M a i t r e y e e

Briefing of the Human Development and Capability Association
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Dear HDCA Members,

One of the major insights and attractions of the capability approach/human development framework is its multidimensional perspective on human wellbeing. There is no single measure, like a utility index or income, which can adequately capture all the richness and complexity of flourishing human lives in the diverse context of our world. Living with less than one dollar a day does not capture the poverty of suffering racist abuse. An increase of GDP per capita does not reflect the environmental degradation and resulting impacts on health and general well-being which might have accompanied that growth. These limitations of using monetary indices to assess poverty are well known. These indices are perhaps convenient to use but they remain vastly inadequate, often detrimentally so, in their information content and flexibility to capture the human condition. Thus, when poverty becomes conceptualized in multiple dimensions which cannot be reduced to a common indicator, there is considerable excitement about the new possibilities for understanding human lives. This excitement however, is also accompanied by significant challenges.

Which dimensions of poverty are most relevant in a given context? How to assess poverty in an urban slum in Brazil? Should the relevant dimensions be different from those used to assess poverty among slum dwellers in Nairobi? How can information about these dimensions be collected? If lack of respect appears to be the most relevant dimensions of poverty that the urban slum dwellers identify, how to measure it? How to monitor whether a given public policy or a given project has impacted on what people themselves saw as the most important dimension of their wellbeing? Which indices to use? Questions abound.

This *Maitreyee* tries to address some of these issues which stem from the multidimensional perspective on wellbeing. Most contributions were presented during a workshop on 'Multidimensional Poverty: How to Choose Dimensions' held at the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford from 23-25 May 2006. Sabina Alkire opens the discussion by reviewing the strengths and weakness of various methods which are currently used for choosing poverty dimensions. Mario Biggeri applies these methods to the assessment of children's wellbeing. Alex Frediani explores how participatory methods can be used to evaluate a squatter upgrading programme in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. 'In the Practice' section examines how two non-governmental organizations have tried to operationalise this multidimensional view of poverty in their activities. John Hammock describes the experience of Oxfam America in choosing which projects to focus on and in which countries. SNV, a Dutch NGO XXXXXXXXX.

As always, we welcome comments and suggestions. If you wish to propose a specific theme or wish to contribute by writing us a short article, do not hesitate to contact us. The interface between research and politics will be the subject of our next *Maitreyee* in June.

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Insights

'Multidimensional poverty: How to choose dimensions'

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The growing recognition of poverty and inequality as being multidimensional has lead to a number of pressing conceptual questions. One such question is how to define the dimensions of concern. While economists and poverty researchers do indeed choose dimensions, they often do not make explicit their reason for choosing the dimensions they do. Without knowing the basis for their choice the reader is unable to probe the chosen dimensions and either trust them or question them.

The present essay explores this conceptual issue, which it focuses as follows: if poverty is conceived as capability deprivation, and if the task is to identify multidimensional poverty, what are the legitimate ways of defining dimensions? Put differently, by what methods should researchers decide 'what matters'. This essay situates the task of choosing dimensions of poverty within the wider task of multidimensional poverty measurement, and with respect to other kinds of poverty analyses that employ plural variables. On the debate about whether there should be one fixed 'list' of dimensions, this essay sides with the position that argues in the negative. It then identifies five processes by which dimensions are regularly selected, and proposes when and how each could contribute to the task of selecting dimensions of multidimensional poverty.

Multidimensional poverty measures relate to the capability approach insofar as they provide information by virtue of which people's capability deprivations might be reduced more accurately. While we remain cautious of misdirected theory we must also guard against empirical overambitiousness in our measurement efforts. Nevertheless, measurement of capability for welfare or poverty reduction exercises is strongly increasing and applies a number of quantitative measures. Typically, multiple dimensions or domains are identified and 'achievement' in each of these domains, set against a base 'fuzzy poverty line' across time is measured. The overlap between capability-related measurement work and these approaches to multidimensional poverty are evident. For instance, such exercises can include indicators (valuable functionings) for each domain, capture the interactions between the domains (the interactions between various freedoms or unfreedoms), ascribe relative weights for the various domains (valuation exercise); aggregate (for comparison across individuals and groups) and even develop a measure of the freedom for a given selection of domains and level of achievement.

