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FROM THEORY TO RESEARCH**

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## Chapter 4

# MEASURING FREEDOMS ALONGSIDE WELLBEING

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

A new idea, it would seem, more easily moves into significance if it drives up with a novel methodological sidecar attached. So the *idea* of human capital arose together with the *methodology* that human capital variables should be on the right hand side of growth equations. The *idea* of human development arose together with the *methodological* tool of the Human Development Index (HDI). And of course the *idea* of free trade drove up with *methodologies* of privatisation and liberalisation. While the relationship between the idea and the method is often publicly uneasy (usually because the methodology does not precisely match or compass the idea), the fact that such pairings are both common and fruitful can hardly pass notice. It follows that if potentially interesting ideas roar in without appropriate sidecars in tow, the research community sets about to craft them.

When such a community considers Sen's capability approach as a way of framing wellbeing and agency, they will immediately observe that the methodological sidecar seems unfinished. Even if one focuses purely on the issue of measuring the expansion or contraction of basic capabilities at the individual level, Sen's conceptual *approach* seems far richer and more compelling than the measurement companions

thus crafted – and of course measurement is only one intermediary methodology that might be of use.<sup>1</sup> In particular, existing measures focus on *functionings* – beings and doings such as being nourished or education – but neglect *freedoms*. Yet it is the substantive role Sen gives to freedom which distinguishes the capability approach and informs *Development as Freedom* (1999). How might a methodological sidecar incorporate freedom? Promising measures have been developed in other disciplines but have not been integrated or evaluated within the capability framework. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the need for measures of freedom, and to map possible practical routes forward, which involve communication of existing knowledge across disciplines as well as new empirical work.

#### 4.2 ASPECTS OF FREEDOM IN SEN'S WRITINGS

Sen's work on the value and role of freedom in development is one of the literatures often cited among economists interested in development and wellbeing, as giving credence and philosophical grounding for including freedom in poverty reduction initiatives in developing countries (poverty being understood here as a deficit of wellbeing). Even the 2000/2001 *World Development Report* of the World Bank, entitled 'Attacking Poverty', argued that poverty reduction entailed 'empowerment' of the poor. The first footnote in that report cites Sen's *Development as Freedom* and its description of deprivation includes 'voicelessness' and 'powerlessness' (as well as low levels of education and health) (World Bank 2001: 15, citing Sen 1999: 87). Sen's capability approach is clearly but one of many approaches – academic, practical, even spiritual – that try to articulate the value and appeal of considering freedom alongside wellbeing. Related and sometimes overlapping terms such as 'self-reliance', 'autonomy', 'democratic practice' and 'participation' likewise relate to

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these are surveyed in Kuklys, Wiebke and Ingrid Robeyns. 2004. *Sen's Capability Approach to Welfare Economics*, paper presented at the 2005 AEA meetings, Philadelphia .

the ability of groups to make informed decisions and advance valued goals on their own behalf.<sup>2</sup> However, this paper will confine itself to Sen's conceptual terms.

The considered presentation of Sen's concept of freedom appears in the Arrow lectures.<sup>3</sup> 'Freedom', Sen there argues, 'is an irreducibly plural concept' (2002: 585). Some aspects of freedom relate to opportunities that people face (often called capabilities), others, to processes that they command (which may be called agency) and experience. The elements of valued opportunities and processes are themselves plural and diverse.

First, more freedom gives us more *opportunity* to achieve those things that we value, and have reason to value. This aspect of freedom is concerned primarily with our *ability to achieve*, rather than with the process through which that achievement comes about. Second, the *process* through which things happen may also be of fundamental importance in assessing freedom. For example, it may be thought, reasonably enough, that the procedure of free decision by the person himself (no matter how successful the person is in getting what he would like to achieve) is an important requirement of freedom (Sen 2002: 585).

The process and opportunity aspects of freedom overlap, but are distinct – neither subsumes the other. In terms of opportunity, Sen argues that besides considering people's actual choices, achievements and their space for personal liberty, separate regard should be given to the opportunities that are available to people which they

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<sup>2</sup> I have tried to study participation in development, and its connections to the capability approach, in Alkire (2002a: Ch 3 and 4), and in 'Structural Injustice and Democratic Practice' (unpublished).

