenda (Leal & Opp, 1999; Chambers & Petit, 2004; Gaventa, 2006). Thus, following Sen's thought, development action planning can be considered as a deliberative process where certain actors practice their agency and find a space for empowerment. Our understanding of development programme and project planning is based on Eyben's (2006) complexity perspective, Habermas' deliberative considerations as conceptualised by Healey (2007) and Cameron & Ojha's (2007) critical reflectivity.

We begin by exploring the CA notion of agency, discussing its potentialities in social transformation processes by entering into the traditional debate between structure and agency.

From this approach we have tried to go beyond the conception of individual agency to include its collective dimension. We base our argument on Ibrahim's (2006) proposals, the two-way relationship between structure and collective agency proposed by Ballet *et al* (2007) for collective responsibility issues and Cleaver's (2007) relational conception of agency.

In relation to the above, we include a multifaceted and multidimensional conception of power (Gaventa, 2005) which enables us to emphasise aspects of previous assumptions and the invisible power which impregnates development planning. We also include the power forms formulated by Miller *et al.* (2006) and link this analysis to Bourdieu's (1992) *habitus* idea, to integrate it in Cameron & Ojha's (2007) discussion of deliberative and reflexive processes in development interventions.

At the core of our discussion, we offer a detailed analysis of the widely recognized methodology for designing and managing development projects: the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). Current criticism highlights rigidity, excessive rationality and focus on short-term results (Gasper, 2000) rather than transformation in structures, institutions and organizations. We explore these topics and examine the issue of its limitations for promoting agency.

To this end, we establish three complementary levels of analysis which lead us to an overall understanding of the LFA: 1) Epistemological foundations and underpinning rationality; 2) Methodology itself: elements, process, tools, languages... and 3) Management and use by organizations in day-to-day practice.

Consequently, we obtain some insights into how LFA includes (or excludes) the potentiality to promote agency and to what extent it has the potential to produce (or reproduce) certain spaces, dynamics and power forms that shape the way participation and deliberation take place, thus limiting (or promoting) stakeholders' capability to practice and develop collective agency.

Finally, implications of the discussions are expressed and some elements are proposed to shape an alternative approach to conceive, design, manage and evaluate development programmes and projects under the umbrella of the capability approach framework and the perspective of agency.

2 AGENCY AS THE CAPABILITY FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

2.1 The capability approach and the notion of development

The capability approach appeared as an alternative approach to the welfare economy and utilitarian approaches which use personal satisfaction as the final reference.

The capability approach is, therefore, a conceptual framework (Robeyns, 2005) which broadens the quality-of-life concept, including new dimensions and conceptions which enable development to be understood from a different perspective from which some core features of previous approaches can be questioned.

Thus, one of Sen's major contributions is that he has enabled us to re-direct our attention towards other types of aspects in relation to development, well-being and quality-of-life (Des Gasper, 1997). It must be remembered, however, that the capabilities approach *"is not a theory that can explain poverty, inequality or well-being; instead, it rather provides a tool and framework within which to conceptualize and evaluate these phenomena"* (Robeyns, 2005; p.3).

Sen's initial premise is to view human life as a set of actions and states and to consider that well-being is achieved when life, as a set of actions and states, achieves a certain quality (Dubois, 2006).

To assess this idea of quality-of-life, Sen establishes two categories: functionings and capabilities (Sen, 1999; p.36).

Functioning is understood to be *“the states of existence and actions that a person effectively achieves or performs throughout their life”* (Dubois, 2006, p. XXX) whether they be activities, physical states, mental situations or social functionings. Therefore, a person's well-being depends on the functionings which have effectively been achieved (Dubois, 2006).

In contrast, capabilities are defined as *“all the possible sets of functionings which a person may choose”* (Dubois, 2006, p. XXX), regardless of whether they are effectively put into practice (Robeyns, 2005), depending on what each person has reasons to value. Thus, they are the set of real options available to a person, i.e, they configure the person's freedom

It is precisely this field of freedom, as a set of capabilities, which for Sen is the ultimate reference of development or to cite Robeyns (2005, p.4) *“what is ultimately important is that people have the freedoms (...) to lead the kind of lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do and to be the person they want to be”*. Therefore, development is conceptualised as freedom and consequently the core concern is to expand that freedom i.e. expand people's real capabilities.

In this article we offer a discussion of how development programme and project planning in the framework of international cooperation can contribute to this objective.

2.2 The concept of agency in the Capabilities Approach.

In the framework of this view of freedom as the core defining element of development, **agency** has been considered a key aspect as it plays an important role in the effective realisation of human capabilities.

Sen understands agency as *“what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important”* (Sen, 1985, p. 206), so that *“people who enjoy high levels of agency are engaged in actions that are congruent with their values”* (Alkire, 2007).

Therefore, agency becomes essential to the capabilities approach since *“one cannot have capability in the sense of opportunity, freedom if one lacks capability in the agency senses, of capacity and skills to think and act”* (Gasper, 2007, p.340).

Agency goes further than well-being in that it does not have to be related to the agent's own well-being but responds to *"what a person does or can do to realize any of her goals and not only ones that advance or protect her well-being"* (Crocker, 2008)

In this regard, **well-being freedom** refers to functionings that *"are self-regarding in the sense that they relate to the 'well-ness' of the person's state of being"*, (Burchardt, 2009). It therefore covers *"not the totality of her considered goals and objectives but rather only her 'wellness', 'personal advantage' or 'personal welfare'"* (Crocker, 2008, p. 151).