Such extensions to extant multidimensional poverty assessments to enable capability evaluations raises a number of questions, starting first with the focus of this essay – how to choose domains or dimensions? Other questions, although not discussed in the present essay, include – how to choose relevant indicators for the domains and related capabilities; how to model interaction among indicators and among dimensions and address endogeneity issues; how to set relative weights for each dimension; how to aggregate or compare across individuals or groups; how to aggregate across dimensions or alternatively, to perform rankings and comparisons without prior aggregation and how to incorporate freedom and agency into multidimensional capability poverty measures.

Broadly, the reasons as to *why* researchers might consider certain dimensions to 'matter' belong to three categories. First among these is *instrumental importance* for

[1] First published as *XXXXX* in *XXXXX*; condensed for *Maitreyee* by Manu V. Mathai

achieving *other* poverty reduction goals; *anticipated outcome* of investments that are to be monitored is a second critical reason for considering certain dimensions; finally, and centrally to this essay, certain dimensions provide a direct poverty measures that represent a person or a population's ill-being. This makes the selection of focal domains and dimensions of poverty a very critical exercise.

The question of whether there should be one universal list of dimensions or lists put forth from diverse human contexts is a long standing debate in the literature on the subject. Aside from the evident practical convenience and appeal of a ready-made list, Nussbaum and others argue that specification of a list of domains is necessary to ensure that the content of the Capability Approach carries critical force. If the approach is too open-ended there is the practical possibility that the wrong freedoms will be prioritized and expanded. In response Sen has consistently defended the need for an ongoing process of public debate and reasoning and selection of dimensions in particular contexts of space and time. Sen's position is open to the criticism that specification of domains can occur in detrimental ways while Nussbaum's position limits the scope of public discussion and a predefined list can be of limited relevance in the diverse, specific contexts of our world. A satisfactory alternative is perhaps, still awaited.

We now turn to a discussion of these methods. In practical applications of the capability approach and related multidimensional approaches, it seems that the methods for identifying capabilities or dimensions of poverty are surprisingly straightforward. In particular, although as mentioned initially the discussion of the basis of choice is rarely explicit, it seems that most researchers draw implicitly on five selection methods, either alone or in combination:

a) *Existing Data or Convention* – are used to select dimensions (or capabilities) mostly because of convenience or a convention that is taken to be authoritative, or because these are the only data available that have the required characteristics. A weakness of this selection method is that it does not raise values issues. Thus it should be used only in conjunction with another method, unless the exercise is a technical test and will not provide the basis for practical recommendations.
b) *Assumptions* – either implicit or explicit about what people do value or should value are used to guide the selection of dimensions. These are commonly the informed guesses of the researcher, but they may also draw on convention, social or psychological theory, philosophy, religion and so on. While convenient a number weaknesses exist: The assumptions may be inaccurate or even detrimental and the method could perpetuate such assumptions. Further, assumption could be asserted ideologically rather than subjected to scrutiny and reasoned debate. Thus, use of this approach must be limited to times when researchers has a clear view regarding the relevant dimensions and is able to present them transparently so that a public discussion, that includes the poor, can challenge or improve the view.
c) *Public 'consensus'* – researchers often select dimensions that relate to a list that has achieved a degree of legitimacy due to such a consensus. Illustrations of such lists at the international level are universal human rights, the MDGs, and the Sphere project; these will vary at the national and local levels. But it must be recognized that such a consensus might mask conflict, be inflexible and may not have involved poor people. The method could be use when an instrument of consensus exists, preferably having been debated regularly and when comparable data are required across a number of situations where the same instrument of consensus is held.
d) *Ongoing Deliberative Participatory Processes* – are used to select dimensions on the basis of ongoing purposive participatory exercises that periodically elicit the values and perspectives of stakeholders. A number of challenges have been highlighted with this

approach. The process may be hijacked by local elite. Values discussions can be superficial and misleading if the level of trust is low. These processes could be expensive and difficult to repeat, unlikely to be feasible on a large scale and unlikely to be comparable across time when dimensions change. Thus use of this method requires a very high level of political inclusiveness fostered by trust and security that is not distorted by threats of violence or revenge for expressing ones views freely and openly.

e) *Empirical Evidence regarding people's values* – are used to select dimensions on the basis of empirical data on values, or data on consumer preferences and behaviors, or studies of which values are most conducive to mental health or social benefit. Weaknesses of this approach include the possibility that people cannot object if the disagree because they are treated as objects of the study. Further, surveys may not include the relevant population. Thus, this method could be used when data are available on poor people's values or other surveys, and when a third party view is necessary for example because deep conflict precludes direct discussion.