<sup>3</sup> Published in Sen (2002).

value and have reason to value – their freedom to achieve valued outcomes. Characteristically, Sen clarifies the distinction between different types of information related to the ‘freedom to achieve’, insists on their difference, and gives certain examples of why a sole focus on actual choices or achievements or a sphere of personal liberty would be insufficient. But he does not argue that it would always be either adequate or necessary to take note only of opportunities. Also characteristically, Sen builds into the description of opportunities the condition that they are valuable: the opportunities that matter for an assessment of freedom are those that people value and have reason to value. Opportunities that people might consider horrid are not to be expanded; nor should an assessment of freedom be formulated by considering all opportunities without taking note of whether or not these opportunities are strongly valued, mildly valued or objectionable. Furthermore, what people value may change over time, and an adequate assessment of freedom must allow for this evolution – for the ongoing development of preferences and of meta-rankings of preferences – and not freeze people’s values at one point in time and extrapolate them inflexibly into the future. There are a number of familiar ambiguities and potential conflicts in this formulation that we will consider presently, because people may or may not *actually* value all that they have reason to value. Alternatively, things they value may be actively detrimental to others.

In regards to the process aspect of freedom, Sen argues that ‘We are, of course, interested in outcomes such as being affluent, or creative, or fulfilled, or happy, but we can also value being able to choose freely, or not having interference by others in the way we live’ (2002: 623). The process aspect of freedom concerns things such as autonomy and immunity – ‘whether the person was free to choose herself, whether others intruded or obstructed, and so on’ (Sen 2002: 10). Sen identifies two ways in which people’s preferences regularly encompass processes:

1. Personal process concern: individuals may have preferences over the processes that occur in their own lives;
2. Systemic process concern: they may also have preferences over the processes that operate as general rules in the working of the society (Sen 2002: 624).

He argues that, in addition to considering opportunities, an adequate consideration of freedom should include processes, and that these should include systemic processes or social concerns such as rights and justice. This is important even though the systemic process concerns people value may conflict with one another.

Sen asks, 'Why is it that both in formal welfare economics and in a good deal of modern moral philosophy, processes have tended to be ignored at the *fundamental valuational level?*' (Sen 2002: 627). Sen observes that utilitarianism has taken extensive note of the consequences of action but not attended to processes. Libertarianism, on the other hand, gave priority to processes but treated them as 'admission rules' that should in all cases be given priority. In contrast, Sen argues that the appropriate approach would be to take an 'integrated view' in which both processes and culmination outcomes are considered, and compete with one another for attention, with none dominating *a priori* but the merits – and conflicts – and trade-offs – all being scrutinised explicitly.

An 'informational analysis' of Sen's own work would lead one to conclude that information on freedom was indeed required in order for an adequate assessment of social arrangements.<sup>4</sup> Thus we need to craft a methodological sidecar containing one

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<sup>4</sup> The first of Sen's Dewey Lectures, on the moral role of information, makes this point (1985b), as does Sen (1979a).

or a handful of indicators – qualitative and/or quantitative, subjective, objective and/or participatory – that are imperfect and crude, yet represent empirically the value of freedoms better than current approaches. But how do we obtain this information – how can we measure change in individual freedoms in a sufficiently sensitive and policy-relevant way?

### 4.3 FREEDOM AND MEASUREMENT: FOCUSING THE QUESTION

Before beginning to survey measurement approaches, as the remainder of the paper will do, it is important to focus in such a way that an imperfect measurement approach or set of measures might emerge that would add value to present methodologies. This is inherently a less than satisfactory task. For practical methodologies – as the introduction suggested – almost always fail to compass the depth of the idea they accompany. Their one advantage is that they may, in comparison to current methodologies, add value.

We might break the measurement question into two (or three) components of individual freedoms:

- *Opportunity Freedoms* – which are the freedoms to achieve valued functionings.