In contrast, **agency freedom** *"refers to what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important"* (Sen, 1985, p. 203), i.e. everything that a person has reasons to value regardless of whether or not it is related to his or her own well-being (Sen, 1992 cited in Crocker, 2008). It is a question, therefore, of actions which respond to objectives that *"the person sets himself or herself, and are therefore person specific"* (Burchardt, 2009).

It is important to emphasise that agency is not conceived of as decontextualised individual action, but considers the **social context** in which it is exercised, and is linked to generating change and transformation which go beyond the well-being of the individual exercising agency.

This enables a conceptual link to be established between agency and social change and transformation processes which development interventions attempt to promote.

Sen specifically states that *"I am using the term of agent as someone who acts and brings about change"* (Sen, 1999; p.19), emphasising that agency *"may incorporate commitments to other individuals or to causes and on occasion their pursuit may result in actions deleterious to the individual's own well-being"* (Burchardt, 2009; p. 6).

In this regard, Crocker makes it clear that agency *"provides conceptual space for a conception of freedom and responsibility that breaks decisively with any egoism that claims that humans are no more than strict maximizers of a narrowly defined self-interest"* (Crocker, 2008; p.5).

2.3 Agency versus structure

The Capabilities Approach recognises the influence and importance of social and institutional conditioning where agency is exercised. In fact, Robeyns (2005) clearly

distances the approach from any type of ontological or methodological individualism, limiting CA individualism to its ethical dimension.

In the specific case of agency, Sen explicitly states that *“the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities available to us”* (Sen, 1999, p. xi-xii).

Robeyns (2005) also speaks of social conversion factors which mediate between the availability of certain resources and the possibility of developing the necessary functionings to achieve states of existence and actions that people have reasons to value. He also assumes that it is a complex question which includes not always explicit elements and therefore *“it is important to question to what extent people genuinely have access to all the capabilities in their capability set, and whether or not they are punished by members of their family or community for making certain choices of the kind of life they value”* (Robeyns, 2005, p. 13).

However, even while acknowledging the above, it must be pointed out that the **separation between individual agency and social structure is problematic**, as the Capabilities Approach is unable to capture this interaction fully (Ibrahim, 2006). This limits its usefulness for understanding certain key issues in the collective action process in general and in programme and project planning in particular

Going deeper into this question, Ballet *et al.* (2007) criticise an excessively narrow conception of the subject and claim it is necessary to consider responsibility as a constitutive characteristic of the person at the same level as freedom. This has important consequences for the notion of agency as it generates a distinction between *strong agency*, which would include the exercise of responsibility towards others and society as a whole and *weak agency*, referred solely to developing individual goals and capabilities (Ballet *et al.*, 2007).

According to Cleaver (2007), further exploration is needed of the multiple forms in which individual agency is exercised and modelled and therefore it is necessary *“to place understanding of agency in wider contexts and frameworks, and think beyond the assumption of agency as purposive action”* (Cleaver, 2007, p 225).

Ibrahim (2006) emphasises the intrinsic importance of social structures and their two-way relation with individual capabilities and agency by reaffirming the *“social embeddedness of individuals”* (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 403) and condemns the attempt to consider them independently from social relations as a serious misunderstanding.

The above poses essential questions on the notion of the individual and the idea of autonomy, because it raises the need to ask to what extent our decisions and the reasons we have for valuing certain opinions over others are socially and culturally mediated. In particular, it must be assumed that they do not only respond to explicit elements, but are embedded in institutionality and cultural networks to which the individual belongs and constitute a significant, invisible and not necessarily equitable power

Let us examine this using the example of a woman who chooses to go hungry in order to feed her children. According to the above definition, this woman is exercising agency in the sense that she is choosing an action which does not contribute to her personal well-being (quite the opposite) and she does so according to very legitimate and respectable reasons. According to the above, it is a free exercise of agency which includes commitment and responsibility towards others, an undeniable ethical value.

However, by broadening the perspective and observing that this behaviour is a generalised shared pattern of behaviour (simplifying, we could say that poor women go hungry and well-off women give up full career development for their children) then doubts arise as to whether this exercise of agency is an exercise of freedom or domination. In fact, it is an action which responds to a shared conception of what leading a good life means, but studies on feminism show that women from the south, when deciding to lead their lives according to the taken-for-granted definition of a good woman, increase their exposure and vulnerability to poverty (Murguialday, 2007).

In fact, *“our sense of ourselves is inherently constructed through interaction with other people. We are born into social relations and we live through them during our lives. Through these relations we are linked to particular histories and geographies which constrain our material and conceptual resources and experiences. Our efforts in working out our individual identities and social relations are ‘structured’ by what has gone before. They are active forces, filled with implicit and explicit principles about how things should be done and who should get what”* (Healey, 2006, p. 45).

This structuring idea puts us in tune with Giddens (1984, 1990) to the extent that it makes us think that *“we are never as isolated or as autonomous as we sometimes think we are”* and leads directly to the **traditional debate between structure and agency**.

From this perspective, agency is conceptualised as relational in the sense that *“it does not exist in a vacuum but is exercised in a social world in which structure shapes the*

opportunities and resources available to individuals, in which appropriate ways of being and behaving are not simply a matter of individual choice” (Cleaver, 2007, p. 226).

Thus, *“active agency interacts with constraining structures (...) that operate in routinised and taken-for-granted ways” (Healey, 2006, p. 35) modulating and limiting the real framework of options for people's actions.*

The important thing is that these structures include power relations through their influence on shaping rules of behaviour and material flows (Giddens, 1984), and preferences and habits (Bourdieu, 1992). In particular, Bourdieu (1992) highlights the importance of *habitus*, as a set of dispositions which incline the agent to act or react in certain ways, in shaping agency. For Bourdieu, individuals have agency, but the type of agency that they really have is partially prescribed by the culture to which they belong (Cleaver, 2007).

