



## The theories that shape the practice – Capabilities Approach by Amartya Sen

Week 3 – Understanding ICT for Development I

**Amartya Sen, (1933-)**

**Development as Freedom**



# Capabilities approach by Amartya Sen

- Sen has challenged the growth-focused view on development and offers an alternative which he calls the *capabilities approach*
- (1) **Individuals can differ** greatly in their abilities to convert the same resources into valuable functionings ('beings' and 'doings').
- (2) **People can internalize the harshness** of their circumstances so that they do not desire what they can never expect to achieve.
- 3) Whether or not people take up the options they have, the fact that they do have **valuable options** is significant.
- (4) **Reality is complicated** and evaluation should reflect that complexity rather than take a short-cut by excluding all sorts of information from consideration in advance.

# Capabilities approach

- Sen defines development as:
- ***"...a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy..."*** (1999, p.3)
- For Sen the development is about:
  - A continuous, dynamic process
  - Freedom of choice in all spheres of life: personal, social, economic, political
  - Putting people at the center
  - Plurality ~ people's individual choices
  - Grassroot movement ~ open-ended process of public deliberation



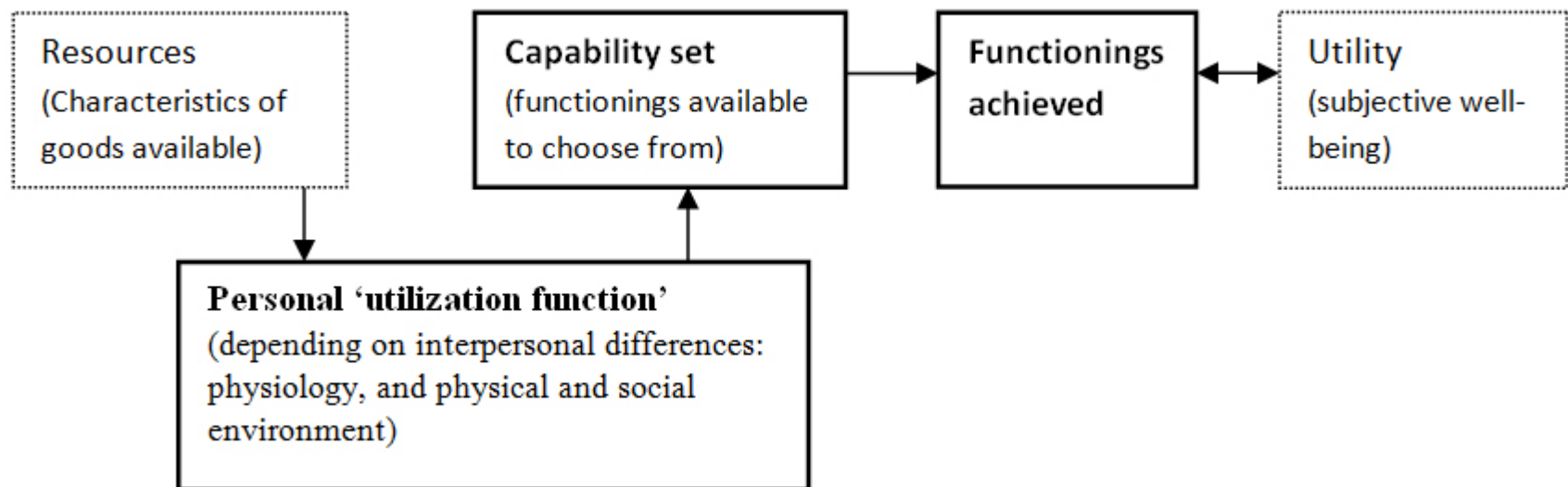
## Sen's core concepts

- Evaluation should start by considering
  - What people actually **can be and do** – not the commodities or wealth or mental reactions



Actual quality of life in terms of  
**Functionings** and **Capabilities**

## Outline of the core relationships in the Capability Approach



- (1) *Individual physiology*, such as the variations associated with illnesses, disability, age, and gender.
- (2) *Local environment diversities*, such as climate, epidemiology, and pollution.
- (3) *Variations in social conditions*, such as the provision of public services such as education and security, and the nature of community relationships, such as across class or ethnic divisions.
- (4) *Differences in relational perspectives*.
- (5) *Distribution within the family* – distributional rules within a family determining, for example, the allocation of food and health-care between children and adults, males and females.

- Continue to examine the Capabilities approach through a closer reading of Sen's Development as Freedom.
- You will find further references in the ilearn platform.