This entails the identification and measurement of valued functionings:

*Functionings* – which are ‘valuable beings and doings’ (or needs) such as being nourished, being safe, being educated, being healthy, and so on.

- *Process freedoms* – which relate to a person’s ability to take action in certain spheres of life – to empowerment, to self-determination, to participation, and to practical reason.

At present, a clear emphasis of wellbeing research is to expand the indicators of functionings that, taken together, comprise wellbeing. For example, Geof Wood's chapter in this volume explores how functionings related to security could be expanded. More crudely, in 1990 the HDI explored how life expectancy and education could supplement income as a measure of wellbeing. Others explore how subjective measures of wellbeing can enrich our understanding of the functionings people enjoy.

Research on measures of *opportunity and process freedoms*, however, is less prominent. This of course is partly because a precise *measure* of opportunity freedoms is difficult and has been argued to be impossible. It would need to include not only the opportunities that people had actually chosen, or into which they had been coerced (both would be captured by functionings measures) but also the counterfactual opportunities that had been open to them that they had not chosen. In other words, a full measure of opportunity freedoms, like a complete budget set, would list all of the possible options open to the agent, all of the 'roads not taken'. And as many have noted, such a set could be theoretically constructed, but would be challenging to measure empirically (Carter 1999; Foster and Sen 1997; Sugden 2003). However, as we shall see shortly, the empowerment framework proposed by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) does attempt to identify opportunities that are present structurally but not chosen. If the empirical work achieves this aim, it could shift the discussion on opportunity freedom measurement significantly.

Even if it is not possible to measure unchosen opportunities, I have argued that it would be interesting to explore a different approach to capabilities that are in some sense basic, that might pertain to poverty or, as Sen's 2004, 'Elements of a Theory of



Human Rights' article argues, that, by virtue of their *special importance* and *social influenceability*, might be claimed by people as a human right.<sup>5</sup>

Consider a person who is undernourished, or who lacks any of the capabilities that are especially important and socially influenceable. If these capabilities are accurately identified (and the participatory processes by which they may be identified is an important question that lies beyond the scope of this paper) then one might expect that were this 'opportunity freedom' present, the vast majority of people would choose it. However, we do not know why a particular person is undernourished, and, in particular, we do not know whether or not he or she would eat or would choose to fast for some period of time instead. We can only measure nutritional levels. Now, there are at least four possible ways in which observable functionings measures could intersect with capability or opportunity freedoms and with coercion – which might be considered to be a subset of process freedoms violations.

- Person A could be Undernourished because she could have eaten but chose not to.
- Person B could be Undernourished because she lacked the capability to eat.
- Person C could be Nourished because she had the capability to eat and enjoyed it.
- Person D could be Nourished because she was coerced into eating against her will.

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<sup>5</sup> For a fuller exposition of this see Alkire, Sabina *Measuring Freedoms* paper presented at the 2005 AEA meetings, Philadelphia

Thus we previously established that opportunity freedoms – being counterfactuals – could not be empirically estimated. And we have now pointed out that it is not possible to evaluate capabilities only from the observed functionings of ‘nourished’ or ‘undernourished’; more information is required. What empirical paths might be explored?

One way ahead would be to focus not on the opportunity freedom at all, but rather on the coercion or process freedom with respect to the functioning of interest. If we could establish, for example, that a person was or was not coerced (or if we could establish that a person had autonomously taken action – these are not necessarily polar opposites), then we would be able to distinguish between person C and person D. We could still not distinguish person A from person B, of course. Yet if the reason that the measurement exercise was important was that there were efforts underway to expand the chosen functioning, and if the functionings were specially important, then these measures might suffice for the purposes of the exercise.