Bourdieu (1992) also shows how *habitus* itself is shaped and determined by elites as a core element in the power relations which support them and therefore it is neither neutral nor spontaneous as common sense would sometimes make us believe. In fact, not only habits but *“each element of such structures has at some time been actively made by human agency, and many are routinely remade” (Healey, 2006, p. 45).*

But this structural power over human existence has never been absolute, on the contrary, resistance and change are an inherent part of social dynamics. In this regard, the debate focuses on the extent to which the exercise of agency is capable of generating not only individual transformations, but also structural change and to what extent it is subject to the discipline imposed by the structure's rules and sanctions. Ibrahim (2006) recognises that agency requires *“self-scrutiny and critical reflection”* to the extent that the agent *“brings about change by first reflecting critically on his/her current status, perceiving a better life and taking action to achieve this aspired life” (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 401).* This process is similar to the process of developing a critical awareness proposed by Freire.

This leads us to redefine the proposal made by Ballet *et al.* (2007) for a strong agency and weak agency in relation to the exercise of responsibility..

Thus, **weak agency** would be associated with the degree of autonomy which the individual acquires in relation to what we call structure. It is a question, therefore, of seeing to what extent the agent is able to carry out actions which he or she has reasons to value without explicitly considering responsibilities towards anyone else's

agency freedom (Ballet *et al.* 2007). From this perspective, agent-generated changes are valued in relation to the agent's own objectives (Sen, 1999) and not necessarily from the perspective of his or her responsibility towards the collective. Furthermore, although it includes a consideration of the extent to which the structure permits or limits this exercise of agency as autonomy, it assumes the duality between structure and agency, i.e. it considers that structure and agency are two differently constituted things which interact.

Strong agency is associated to changes the *agent* is able to generate in relation to his or her responsibilities towards the collective (Ballet *et al.* 2007), which in development terms would be formulated as responsibility for expanding the real capabilities, or freedom, of others. In this regard, agent-generated change is measured not only in relation to his or her own objectives, but also in relation to the agent's contribution to the transformation of collective elements which enable and build human development.

These collective elements undoubtedly refer to what we call structure and structure-transforming action must necessarily include collective action. It is therefore essential to conceptualise agency in the framework of collective action.

An example which illustrates this difference between weak and strong agency can be taken from one of the most global, proactive and transformational social movements in recent times, the gay and lesbian liberation movement (Castells, 1996). From the perspective of the Capabilities Approach, it is scarcely questionable that freedom on sexual orientation is essential for development as freedom.

It is also obvious that current structures and institutionality throughout the world have not only not respected this principle, but persecuted it through different kinds of stigmatisations and violence.

From this perspective, *weak agency* would refer to a person's ability to have the kind of personal relationships that he or she has reasons to value, and would include personal autonomy in both the private and public sphere. The term weak does not refer to the difficulties in exercising this type of agency in practice but to the limited explanatory capacity of the concept. It is a form of understanding agency which allows us to evaluate when we are in a socially desirable situation, but does not explain how to make the changes needed to achieve such a situation. It is therefore an evaluative rather than an explanatory conception of agency,

In contrast, **strong agency** refers to the processes and actions which generate a transformation in the way of understanding, conceiving and regulating the issue of homosexuality in society as a consequence of responsibility and commitment. In this case, the gay and lesbian liberation movement has been a long-haul process of change where individual action has played a vital role in breaking down prejudice and generating acceptance. But aspects such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India, or the full recognition of marriage and adoption rights in Spain, would not have been possible without the organised collective action of many different collectives in their struggle against legislative structures, institutions, de facto powers and extraordinarily unfair beliefs.

In this regard, *strong agency* is strong because it enters into the dynamics and processes of transformation and change, which does not imply renouncing the ethical individualism of the Capabilities Approach whereby these changes can be evaluated in relation to what we call weak agency or autonomy.

In fact, one of the core dimensions of agency is its impact in the world (Crocker, 2008) and therefore understanding agency means understanding how it alters the elements of the underlying power structure since *“the more an agent’s actions make a difference in the world, the more fully does the agent exercise agency”* (Crocker, 2008, p. 13).

But all this forces us to go beyond the individual view of agency and understand it from a collective dimension. Ibrahim (2006, p. 404) proposes a definition of **collective capability** *“as the newly generated capabilities attained by virtue of their engagement in a collective action on their membership in a social network that helps them achieve the lives they value. They are not simply the sum of individual capabilities, but rather new capabilities that the individual alone would neither have nor be able to achieve, if he/she did not join a collectivity”*. This definition is important because it establishes that collective capabilities affect individuals’ decisions in two ways: first, they affect individual perceptions of what is considered to be good; second, they determine individual capacity to achieve it.

There is then an **overlap between structure and agency**. Although structure has traditionally been presented as a set of external forces acting on individual subjects (Healey, 2006), the example of the woman going hungry to feed her children shows that this is problematic, as structure is materialising precisely through the action she undertakes.

Such is the idea put forward by Giddens (1984) who claims that structural forces are not an abstract element but act through the web of relationships in which we live. Structural forces are constituted through our specific actions, so that it is we ourselves who materialise and constitute the structures that surround us.

This overlap between structure and agency is precisely what opens the door to transformation and change through collective agency. *“Through acts of collective agency the individual can pursue this perception of the good collectively by joining or participating in a group with similar goals. Collective agency is thus not only instrumentally valuable for generating new capabilities, but also intrinsically important in shaping and pursuing the individual’s perception of the good”* (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 405).

Structures delimit agency, but agency in turn delimits structure and rebuilds it continuously along new unexplored paths.