What is very clear, immediately, is that these processes overlap and are often used in tandem. For example, rights-based approaches to development might decide to make use of participatory processes to set specific priorities, and then choose indicators drawing on existing data. While it is clear that researchers will use two or three of these methods in an iterative manner, it is important to ensure that the set of domains that are generated are open to public scrutiny and ongoing debate. To this end Ingrid Robeyns has proposed that authors use four criteria for identifying relevant domains and capabilities:

a) *Explicit formulation* – so that the list is made explicit, discussed and the selected domains defended.
b) Methodolgical justification – the method used to select the domains is clarified and defended, while open to critique and modification.
c) Two stage process: Ideal Feasible – this criterion holds that the list be generated in two levels to include the ideal selection of domains and a selections of domains deemed as feasible given the practical realities. This distinction is useful given the likelihood that realities of practical feasibility can change.
d) *Exhaustion and non-reduction* – the capabilities on the list should include all elements that are important. No dimensions that are important should be left out.

While it remains unlikely that consensus can be reached on the dimensions that matter or why they matter, this essay has argued that it may be possible to identify a bit more explicitly why economists and researchers hold the views they do, which could itself be a step forward.

Choosing dimensions in the case of children's wellbeing

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As Sabina Alkire underlined in the previous contribution, there is no straightforward way for choosing how to choose dimensions of multidimensional poverty. She distinguished five methods for selecting dimensions emerged from the literature. This brief article is a first attempt at analysing how these methods can be used for selecting dimensions in the case of children's wellbeing.

Existing Data or Convention

This selection method is mainly based on the use of existing secondary data. The dimensions are chosen by researchers according to research questions – although in practice dimensions are often chosen according to data availability – without paying much attention to what these variables actually represent in terms of values. For example, primary enrolment rates can be used to represent children's education, without paying attention to the way children are treated at schools, even if that is the major factor affecting children's wellbeing.

At an aggregate level and for international comparison an important source and basis for the analysis of children's wellbeing is the statistical section of the State of the World Children and of other reports of other UN agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO and the World Bank.

At individual and household level the data are collected by household surveys such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). UNICEF developed the MICS as a tool for monitoring progress in the achievement of World Summit for Children (WSC) goals, and to monitor progress in relation to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Together with MICS, World Bank multipurpose household surveys (Living Standards Measurement Study LSMS/Integrated Survey series and the Priority Survey series), ILO SIMPOC surveys (Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour), National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are the instruments for generating information on child well-being in developing countries. Another relevant source of information is the data collected by national statistical offices especially for some developed countries (UNICEF 2005).

The analysis of household surveys questionnaires gives evidence that although the informational base on children is already well developed, the dimensions chosen through data availability are often too limited. There are relevant dimensions that need to be added in the questionnaires. Even if we consider all the surveys mentioned above, some dimensions are still under-represented or not represented at all, such as social relation, participation, respect, identity, mental wellbeing and mobility.[1]

For some dimensions, specific opinion polls are another interesting source of information using this method. For instance, the UNICEF speaking-out surveys have the worth of asking some questions related to overlooked dimensions of children well-being such as social relation, participation, respect.

List based on Consensus

This method uses a set of dimensions that have been pre-established earlier on and which benefit from widespread consensus. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is such a list that can be used for assessing children's wellbeing. The articles of the CRC can be classified according to relevant dimensions. This has been done for instance by UNICEF both theoretically and empirically to measure children's deprivations (UNICEF 2004).

Dimensions of children's well-being are captured also by the Millennium Development Goals. Children are considered in the first six goals regarding three dimensions: freedom from poverty/hunger, access to education, freedom from specific illness. Two goals are directly linked to children: achieving universal primary education (goal 2) and reducing child mortality (goal 4). Other dimensions such as respect, freedom from exploitation can be

[1] If you want a deeper treatment of these unrepresented dimensions in the full version of this contribution, please contact the author.

captured by specific conventions like the ILO conventions on the Minimum Age and on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

The lists based on consensus have often been agreed at by adults, without any form of legitimacy given by children themselves. Often, children did not take part in establishing criteria for assessing their own wellbeing. The above lists were prepared during international conventions, in a top-down fashion, and lacked roots at the local level. Sometimes, these lists are disputed, and even not accepted, at the local and community level.