An alternative approach would be to focus on the side effects an action had on other basic functionings. It might be argued that any adequate measure of freedom must consider not only the functioning and autonomy directly related to it, but also whether the process undermined other basic capabilities and human rights (for example, if the process of obtaining food was degrading or dangerous or disempowering). Indeed in some cases this might be a central criterion, for example in situations involving young children’s nutrition, immunisation and primary school attendance. In the case of a headstrong yet brilliant young child, a period of parental cajoling, reasoning, convincing and requiring the child to attend school (or eat her dinner) may make the child’s educational (nutritional) achievements a shade less than autonomous, and this may be constructive rather than otherwise (Nussbaum 2000). Yet it *would* be relevant to know whether the process involved in securing the headstrong young

child's primary education significantly undermined her other basic capabilities in the same or subsequent time periods. To return to the case of the fasting person, if they were forced to eat, then such an approach (were it feasible – and we'll return to this issue!) might detect a detrimental impact on their spiritual state, or on their ability to advance the social cause which occasioned the fast in the first place. Thus were we able to measure side effects, this might also provide, in a different way, sufficient information to distinguish person C from person D.

#### **4.4 MEASUREMENT APPROACHES**

The nature of the measures of individual freedom either in use or under construction is a significant topic in itself which this paper can only summarise. This paper will focus on two measurement approaches:

1. Empowerment measures and Opportunity Freedoms;<sup>6</sup>
2. Agency Measures.<sup>7</sup>

To draw upon existing literature well is more difficult than might be anticipated, because it is evolving at a rapid pace and in an increasingly decentralised manner. Furthermore current measures are dispersed across disciplines (psychology, sociology, economics, politics) and occur in literatures related to distinct issues

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<sup>6</sup> Surveys are found in Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), Malhotra, Schuler & Boender (2002), Narayan (2005) and Roy & Niranjana (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Biswas-Diener & Diener 2001; Christopher 1999; Diener & Biswas-Diener 2002; Diener & Diener 1995; Diener, Oishi & Lucas 2003; Diener & Suh 1997; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith 1999; Frey & Stutzer 1999, 2002; Gregg & Salisbury 2001; Gullone & Cummins 1999; Hampton & Marshall 2000; Hayo & Seifert 2003; Helliwell 2003; Helm 2000; Ng 2003; Ravallion & Lokshin 2001, 2002; Ryan & Deci 2001; Suh 2002; Wissing & van Eeden 2002.

(quality of life and living standard work, opportunity sets, multidimensional measures), distinct measurement schools (participatory, qualitative, quantitative-objective and quantitative-subjective), and use distinct quantitative techniques of aggregation and internal cross checking. These measures also relate to differently 'named' concepts (efficacy, esteem, empowerment, agency, freedom, creativity, self-reliance, autonomy, etc). To further complicate the problem, the same terminology is used with different definitions. Aware of limitations and involuntary omissions, some of the papers that shed light directly upon this topic are presented below.

#### **4.5 EMPOWERMENT MEASURES**

Many approaches to measuring empowerment have traditionally used proxies – functioning measures that are easy to use and that, it has been assumed, are strongly correlated with the unobservable variable of empowerment. For example, studies of women's empowerment often used women's education, mothers' education, women's labour force participation, mothers' labour force participation, and so on. Another set of variables involve decision-making power of women, for example over cooking decisions or child-spacing, or, specifically in the case of women, such things as gender preferences for children.<sup>8</sup>

This section will focus instead on a framework for measuring degrees of empowerment proposed by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005). They argue that degrees of empowerment can be understood as comprising two factors: agency and opportunity structure. 'Agency is defined as an actor's ability to make meaningful choices; that is,

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<sup>8</sup> Yesudian, P. Princy. 2004. *Impact of Women's Empowerment, Autonomy and Attitude on Maternal Health Care Utilization in India*. Global Forum for Health Research, Forum 8, Mexico City. A range of studies that employ various proxies are surveyed in Malhotra *et al.* (2002) and in Annex one of Alsop and Heinsohn (2005).

the actor is able to envisage options and make a choice. Opportunity structure is defined as the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate' (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005: 6). They measure 'degrees of empowerment' by assessing:

1. 'Whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice';
2. 'Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose';
3. 'Once the choice is made, whether it brings the desired outcome' (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005: 7).

For example, 'if the woman in Benin wants to send her daughter to school, is there a school for the daughter to go to? If yes, does the woman actually make the decision to send her daughter to school? If yes, does the daughter actually attend school?' (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005: 7).