2.4 A multidimensional, multifaceted understanding of power

The exercise of agency and its potentialities for generating change in the framework of a complex overlapping with structure requires the prior conceptualisation and clarification of a crucial aspect, power dynamics

Although the meaning of power is diverse and contentious (Gaventa, 2005), in keeping with the line of argument followed up to now, we support our discussion with Gaventa’s (2005) interpretation of Lukes’ (2005) proposal for conceptualising three different categories of power.

- ✓ **Visible power**, consists of observable decision-making processes where contests over interests are visibly negotiated in the public sphere with established rules (Miller *et al*, 2006); of course visible power may be unfair (biased laws and policies or closed, corrupt or unrepresentative decision-making structures), but it does not exhaust all unfair power relations
- ✓ **Hidden power**, or the influence on who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda, that is to say the capacity for setting the political agenda and excluding issues and actors from the arena; it has been traditionally formulated as the capacity for making no decisions on particular issues
- ✓ **Invisible power**, which shapes the psychological and ideological approach of people to problems; according to contributions from authors like Foucault and Bourdieu, it refers to social and political culture and the individual realm of

meanings; it is the way people's values and preferences are shaped through socialization, culture and ideology; that way, inequalities may be perpetuated by the definition of what is normal, "true" or acceptable because "*significant problems and ideas are not only kept from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of the people involved, even those directly affected by the problem*" (Miller *et al*, 2006).

Traditionally, these three categories of power have been interpreted negatively in the sense that they modulate and restrict the potential for human agency. That is, they are conceived of as forms of domination and conceptualised as **power over** or the "*ability of the powerful to affect the actions and thoughts of the powerless*" (Gaventa, 2005).

In contrast, other interpretations (Miller *et al*, 2006) recognise the liberating potential of power and emphasise what they call vital power sources. In keeping with the idea of agency which we have developed here, they refer to the following (Miller *et al*, 2006):

- ✓ **Power 'to'** as the individual power to shape your own life. It refers to the capacity to act, to exercise agency and to realise the potential of rights, citizenship or voice. It is therefore fully linked to Sen's idea of agency.
- ✓ **Power 'with'** others to find common interests and build collective strength. It refers to the synergy which can emerge through partnerships and collaboration with others, or through collective action and alliance building processes. Following Crocker (2008) "to realise an individual's or group's goals and to change the world (...) requires that the individual or collective agent has agency freedom and effective power" (Crocker, 2008, p. 12). In fact, "given the interdependences of social living, many liberties are not separately exercisable, and effective power may have to be seen in terms of what all, or nearly all, members of the group would have chosen" (Sen, 1985, p. 211). In this regard, the collective agent's capacity depends on the power with which the actors are able to construct.
- ✓ **Power 'within'** refers to gaining the sense of self-identity, confidence and awareness that is a pre-condition for action. It is based on a person's sense of self-worth and self knowledge and requires questioning the "taken for granted" issues which perpetuates personal acceptance of inequalities. It is closely linked to the idea of invisible power as it covers the entire set of meanings and interpretations which the person constructs.

These different forms and categories of power are present in the interaction dynamics between structure and agency. Therefore, if we consider that development projects aim to support processes of change in these dynamics, we must be able to include these elements in a coherent manner.

2.5 Implications for development projects

According to the above conceptual consideration, it can be assumed that the ultimate goal of human development programmes and projects should be to expand not only human capabilities but also individual and collective agency freedom.

In this regard, Dreze & Sen's (1989 quoted in Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007) claim that *"it is (...) essential to see the public not merely as 'the patient' whose well-being commands attention, but also as 'the agent' whose actions can transform society"*. In relation to the that Muniz & Gasper (2009) propose using agency as an element for evaluating project effectiveness.

In this article, however, we propose considering agency not only as the programme result but as something which emerges in the programme itself and qualify it to promote social change.

We understand development programmes and projects from the perspective of participatory approaches, which endows them with certain collective action characteristics. This brings us in-line with Ibrahim's (2006) ideas on the above-mentioned collective agency issues.

In the framework of international cooperation, however, this has some implications on the way development projects and programmes are conceived which influence the project process itself.

Firstly, it is necessary to consider the **complexity perspective** and assume uncertainty as something which is inherent to development programmes and processes. To quote Eyben (2006, p. 4) *"the premise of complexity theory (...) is that change is emergent. Organized efforts to direct change confront the impossibility of completely understanding a system in constant flux (...) Thus, we cannot predict all the effects that our actions may have on processes of change or, indeed, on ourselves"*. From this perspective, we are proposing a relational approach which, rather than looking for specific results, values the creation and consolidation of relationships among actors pursuing a similar social change agenda.

The emphasis is therefore on the importance of organising and strengthening relational networks where the donor is just another constitutive element. *“Rather than aiming to achieve predetermined concrete change in which the recipient organization is treated as an instrument of that change, the focus of donor effort would be to support that organization’s own effort”* (Eyben, 2006, p. 53). In this article, we emphasise the importance of orienting development programmes and projects towards strengthening the agency capability of networks which, collectively, have the potential to generate transformations in favour of human development. The focus should be on supporting development processes. To that end, both flexibility and confidence are just as important as accountability and critical reflection (Eyben, 2006).

Secondly, the issue of collective agency leads us to underline the importance of the **deliberative processes** generated through the programme and project planning process. *“Habermas’s ‘discourse ethics’ requires that all those affected by ethical norms to coordinate and guide collective action of social agents must deliberate together without coercion and deception over the possibility and the content of the norms”* (Cameron & Ojha, 2007). This idea of reconstituting public debate has had a key impact on how development planning is understood (Healey, 2006). In contrast to the prevailing technical rationality of traditional planning methods, what is being proposed is a communicative rationality where actors deliberate and collectively build strategies and options. Thus, the planning process becomes a collective reasoning process (Healey, 2006).