Participatory Processes

Democratic and participatory processes could hence be a very relevant method of selecting dimensions. These methods can be applied for children with success at the local level and for community projects using participatory tools. Tentative projects are carried out by UNICEF and other UN agencies and by some international NGOs. However, these projects are only in their incipient stage.

The level of children's participation can vary from light interaction to deep participation using different participatory tools (Biggeri *et al*. 2006a, b). The tools used can also vary according to the local circumstances, the age and maturity of the children. They can vary from unstructured and participatory questionnaires, deep interviews, photo essay, mapping, focus-group discussions, drawings, etc. In project implementation, children's participation in the initial process and interim monitoring would contribute to improving project implementation.

Participatory processes can however be subject to a number of distortions such as adaptive preferences (how can we ensure that what children value as a dimension of wellbeing actually contribute to their wellbeing, such as eating tasty but chemically-process food?) or power (the most confident child can impose his/her view of wellbeing on other children).

Expert Analyses

This is a very frequently used method for choosing dimensions of wellbeing. According to expert analysis we often observe a distinction between the dimensions of wellbeing in developed and developing countries. For instance, in developed countries the main dimensions of children wellbeing usually considered are health and survival, material wellbeing, education and personal development and social inclusion (Micklewright and Stewart, 2000), while in developing countries, experts usually concentrate on various aspects of deprivation (Mehrotra 2006 and Gordon *et al*. 2003).

To conclude it is important to underline that often the selection depends on research objectives and/or operational processes (e.g. purposes of the analysis, long term versus short term, open-ended, well-defined, comparability, project analysis) and practical constraints (e.g. time, money, feasibility). Furthermore, considering that each of the selection methods presents strengths and limitations, different methods should often be combined. A final consideration has to be taken into account: that the dimensions of children's wellbeing and their relevance will vary according to age and the maturity of the child (Biggeri *et al* 2006a).

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A Participatory Approach to Choosing Dimensions

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As Sabina Alkire’s opening piece highlighted, participatory methods are one way of identifying, exploring and evaluating the dimensions of well-being. This short essay describes how participatory methods can be used to evaluate a squatter upgrading programme in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. The capability approach is employed to identify and explore through participatory methods one aspect of well-being: *housing freedoms.*[1] While complementing each other in a variety of ways, the research reveals that participatory methods and the capability approach also share similar limitations and challenges.

Since the 1970s many different participatory approaches to research, policy making and planning have been put forward. However it has been only since the 1990s that participatory methods have entered the development mainstream. Participation became a buzzword in poverty research and development projects. The best known participatory approach in the current development scene, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), was elaborated in the late 1980s in India and Kenya. According to Robert Chambers, “PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate” (Chambers, 1997: 102).

A variety of participatory tools have been developed, where the outsider (researcher or practitioner) is perceived as a facilitator who encourages and enables local people to express their own reality. These include group activities, visual diagrams and mapping. Although developed to be used in rural areas, PRA techniques and similar participatory methods have been applied in many different studies, practices and in a variety of contexts (Cornwall and

[1] This study has been undertaken in the context of my doctoral research. Housing is understood as the on-going activity that associates to a certain set of functions of the house. Such functions, or *doings*, *beings* and *havings* are perceived as housing functionings. ‘Housing freedoms’ are the capability people have to achieve their valued housing functionings.

Pratt, 2003). Unfortunately some recent applications of participatory approaches in the development mainstream fall short of their original intentions. Participation is sometimes used merely as a tool for achieving pre-set objectives and not as a process to empower groups and individuals to take leadership, envision their futures, and improve their lives (Cornwall, 2000; Cleaver, 2001).

Sen does not write directly on PRA or participatory methods. However other authors have elaborated on the links between the capability approach and participatory methods (Alkire, 2002; Croker, 2005). They argue that Sen's writings acknowledge participatory methods as the principal process by which many evaluative issues may be resolved. Comparisons made between participatory and capability approaches unfold series of similarities: they criticize the income-led definition of poverty; they view people as active agents in the process of change; while emphasizing the need to contextualize the conceptualization of poverty, thus unfolding the local dynamics embedded in the social reality of each particular case of study.