In order to complete the framework, Alsop and Heinsohn suggest that empowerment should be assessed relative to three different domains of people's lives:

- the state – in which a person acts as a citizen (*justice, politics, service delivery*);
- the market – in which a person is an economic actor (*credit, labour, goods – for production and consumption*);
- society – in which a person is a social actor (*family, community, etc*).

To complete their framework, they observe that each domain can be analysed at three levels: macro, intermediary and local. How these levels are specified will vary in different contexts. Often the macro will coincide with the nation; the intermediary will be the state or province, and the local, the village or neighbourhood.

Thus this approach situates individual empowerment firmly within a social, political and economic context, and explores how informal and formal institutions at many levels impinge on individual empowerment.

This framework guides a five-country study of empowerment, being undertaken by various teams within the World Bank. In addition to draft participatory exercises and an individual survey questionnaire, Alsop and Heinsohn present the indicators used in Ethiopia, Nepal, Honduras and Mexico to illustrate the kinds of indicators that are used to fill in this framework. The indicators from Ethiopia are:

- Extent to which women are equally represented in district councils (compared with men) *State: Intermediary;*
- Extent to which women are equally represented in village councils (compared with men) *State: Local;*
- Extent to which women choose their type of employment *Market: local and intermediary;*
- Extent to which women negotiate working conditions with their employers *Market: local and intermediary;*
- Extent to which women have access to credit *Market: local and intermediary;*
- Distance to nearest bank or credit institution (measured in hours/minutes) *Market: local and intermediary;*
- Number of times women have asked for 1. loans from bank, 2. loans from moneylenders, 3. loans from family and friends, 4. store credits, 5. forward sales in the last year. *Market: local and intermediary;*
- Number of times women received 1. to 5. over the last year *Market: local and intermediary;*

- Percentage of women who take action against harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation, milk tooth extraction etc) *Society: local and intermediary;*
- Percentage of women who take action against domestic violence *Society: local and intermediary;*
- Extent to which women can make independent decisions over investments in 1. house durables, 2. kitchen utensils, 3. farm tools, 4. yard animals, 5. farm inputs and 6. business inputs. *Society: local;*
- Percentage of women having an equal say over 1. the spacing of children, 2. using contraceptives, 3. having sex. *Society: local;*
- Ratio of women vs. men who attend 1. political, 2. social, 3. religious community meetings. *Society: local;*
- Extent to which women vs. men 1. speak up at these meetings, 2. have their views taken into consideration, 3. affect decisions. *Society: local*

Alsop and Heinsohn also identify questions from other survey instruments, including the World Bank's Living Standard Measurement Survey modules (LSMS) and its Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital (IQMSC), as well as other data sources such as that of Freedom House, which can be drawn upon for assessing certain aspects of empowerment. This planned approach uses objective quantitative indicators, combined with participatory and qualitative techniques.

What can we learn regarding the measurement of capabilities from Alsop and Heinsohn's framework? The first observation is that, like this approach, the analysis of degrees of empowerment distinguishes between opportunity structures (which correspond to opportunity freedom in Sen's work – and can be provided by social, economic or political institutions) and agency.

Here the terms differ somewhat. It is not necessary to expend too much effort on conceptual matters given that the present task is to generate a narrow but sufficient methodology. Yet it might prevent confusion to observe that agency, as defined by Alsop and Heinsohn, includes only a subset of Sen's concept of process freedom. That is, Alsop and Heinsohn focus on instances in which people exercise agency on behalf of themselves or their family or community to choose functionings from within a feasible capability set. It will be interesting to learn more precisely what aspects of agency the quantitative measures of choice represent, and qualitative, subjective, participatory and ethnographic studies should clarify this. Given the discussion of 'individualism' that will be presented in the next section, it will also be interesting to observe the extent to which choice-related empowerment measures (such as many of those used in Ethiopia) are correlated with cultural individualism vs. collectivism. Some questions are left unaddressed, such as how information on agency and opportunity structures will be combined during the analysis to establish 'degrees of empowerment'.