However, this communicative ethics has been considered excessively optimistic to the extent that it assumes that *“high quality deliberation will address structural constraints on the deprived”* (Cameron & Ohja, 2007, p. 46), which may be unrealistic in highly unequal contexts.

This leads us to the third element, **critical reflexivity** and power analysis as essential elements to be included in development programme and project planning. In this regard, the invisible dimension of power –or what Bourdieu conceptualises as *habitus*– must be dealt with. Given that invisible power is anchored in our imaginaries, beliefs and assumptions, Freire’s emancipation ideas become relevant again in the framework of development planning as generator of agency to the extent that *“people would have the potential to challenge power if they could get sufficient understanding to reflect on their conditions of existence and see their ‘structured oppression’ for what it was”* (Healey, 2006, p. 46). In this regard, it can be said that conscious reflexivity on our

assumptions and modes of thinking carries transformative power (Chambers & Petit, 2004).

This critical, conscious reflexivity cannot be approached in the abstract, but must be anchored in experience and situations where the different actors involved in the planning process coexist. This leads us to a dynamic notion of learning from experience as a process of deliberating and putting into practice strategies for social change. This limits the validity of the traditional project cycle (identification, design, execution and evaluation) and emphasises much more iterative and incremental models

In this regard, deliberation and reflexive dialogue become core elements for developing agency because *“not just any behaviour that an agent “emits” is an agency achievement”* (Crocker, 2008b, p. 11). There must be a certain reflection and conscious deliberation of the reasons and values upholding agency: *“what is needed is not merely freedom and power to act, but also freedom and power to question and reassess the prevailing norms and values”* (Dreze and Sen, 2002, p. 258 cited in Crocker, 2008b).

According to Healey (2006, p. 47-49), *“our actions constitute the structural forces. We make structural forces, as we are shaped by them. So we have power and, if sufficiently aware of the structuring constraints bearing in on us, can work to make changes by changing the rules, changing the flow of resources and, most significantly, changing the way we think about things”*.

3 THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH

3.1 A worldwide used methodology

LFA is currently the most widely used methodology for project design, planning, management, monitoring and evaluation in the international aid arena. It is common nowadays that most bilateral and multilateral agencies use the tool to manage both the projects which they execute directly and those which they fund through third parties. The methodology and its underlying logic constitute what is often called LFA.

LFA's enormous popularity (not without its critics, as we shall see) is due to its progressive adoption by donor agencies. Although originated in the 1960s as commissioned by USAID, the definitive boost for its diffusion came in the 1980s and 1990s when the German GTZ and the European Commission adopted their own

versions of the Logical Framework Approach (ZOPP and Project Cycle Management, respectively).

LFA's underlying logic determines the establishment of cause-effect relationships among the various phenomena observed in the situation which is aimed to change. It is argued that by identifying problem causes are acting upon, they will be solved and consequently the problem will disappear. In negative terms (problems), the idea is to identify cause-effect relations; in positive terms (objectives) the idea is to determine the resources-goals required to achieve change.

The different levels of analysis are formulated from a greater to a lesser degree of precision: activities, results, specific objective, and general objective. Their relationships are established through what is known as vertical intervention logic, which indicates that, after verifying certain hypotheses, carrying out activities will produce certain results which, after again verifying certain hypotheses, will achieve a specific objective and similarly, a general objective. The main difference between the different levels lies in the fact that the first two (activities and results) are under the responsibility of the project, whereas the achievement of the specific objective and the general objective require the presence of external factors outside the control of the intervention.

In addition to vertical logic, there is also a horizontal logic which relates each level to indicators and sources of verification which will serve the purpose of verifying the degree of compliance. In addition, horizontal logic includes the hypotheses which must be fulfilled at each level to ensure progress to the next level.

All this is usually set out in a table, known as a Project Planning Matrix, which summarises the main aspects of the intervention.

	INTERVENTION LOGIC	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	HYPOTHESES
GENERAL OBJECTIVE				
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE				
RESULTS				
ACTIVITIES		MEANS	COSTS	
				PREVIOUS CONDITIONS

Fig. 1: PPM used by the European Commission.

3.2 A globally criticised methodology at three different levels

In this section an analysis of LFA has been performed on three levels: 1) epistemological foundations and underpinning rationality, 2) the methodology itself: elements, process, tools, languages, etc. and 3) management and use by organizations in day-to-day practice.

Although certain ideas are repeated as a result of the internal structure used to script the discussion at each level, note that there are different nuances and implications according to the level being discussed.

At each level the discussion is structured into: analysis of project process characteristics (complexity and uncertainty, deliberative processes, critical reflexivity, power and relationship analysis), focuses of attention (relation to development processes and the role of organisations and institutionality) and methodology-related elements (non-linear processes and qualitative evaluation of agency).

Epistemological foundations and underpinning rationality

In relation to project process characteristics, LFA does not capture the idea of complexity and uncertainty. According to Dale (2004), “*development planning should be understood in terms of resources and goals*” but the way of understanding this idea

in LFA implies that the first ones are perfectly knowable and the second ones perfectly assumable and agreeable. In fact, it is precisely the way the analysis is structured which makes it difficult to include complexity in the sense of considering multiple and diverse interrelationships between different aspects of the situation, as well as stakeholders' different references and interpretations. Thus, two of the most common criticisms of LFA are that "*linear/causal logic is too simple in relation to the complexity and circularity of relations among the phenomena in the social situation*" (Sainz, 2007) and this "*causal logic represents a "Western" vision of relations between phenomena which is not shared by other cultures and groups*" (Sainz, 2007). This implies that LFA reasoning is not neutral but includes ideological components with an invisible power which limits LFA 's capacity to foster deliberative processes as people from other cultures (or non-technical staff) may find the methodology difficult to use because their reasoning is different.