The initial challenge of the evaluation of the squatter upgrading programme was to adapt participatory tools to the exploration of capabilities and not merely needs. Traditionally participatory tools are identifying and evaluating physical and social conditions of a certain group or community. Instead of evaluating merely the characteristics of the house and the residents' access to social facilities, this application of the capability approach aimed at exploring more broadly how the urban intervention has impacted on residents' *housing freedoms*. In this context, the research developed into two stages: firstly dimensions of housing were to be identified; and then they were to be evaluated.

The first stage of the evaluation involved a focus group activity with a group of young adults from a squatter settlement in Salvador da Bahia and who had been under a course of capacity building of a local NGO. The objective of the session was to draw and explore a list of housing functionings based on a dialogue between the focus group and a list developed by the researcher based on a review of the existing literature on urban development. The discussions were recorded by participants in the form of diagrams and tables. The result was a comprehensive set of housing functionings (i.e. individualize/expand; healthy environment; afford living costs; participation; and maintain social networks) and an elaborated list of associated features that impacts on the freedom to achieve these functionings. Examples of such features include housing typology, mechanisms of participation, social facilities, etc.

Out of these findings, a card game was developed to evaluate the impacts of the squatter upgrading programme. Focus group activities were set-up to seek out people's understandings of housing, poverty and well-being; to prioritize the valued features of housing; and to compare their choices with the squatter upgrading intervention. The dialogue that took place around the features and dimensions of housing aimed to unfold the underlying dynamics of transforming resources into achieved *housing functionings*.

This process of evaluation revealed a series of complementarities between the capability approach and participatory methods. By moving away from the utilitarian approach of development, the capability approach wrests back participation from its instrumental application. The elaborated evaluative framework of the capability approach provides the participatory literature with a comprehensive and flexible theory of wellbeing that can capture the multiple, complex and dynamic aspects of poverty. In the context of housing, the capability framework redirects the informational space that participatory methods should be addressing: moving away from housing needs to housing freedoms. In this way local housing strategies are explored, unfolding the underlying dynamics that shape people's livelihoods. Finally the capability approach enhances the researchers' critical self-awareness, by raising issues such as adaptive preferences, process freedom and agency.

Meanwhile participatory methods contribute to the capability approach by offering a variety of thoroughly developed and researched tools and techniques. Participatory methods can adapt to different purposes of studies, unfolding dimensions not only of well-being, but also of the specific factors that constitute well-being such as housing; they can capture many aspects and dynamics that influence the transformation of opportunities into achievements; and finally participatory research methods have the potential to expand capabilities by encouraging public debate and stimulating local-level action.

However, while complementing each other in a variety of ways, participatory methods and the capability approach share similar weaknesses and challenges. Out of the study of the squatter upgrading programme, the following issues were raised. First, neither set of literature has reached a consensus on the targeted participants of their analysis: are evaluations based on the perspective of individuals, groups or both? The analysis of 'housing freedoms', led to the differentiation between the individual features (such as typology of houses, individual land title) and collective features (such as communitarian centre, cooperative). Instead of separating collective and individual *capabilities*, this research explored the collective and individual *features* that constitute people's housing freedoms.

Another critique made of both approaches is that they propose local solutions to global problems, thus not tackling structural inequalities (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Indeed, this evaluation of the squatter upgrading programme captured how global processes (such as the increasing role of international NGOs, the shift from state government to governance, growing global competitiveness of cities) impacted on the lives of local residents and their livelihood strategies. However it falls short on proposing global solutions that could address broader macro level inequalities and injustices.

A final issue raised was that of the influence of power relations on participation-based development analysis (Cooke, 2001; Mohan, 2001). The use of social psychology literature on the analyses of the subtle ways in which groups make decisions disclosed the less visible ways of participation being used as instruments of control and maintenance of the status quo through the production of consensus. During the analysis of the squatter upgrading programme, existent local power relations were identified which could undermine the validity of the research findings. But by perceiving participation through the lens of capabilities, these power relations became part of the investigation of the residents' freedom. Instead of avoiding aspects that might interfere on the outcome of the study, the capability approach informed the questions in a way which addressed power relations.