However the main contribution of this approach becomes evident when we return to the four-fold division between persons, which is crude, but does highlight a slightly different set of issues:

- Person A could be Undernourished because she could have eaten but chose not to.
- Person B could be Undernourished because she lacked the capability to eat.
- Person C could be Nourished because she had the capability to eat and enjoyed it.



- Person D could be Nourished because she was coerced into eating against her will.

Theoretically, Alsop and Heinsohn's framework could distinguish person A from person B, because they could identify persons who enjoyed an opportunity structure of nourishment but chose not to use it. That is, theoretically, they could actually identify a counterfactual opportunity freedom, a 'road not chosen'. If the empirical work bears this out, it will be of tremendous importance to those working on capability measurement. We will be able to distinguish persons who are 'starving' from those who are 'fasting'. What is not yet clear is how persons C and D will be distinguished from one another, or in the case of children, for example, how destructive forms of coercion will be identified. Alsop and Heinsohn have provided a masterful and promising map of the range of variables that potentially impact on the measurement of both opportunity and process freedoms.

#### **4.6 DOMAIN-SPECIFIC AGENCY MEASURES**

Another fertile and significant literature is that of *subjective measures of autonomy at the individual level*. For there are a number of large-scale cross-cultural psychological studies of creativity, of autonomy, of self-esteem, of personal freedom, of self-determination – some or all of which may pertain to freedoms.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than approaching agency only as a 'dimension of wellbeing', however, I have argued that it is also appropriate to consider agency with respect to each domain of wellbeing. The reason for this is drawn from Sen's analysis, which rejects the view (held by some basic needs theorists) that agency (or, for that matter, opportunity

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<sup>9</sup> A recent survey of these may be found in Alkire (2005).

freedom) can adequately be represented *only* as a dimension of wellbeing (Alkire 2002a: Ch 5). Sen acknowledges that agency can have intrinsic value, and insofar as it does, I have argued that it can take its place as one domain or dimension of wellbeing alongside other dimensions that have intrinsic value, such as friendship, meaningful work, knowledge, relationships, inner peace, or being healthy (Alkire 2002a; Finnis 1980; Grisez, Boyle & Finnis 1987). However, Sen's capability approach argues that freedoms must be evaluated with respect to *each* valuable functioning – freedom also plays an architectonic role with respect to the other dimensions of wellbeing (Nussbaum 2000). It would seem consonant with this approach to suggest that, similarly, agency might be more accurately evaluated with respect to different functionings rather than globally.

This can be stated quite simply. A person who is 'empowered' as a citizen because she can vote and speak in local meetings may nonetheless be excluded from the labour market because of her gender and low levels of education, or be abused by her husband. A domain-specific measure of agency can distinguish between the freedom that she experiences in different domains of her life, whereas a 'global' measure of agency would conflate these diverse measures into an aggregate that would be of less practical value.

One significant empirical approach to domain-specific measures of human agency is the self-efficacy scales, initiated by Albert Bandura.<sup>10</sup> The social-cognitive theory he uses distinguishes between *personal*, *proxy* and *collective* forms of agency. For example, in one recent application of Bandura's approach, individuals rank three kinds of 'efficacy' on scales from 1 to 5. These are: Perceived personal efficacy (handling activities in family, in partnership, at work, managing personal finances and

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<sup>10</sup> Bandura's and related work has been collected in Bandura (1997).

health); Individual social efficacy (perceived capabilities to contribute individually to improvements in social problems) and collective social efficacy (capabilities of society as a whole to effect desired improvements in unemployment, corruption, criminal and drug activities, economic crises, and terrorism) (Fernandez-Ballesteros, Diez-Nicolas & Bandura 2002). While Bandura's own interest focuses on the way that individuals' beliefs about personal efficacy can be cultivated in order to increase efficacy itself, the measures may also be of interest to those whose primary variables are external to the person or community.

Another very fruitful potential subjective approach to measuring agency and autonomy empirically and across cultures is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Ryan and Deci (2000b), and this approach will be explored in greater depth. This approach resonates very strongly at a conceptual level with Sen's own work because it focuses on capabilities that the person *values* (in contrast to self-efficacy, which identifies capabilities a person understands herself to *have* – whether or not she values them).