Although the LFA includes workshop participation, the deliberative processes are usually very poor. The reason for this is commonly interpreted as a matter of time and resource limitations, but the truth is that LFA logic is more characteristic of technical rationality than communicative rationality. In fact, LFA clearly includes the principle that "*planning is a design activity where designers have a deep knowledge of the situation, which can be applied through a rational process*" (Friedman, 1987, quoted in Ferrero, 2008). Thus, the forms of participation are considered as mechanisms for deepening designers' knowledge and for that purpose consultations to the project beneficiary population are held.

However, the occasional workshop format has not been designed to generate an in-depth deliberation process and a critical reflection for developing new forms of power to, with or within to enable agency. Furthermore, "*if qualification is necessary to develop the objectives we can fall into the trap of them being specified by the most powerful (top-down)*" (Gasper, 1997), which, as Chambers (2005) notes "*the top-down nature usually means that the experts' points of view are the ones which gather strength*".

Thus, the workshop format itself is an obstacle to the conditions of equality proposed from communicative ethics and LFA does not consider specific strategies to overcome major pre-existing inequalities when it comes to participative intervention design. "*We hope that exchange of views will produce some convergence and /or compromise, but democracy centres on consensus on procedures rather than consensus on contents*" (Gasper, 2000a). In contrast, LFA considers that one or two participation workshops are

sufficient to reduce the differences between stakeholders and reach a solid agreement on project objectives (Gasper, 2000a). It does not consider, however, that any consensus maybe the consequences of underlying power structures which have not been dealt with (or even questioned) during the LFA process.

This oversight has important consequences which limit the opportunities for critical reflexivity and therefore change at personal and organisational level. There is no space to reflect on the multiple taken for granted which appear in the development intervention design and therefore there is no opportunity to question them. Thus, the possibilities of generating in-depth change and transformation in structural aspects are clearly limited since learning processes are inhibited if differences in views between stakeholders are treated lightly and concealed under a Logframe.

Rather than specifying these issues and challenging them, participation spaces are designed to reach a consensus. This enables Mosse (1998) to consider “*projects as myths to accommodate different interests and agendas*” (Mosse, 1998), but in practice, they impose the dominant vision on the social situation. In fact, there is no explicit incorporation of difference and conflict management, as everything is fitted into an objective structure of causes and effects which automatically becomes an intervention structure of means and ends.

LFA power analysis is very precarious, as it is limited to an analysis of stakeholder participation according to an interest-power matrix. Its aim is more to guarantee project viability, guaranteeing the inclusion of powerful actors to achieve their approval and avoid resistance, rather than to generate a critical approach to existing power relations in the territory. Similarly, there is no analysis of power at different levels (local, national, global) nor any systemised analysis of inter-actor relations.

In relation to the focuses of attention, LFA link with the idea of development process is extremely weak. It assumes that “*change is engineered via a ‘project’ within or largely controlled by a single organization* (Gasper, 2000a), which, from a perspective of complexity, uncertainty and diversity is totally incoherent. By focusing on the problems, it does not give adequate consideration to potentialities and does not include a reflection/analysis of how social change is generated and what strategic opportunities are available for multiplying change.

Similarly, there is no explicit focus on organisations and institutional change. LFA does not explicitly contemplate organisation strengthening or change or the structural aspects of inter-organisational relationships. Nor does it consider core elements of

institutional change such as changes in values, attitudes, formal and informal rules. All of the above remains outside the project design process and therefore it is difficult for the underlying structures in the power relations between actors to emerge and be subjected to criticism.

In relation to the methodology, LFA has no clear time dimension which prevents it from capturing the dynamism of development processes. Also, it presupposes the capacity to accurately predict cause-effect relationships between the resources used and their effects (Mosse, 1998), which in complex, dynamic, multi dimensional environments is a lot to presuppose. Specifically, it considers that external factors conditioning the implementation process are limited because the problem being dealt with is basically stable (*Friedman, 1987, cited in Ferrero, 2008*). By not including the time dimension, as a management tool LFA has difficulties in reacting to any changes which crop up during execution. In fact, one of the most widespread criticisms is that “*LFA is excessively rigid and cannot adapt to changes in the situation*” (Sainz, 2007). This rigidity favours the use of the “*blueprint approach*” which brings us back to the fact that LFA helps to maintain unequal power relations among the different project stakeholders.

The problem is that the underlying assumption is that social change is relatively well understood and controllable (Gasper, 2000a). LFA is not appropriate for representing change in development processes (Ferrero, 2008) as long-term, complex and multidimensional dynamics. So LFA encounters difficulties in highly uncertain, changing environments (Gasper, 1998) because it is incapable of integrating the uncertainty and complexity inherent in any development process. By attempting to reduce uncertainty by excessively simplifying relationships, its validity as a transformation instrument is severely questioned.

The Methodology itself: elements, process, tools, languages...

Despite the generalised use of LFA, or precisely because of it, there has been much criticism from the methodological point of view. We can group these considerations into four major categories.

First, criticisms which point to the limitations imposed on intervention conception and which include focussing almost exclusively on direct results (target-ism), clear and agreed objectives (objectives-ism) and the initial indicators (tunnel-ism). There are also the limitations imposed by often presuming that the project itself is development (project-ism). In summary, it can be said that LFA tends to invisibilise unexpected negative or positive effects (because it ignores objectives, results and indicators which

are not in the matrix) and also leads to the controlling characteristic of organisations which attempt to set themselves up as the hub of the development process (Gasper, 2000b). As a consequence the chances of effectively including other actors in a deliberative process are reduced, whereas use of technical rationality is sanctioned to the detriment of communicative rationality. As already pointed out, opportunities to develop individual and collective agencies are seriously hampered.