The application of the capability approach through participatory methods explicitly thus aims to tackle the limitations of participatory methods, such as the lack of consensus on targeted participants, partial globalization of development policy analysis, and the lack of analysis of the impacts of power relations on participatory activities. When exploring housing freedoms, individual and collective focuses are addressed as both approaches analyse well-being from a variety of perspectives. Sen's perception of the poor as agents of change aims to address the existent local and structural power inequalities. Meanwhile the combination of both approaches fell short on this application in proposing global solutions of local problems. However it explicates local impacts of global processes, with the potential to capture the issues concerning the practical manifestation of poverty as well as unfold the dynamics influencing the causes of inequalities. Thus, the body of literature exploring the practical application of Sen's writings can serve as an evaluative framework that safeguards the radical roots of participatory methods, encouraging critical engagement, while also assessing and challenging structures of subordination.

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In the Practice

The Where, What and How of NGO work: An Example from Oxfam America

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It is a big world out there with massive poverty, oppression, destitution and need just about everywhere. Where is an international organization to work? What of all the many dimensions of poverty should it focus on? And how should it carry on? Is there a best or even a better or good approach?

These are daunting questions that every international agency asks itself. They cannot be answered fully here. What I can do is quickly summarize how Oxfam America answered these questions in the 1980s and 90s. This may help ground the discussion in some reality.

Oxfam America at the time was a small organization. It had a budget of approximately 10 million dollars a year; it worked in approximately 28 countries and had no more than 90 staff at any time in that period. It also had one unique characteristic that separated it from many of its American counterparts. It was not an operational agency; it was a funding agency, working exclusively through local NGOs and local partners. Part of the Oxfam America philosophy was that foreigners should play a non-operational role. After all it was their country; we should provide funds and, at times if needed, technical assistance.

Oxfam America had other important philosophical (some might say ideological) underpinnings to its work. First, it was to be the thinking person's NGO, an alternative to the large international organizations that seemed to serve up pabulum as the solution to poverty. Second, Oxfam America was committed to development—not humanitarian aid. It stood for change, not charity. Third, Oxfam eschewed a focus on any one dimension of poverty, any one sector of work or any one solution across regions. Fourth, it was clear that every action was political—not necessarily partisan. A corollary to this was the practice of solidarity and a belief in the empowerment of the impoverished.

There was no one process for deciding in which country to work. But once in a country it was difficult to leave, since there was commitment to long term development. Countries were often chosen for political reasons. In Central America the analysis of the situation led the regional team to decide to work heavily in Nicaragua and El Salvador due to the Reagan administration's policies in both countries. It was important due to the Contra and FMLN wars to have a progressive American agency present in those countries. The same was true for Vietnam and Cambodia. And Namibia made it into our country list because it was waging a war of liberation against South Africa.

The choice of countries within given regions was also folded into a process of determining which dimensions of poverty to highlight. Oxfam America's world was divided into regions such as South America, South East Asia and West Africa and each region had one lead regional representative. In the 80s this person lived in headquarters and travelled to the region. Later, we established regional field offices. Every three years the regional director wrote an in-depth socio-political analysis of the region, in consultation with local partners and regional experts. This three-year strategy paper was then vetted by the overseas staff and management at headquarters and then presented to the committee of the Board that oversaw the work in that region. It was a relatively rigorous process—with a heavy concentration on political analysis of the regional context and how Oxfam America could tap into regional movements and trends. Once this strategy paper was approved, the regional director had a great deal of freedom and authority within the region.

Oxfam's work had certain biases or distinguishing characteristics. There was a predisposition to work in rural areas instead of urban, a tendency to work at the grassroots instead of national level. There was an interest in hunger and anti-hunger programs that often led to a focus on agriculture. There was a penchant for programs that would generate income to promote independence. There was a bias against corporate or private sector solutions with a preference for cooperatives, associations, mass movements and community groups. Oxfam America had a predilection for building trusting relationships, based on solidarity, with groups and in areas where traditionally Americans were not trusted. This led Oxfam America to work in troubled areas such as in El Salvador, the Philippines and Eritrea.

