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

Resources (Characteristics of goods available)

Capability set (functionings available to choose from)

Functionings achieved

Utility (subjective well-being)

Personal ‘utilization function’
(depending on interpersonal differences: physiology, and physical and social environment)
• (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.