Paradoxically, the use of LFA according to a technical rationality does not always reduce uncertainty but can in fact, increase it. Thus, the long periods required for design can coincide with changes in the context which are not included in the process (Rondinelli, 1993).

Technical rationality is also reflected in the use of problem/objectives trees, based exclusively on linear, univocal relations between development problems (Gasper, 2000b). In effect, the use of this tool conceals the existence of non linear relations and above all, of feedback between different problems (and actors), which rather than a tree, configure a complex network. Thus, a communicative rationality could be more successful when it comes to achieving partial consensus on problems (and in terms of potentialities). It would also put another aspect on the agenda which is usually left to one side, which is the political dimension of any development project and/or process (SIDA, 2005).

One last aspect of communicative rationality is related to project evaluation criteria. What may be a failure from a rational resources-goals perspective, can be a success from other perspectives (e.g. the communicative perspective): “projects do not fail; they are failed by wider networks of support and validation. The argument is that projects are made successful by social processes that disperse project agency, forge and maintain networks of support and create a public audience of their drama of social transformation. Failure is not a failure to implement the plan, but a *failure of interpretation* (italics in the original)” (Mosse, 2005, p. 18). The generation of such support necessarily requires the creation of spaces for deliberation and reflection and can only be understood from a perspective of the process facilitated by tools other than LFA (analysis of different levels of power, relationships analysis, agency mapping, etc.).

Secondly, the pernicious effect of attempting to put into practice the initial project design at all costs, considering any deviation as a failure, has also been pointed out (Rondinelli, 1993). This view of project design seriously undermines any deliberative processes in the driver organisation which would be important for improving both

results and agency among its members through critical reflexivity. Thus, organisational change is thus discouraged.

Likewise, LFA hinders the carrying out of evaluations and the subsequent learning, as project managers will consider any potential deviation to be an error.

Thirdly, other authors have pointed to LFA's inability to boost participation (Gasper, 1997). Moreover, it has been pointed out that given the way LFA has been conceived, it "does not reverse or modify development's hegemony so much as provide more effective instruments with which to extend technocratic control or advanced external interests and agendas" (Mosse, 2005, p. 4). In part, this is due to the fact that it does not analyse power relations between the actors involved, so that it does not explicitly reveal, for example, the power of the facilitators and the funding agencies who, with their specialised knowledge, can easily direct the process results. This kind of participation can hardly sustain deliberative processes with a critical reflexivity component.

Fourthly, and emphasising the organisation, LFA has difficulties when it comes to considering the different interests involved. Its search for agreed objectives and interests tends to conceal the fact that, within the organisations promoting the projects, there are different categories of motivations and interests and it is largely the power relations within the institution which determine the final decision (Dale, 2004). Once again, power analysis, in this case intra-organisational power, is needed to understand the strategy and objective defining process within the organisation itself. This analysis, if participative and reflexive can become a tool for organizational learning and change, provided it exerts an influence on power relations inside the institution. This in turn would affect strong agency, as it would reinforce the organisation's capacity to promote social change.

A final criticism concerns the ultimate objective of strengthening the agency of the actors involved, which we have justified as a fundamental criterion in development intervention design. Unfortunately, the present LFA format practically does not permit the inclusion of process objectives, like the generation of agency itself (or participation, or reflexivity). It seems that the only plausible solution would be to include agency as a general project objective (of any project) qualified by the particular circumstances of each development process.

However, we believe that agency cannot be measured by indicators. Agency must be understood for its qualitative value so the impact of interventions should not be

measured in terms of results. Instead, what would be required would be a sort of “agency mapping” to assess the extent in which agency has been expanded

Gaspar also mentions how “daring” it is to propose possibly objectively verifiable quantitative indicators, stating that *“LF requires a high degree of consensus about what is feasible and valuable, without this consensus, only the pressure of a dominant authority, the controller of funds, may lead to it being declared”*, (Gaspar, 2000a).

Management and use by organizations in day-to-day practice

In addition to all of the above criticisms, new weaknesses arise in practice when LFA methodology comes up against the day-to-day functioning of development institutions which use LFA to manage development projects.

Development institutions are in precarious state of equilibrium. This is based on the duality between empowering grass-roots movements to become autonomous from the “aid system”, while also maintaining (directly and indirectly) hegemonic models to ensure their own survival. This idea is mentioned by Mosse who suggests that *“subordinate actors in development create everyday spheres of action autonomous from the organizing policy models (...), but at the same time work actively to sustain those same models”*. (Mosse, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that these institutions disperse their energies through inefficient bureaucracy, rules and jargon imposed by the international cooperation system, allowing residual time to think, reflect on and rethink policies which should be guided by practice.

The abovementioned criticisms of impositional models exercised from the international sphere to the local, quite evidently maintain the invisible power held by donors and public policy creators by demanding a certain format to orient project management, ignoring the needs which institutions face in practice. Donor power makes it possible to orient the transforming potential of interventions, in this case, moving further and further away from a communicative approach which uses deliberative processes to create consensus and critically analyse the structures and mechanisms constraining societies.

In practice, donor power does not enable interventions oriented to the promotion of a strong, collective agency, as it uses bureaucratic instruments which prevent an emphasis on accompanying development processes. Furthermore, it does not allow the use of new approaches which seek to emphasise relations and alliances created by processes rather than by tangible results.