According to the SDT formulation, a person is autonomous when his or her behaviour is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them. People are therefore most autonomous when they act in accord with their authentic interests or integrated values and desires (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim and Kaplan 2003; Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000; Ryan, Deci & Grolnick 1995).

SDT contrasts autonomy with its [presumed] opposite, *heteronomy*, 'in which one's actions are experienced as controlled by forces that are phenomenally alien to the self, or that compel one to behave in specific ways regardless of one's values or interests' (Chirkov *et al.* 2003: 98).

To determine autonomy, a study first asks respondents whether they engaged in certain practices (these could relate to health, to education, to employment, or to any other domain of poverty or wellbeing). Respondents are then asked to rate, from 1 to 5, four possible reasons why they felt or believed or engaged in the practice (1=*not at all because of this reason*; 5=*completely because of this reason*). The possible reasons range from less autonomous (1) to more autonomous (4) and were as follows:

1. *External Regulation*: Because of external pressures (to get rewards or avoid punishments). I would engage in this behaviour because someone insists on my doing this, or I expect to get some kind of reward, or avoid some punishment for behaving this way.
2. *Introjected Regulation*: To get approval or avoid guilt. I would engage in this behaviour because people around me would approve of me for doing so, or because I think I should do it. If I did not do this I might feel guilty, ashamed or anxious.
3. *Identified Regulation*: Because it is important. I would engage in this behaviour because I personally believe that it is important and worthwhile to behave this way.
4. *Integrated Regulation*: Because I have thoughtfully considered and fully chosen this. I have thought about this behaviour and fully considered alternatives. It makes good sense to me to act this way. I feel free in choosing and doing it (Chirkov *et al.* 2003: 102).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>. These four are explained at greater length in Deci and Ryan (2000).

The attention within SDT to autonomy, which Deci and Ryan describe as ‘the experience of integration and freedom, and ... an essential aspect of healthy human functioning’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 231), generated a vigorous empirical debate within the field. Some argued and attempted to demonstrate empirically that autonomy is not universally valued, but is rather valued by, and useful in, more individualist cultures and societies alone. In a powerful rebuttal to this attack, Chirkov *et al.* distinguished autonomy – conceptually as well as empirically – from several related concepts: dependence/independence, and individualism/collectivism and vertical/horizontal.<sup>12</sup>

It is worthwhile to note their distinction between dependence and independence. Of particular interest, given the other measures surveyed, is the possibility that a person could be *autonomously dependent*. The basic terms are defined as follows:

SDT defines *dependence* as reliance on others for guidance, support or needed supplies (Ryan & Lynch 1989). Within SDT, the opposite of dependence is not autonomy but rather *independence*, the circumstance of not relying on others for support, help or supplies.

Thus SDT argues that a person can be autonomously *dependent* or autonomously *independent* – that these categories are orthogonal to one another. An autonomous person might, for example, welcome others’ influence and be responsive to good advice – or she might be inclined to resist any external influences. Similarly, they argue that an autonomous person may be more *individualist* (ascribing ‘relative priority... to the individual’s goals and preferences’ (Chirkov *et al.* 2003: 98-99)), or

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<sup>12</sup> Following Triandis (1995). See also Oyserman, Coon and Kemmelmeier (2002), who do not mention SDT however.

more *collectivist* ('priority placed on the needs, norms, and goals of one's group or collective' (Chirkov *et al.* 2003: 99)). Finally, they argue that individualism and collectivism can be fruitfully distinguished from *horizontal* and *vertical* aspects of culture, where these refer to 'practices and norms supporting equality or interchangeability among people versus hierarchical or subordinate social relations' (Chirkov *et al.* 2003: 99).

Testing autonomy thus defined across four countries (Turkey, Russia, USA and South Korea) produced a series of findings that broadly supported the SDT claims, and established that autonomy can be distinguished from individualism,<sup>13</sup> as well as from horizontal vs. vertical outlooks, and that autonomy is correlated with wellbeing for persons in individualist as well as collectivist cultures (Chirkov *et al.* 2003).