Oxfam America's most successful programs during that era were those that chose what to work on not based on a dimension of poverty (such as health or education) but rather on choosing the right groups with which to build solidarity and trust. In South America the analysis of the region showed that indigenous peoples were the most oppressed and marginalized. At the beginning the projects were fairly traditional and small—building on articulated needs. As trust developed, programs became more political such as helping the indigenous to protect their land under threat from oil companies. Development was equated with rights; solidarity was the key to trust. Land rights were at the heart of poverty reduction; Oxfam America was allowed to enter this domain once indigenous peoples trusted it.

In India Oxfam America's analysis suggested that one of the most oppressed groups in India was women. Oxfam America decided to channel all its funding to women's programs—from micro-credit programs to rural women to associations of women cooks in urban slums, from training women in community management to programs to enable women to purchase and own cows. Oxfam America supported innovative women leaders in India who pushed the political, economic and social system to enable women to become actors of their own lives.

In Central America Oxfam America's analysis suggested that the main issue for the oppressed and impoverished in the late 80s and early 90s was the war being raged by the U.S. in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Oxfam America as an American organization complemented its work on the ground with strong policy advocacy work in the U.S. in order to change policies that were directly causing or exacerbating poverty in the region. The program focused on funding in areas that were not receiving international assistance from other American groups—in rebel held areas in El Salvador and in Government held areas in Nicaragua. Specific projects came from community leaders and the needs they perceived. Often they were agricultural production or income production projects. Innovative programs in rebel held areas included the training of bare foot doctors and dentists.

These three regions had coherent programs that followed a serious analysis of where and with what groups in society Oxfam America could have a major impact on poverty and oppression. This was not always the case in other regions. Some programmes had just a scattering of good projects at the local level but with no coherent theme or group focus. However, each region attempted to determine what the best avenues for funding were, and each emphasized certain aspects of the following Oxfam America methodology (though this methodology was never followed by all staff, it was intrinsic to the Oxfam America approach):

1. *Ownership/Participation:* The community, local NGO or agency had ownership of the program and project. It was not just community participation in providing workers, in "doing" projects, or in attending meetings. The results of effective participation were to become community assets—organizations, skills, public works, public infrastructure.
2. *People as People not Victims:* People were not victims or even beneficiaries but owners of a change process. This meant consulting and listening and building on the abilities of local people.
3. *Non-Partisan:* Putting the needs of partner communities first, not the political gain of a particular political party or group. This meant not being tied to any one political party or partisan idea of change.
4. *Solidarity-Trust:* Building trust with local community partners, especially through the development of bonds of solidarity between the NGO and the communities. This meant that the relationship was not limited to a specific project.
5. *Sustainability:* Training the community and empowered it to maintain the work that was begun to the best of its ability and potential. This meant appropriate technology and programs that the impoverished could own and manage.
6. *Division of labour:* Preserving and building the institutional structures that allowed for effective work. Oxfam was the funding, not operating agency; it was the international policy advocate, not the participant in local politics.
7. *People Count:* Giving authority and decision-making power down the chain of command so that programs were flexible.
8. *Timing:* Understanding the local reality and context in order to act in the most relevant way within the given political context at the most appropriate time.
9. *Flexibility:* Not being dogmatic about approved programs and budgets. Development is a dynamic process and adaptability to change is part of the process.
10. *Accountability*: Being held responsible for one's actions—not just to Oxfam America headquarters but especially to the local owners and partners. Accountability to partners meant, for example, standing up for a partner when the partner was confronted by the military in El Salvador.

Oxfam America did spend a good deal of time in analysis and in understanding the context of its work. Its methodology was driven by an ideology of empowerment and a heavy dose of progressive, pro-impoverished, anti-establishment politics. It was particularly strong on the social and organizational components, but less strong on the economic and technical aspects of programs. This all helped to frame how it chose countries and how it decided what to work on. But it also much depended on individual responsibility, flexibility and disposition as to how to implement or live up to these principles.

Announcements

2007 HDCA Conference '*Ideas Change History*', 16-20 September, The New School, New York City

The call for papers has now been sent out.

!!!!!Deadline is 30th March 2007 !!!!!!!!

Please refer to HDCA website 'Conference 2007' for further information,

For all other news on HD-related matters, please refer to our totally newly 'refurbished' website (www.hd-ca.org).