Therefore LFA is a mere instrument which has to adapt to donors' priorities. *"if you want funding...include sustainable livelihoods"* (Bornstein, 2003). Sainz broadens this idea by considering that in practice, LFA becomes a "mere administrative procedure to fill in forms rather than a goal based planning methodology" (Sainz, 2007).

Coming back to the issue of building strong agency through deliberation and reflectivity, Bornstein (2003) which states that, *"participation is suffering the effects of technical language, the necessary training and experience and time restrictions"*, issues closely linked to the abovementioned "bureaucratic power". In practice, LFA is perceived therefore as a management methodology which impoverishes collective deliberation, the basis for enabling and fostering critical reflexivity in the individual and collective sphere.

The total absence of this communicative logic among different actors (local, national and international) is evidenced by the significant vacuum in the relationship between public policies and development projects which are supposed to implement them.

Despite the many criticisms of LFA, Mosse notes that *"development organizations are less tolerant of research that falls outside design frameworks, that does not appear to be of practical relevance, is wasteful of time or adds complexity and makes the task of management harder"* (Mosse, 2005, p.12). This hints at the invisible power (that is more structural and difficult to observe without appropriate analysis) which guides development institutions' attitudes and would explain the enormous institutional inertia and disinterest in studies which attempt to include innovations and new management tools with a genuine transforming potential to foster strong agency in beneficiaries and co-participants in interventions.

Convenience, institutional inertia and maintaining "management know-how" in development organisations consolidate the use of LFA and to a certain extent, legitimate it, despite the continuous evidence pointing to its weaknesses and its poor, very limited analytical and predictive capacity.

Over and above the top-down logic associated with LFA, in practice the strict cause-effect relations on which it is based are not used correctly. Gasper notes perfectly a methodological weakness in LFA with the terms *"logic-less frame (...) a pre-existent log frame format is used to accommodate a pre-existing design rather than to help create a logical design in an appropriate format"* (Gasper, 2000a).

The programmatic rigidity of interventions often leads to an unfortunate situation in which the intervention is first designed and then positioned in a matrix according to an apparently causal logic, omitting the complexity of inter-factor relationships and intervention uncertainty. This situation would suggest that linear logic should approximate spiral logic with deliberative processes and learning at each turn of the spiral. Rather than closed interventions they should be directed at strengthening relationships among the actors taking part who, through deliberative and reflexive processes, take joint decisions on where to orient small interventions which constitute a genuine development process.

The suggestion of basing intervention success in the transforming potential of inter-actor alliances is a radical alternative to LFA. Consequently, strengthening relationships would involve introducing many changes in LFA use. If we genuinely consider projects as useful tools for promoting agency, we need to invert the general tendency noted by Calabuig (2008) when states that *“teams of consultants play a more important role than local staff, who are allocated only a low percentage of the total budget for the project”*, this can disempower local staff, contrary to what development interventions are intended to achieve.

Mosse also suggests that the administrative bureaucracy associated to the international cooperation system limits support to political processes of empowering with the actors being work worked with (Mosse, 2005). This again runs contrary to the idea of underpinning the organisations themselves.

Instead, development organizations need to maintain their social partner networks to sustain themselves and act as a job board for development professionals who depend on funded projects for their very survival.

4 CONCLUSIONS

LFA responds to a Western notion of development based on technical rationality and therefore its usefulness as a basis for a deliberative and reflexive process which empowers and strengthens strong agency in actors working to generate social change in development processes is doubtful.

Not only does LFA fail to consider explicitly the subject of institutionality, but it also creates a certain kind of institutionality which, based on de-politicising development, contributes to perpetuating power relationships. This is problematic because these

power relationships are precisely in the origin of inequalities and therefore, the lack of human development.

Development institutions themselves show a dual behaviour by pursuing two opposing objectives: their own survival (for which they require access to funds based on the existence of poverty) as against empowerment and social transformation (the very reason for their existence). In consequence, there is a vacuum between the dominant political statements and the practice of development institutions.

From the perspective of deliberative and reflexive processes for strengthening agency, LFA has important weaknesses: simplification of intervention complexity, establishing relations which are linear and too simplistic; hypotheses end up being an adornment to the matrix to which hardly any attention is paid as only desired effects are contemplated and collateral effects are not taken into account; technical language used restrict use of LFA to specialised experts (representing a sort of natural selection of a caste of people with very specific training from high social strata); verifiable indicators orient intervention success and impact towards the tangible items contemplated in the design phase; no deviations are permitted from the initial plan which establishes the final destination of the interventions from the early phases of birth and immaturity; it does not encourage participation but uses it to legitimate rigid interventions; it considers the main body of “beneficiaries” as a monolithic group with necessarily shared interests with the consequent oversight of intra-community power relations and finally, it does not focus on processes but on the short-termism of small impacts which are easy to control and measure. LFA therefore contributes to disperse agency instead of creating it.

Furthermore, the approach is poorly understood in practice, difficult to use and there are complications when it comes to compartmentalising planning elements, so that it ends up being a framework in which to fit interventions previously conceived. The administrative overburdening associated with LFA use is a new form of power which, again limits the opportunities of expanding agency.

To create a new framework which responds to the perspective of agency and social change processes, we think the following elements should be included in an agency-fostering methodology: **thinking on how and not what** (*communicative rationality, deliberative processes, reflexivity, visibilisation of power relations and inter-actor relations*), **focusing on towards where and not what for** (*focus on organisations with potential for change and on processes as ends in themselves*) and **learning-based**

rather than results-based (*agency qualitative mapping rather than quantitative indicators*). Coherent integration of all these elements could provide the basis for a methodological approach which would make the transition from results to capabilities and agency.

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