What is particularly useful in this conceptual approach is the clarification of how autonomy is distinct from both dependence/independence and individualism/collectivism. Thus a person could be acting within rules set by a parent or by social norms or by law, but doing so autonomously because one internally endorsed those rules. Alternatively, one could be acting in the same way but feeling utterly coerced and oppressed by the parent, the norms or the law. In the first instance, autonomy – and indeed agency – is not threatened; in the second it is. This distinction Sen, too, has cultivated – in his example that freedom is expanded by the government spraying malaria ponds even if it did not consult every person, because they would probably have endorsed this if asked (Sen 1982, 1988, 1992).

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<sup>13</sup> Seen Oyserman *et al.* (2002), whose in-depth review of empirical psychological studies of individualism and collectivism between European Americans and non-Americans or African/Latino/Asian Americans, found that 'these differences were neither as large nor as systematic as often perceived' (2002: 40)

The SDT approach to measuring autonomy is of considerable interest for several reasons. First, previous empirical studies have apparently been able to use variants of this instrument to discern changes in autonomy, so the instrument has the potential of being sensitive to policy-changes. Second, the concept of autonomy is carefully distinguished and empirically distinguishable from individualism and independence, and thus potentially relevant across cultures and societies much in the same way that Sen understands agency to be relevant across cultures. Third, the self-regulation scales can be adapted to measure autonomy with respect to different practices or to different dimensions of wellbeing. Indeed, the SDT have developed separate questionnaires for autonomy related to education (from elementary age on up, including persons with learning disorders), health-related behaviours, religion, pro-social behaviours, friendship and exercise. Agency can be differently exhibited in different spheres – within the household, in gender relations, in health practices, in political domains. The SDT autonomy tool could, conceivably, be used to map agency in different domains. Fourth, the tool is relatively brief, which improves feasibility and reduces costs.

But how could this tool contribute to a measure of capability freedom? What is terribly evident is that this measure is incomplete. It must be complemented by a functioning measure. That is, for each domain of wellbeing under consideration, one could anticipate two empirical representations: one for the functioning(s) (related, for example, to health, employment, nutritional status, education, safety, self-respect, and so on), and the other for the 'autonomy' measure associated with each functioning. So a wellbeing questionnaire would include functioning measure(s) and one agency measure per domain of wellbeing. How the (functioning, autonomy) set

of wellbeing measures would be compared across persons or across time – whether by dominance rankings or by aggregation – is a separate topic for study<sup>14</sup>.

If the autonomy measures are accurate, then what is clear is that if a person was highly autonomous but undernourished, this might suggest that they pertained to the category A; if they were nourished and had a high autonomy ranking, they would almost certainly pertain to category C. If the person had a low autonomy ranking and was nourished, it could not be definitely concluded that she was being forced to eat (category D), but it would definitely suggest that empowerment was required. Similarly if the person were highly autonomous but undernourished, it would strongly suggest that she pertained to category A. If this information were further supplemented by data on the opportunity structure that Alsop and Heinsohn propose, then it would be possible to map individual freedoms more fully.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

In 1985, Sen made a plea that wellbeing not be considered in isolation from human agency (Sen 1985b). At present, the explosion of research on empowerment in development similarly draws attention to the need for increases in wellbeing to be in part generated by and sustained by the communities in question. Measures of empowerment and opportunity structure, such as Alsop and Heinsohn propose, would contribute clarity regarding the exterior environment. Measures of individual autonomy, such as Ryan and Deci have developed, could potentially provide accurate domain-specific measures of autonomy. The methods by which this data would be combined for comparative purposes, and the accuracy of the proposed indicators, are still appropriately the subjects of ongoing empirical research. However

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller exposition of this see Alkire, Sabina *Measuring Freedoms* paper presented at the 2005 AEA meetings, Philadelphia



these streams could be the building blocks for a methodological sidecar that would expand the functioning measures with key aspects of individual freedom.

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