

Energy use, energy poverty and justice within the capabilities framework

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Some starting points

- Fuel poverty has many different pathways and outcomes
- Developed and developing world approaches to energy poverty have little correspondence
- Concepts of fuel poverty and energy poverty don't connect well with thinking on poverty

The 'capability' framework

- Originally an approach to conceptualising the aims of economic development
- An alternative to GDP or income based evaluation of development programmes
- Poverty as multi-dimensional
- Focus should be on what people can achieve and do



Amartya Sen



Martha Nussbaum

Two linked concepts

- **Functionings: ‘valued beings and doings’**
 - e.g. being in good health
 - Undertaking paid work
 - Sustaining meaningful relationships
- **Capabilities: the opportunities to realise given functions**
- **Freedom to choose is crucial: hence focus on the opportunity as the object of interest**
- **Purpose of development is to increase the capabilities of individuals**

Why focus on outcomes, not income

- People cannot convert income to outcomes at the same rate, due to e.g.

Personal characteristics (age, illness, disability...)

Environmental diversities (climate, pollution...)

Variations in social conditions (crime, social networks...)

Differences in community requirements (norms, ways of behaving...)

What if we apply this to energy?

- What is energy for?



Being in good health

Being educated

Maintaining meaningful relationships

Political participation

Maintaining dignity and self-respect

etc

input

People need different amounts of input to reach same level of outcomes

outcomes

A capabilities definition of energy poverty?

capability compromise as a direct or indirect result of insecurity in appropriate energy services, in the absence of an alternative.

Locating approaches to energy poverty



Fuel based approaches



Energy efficiency approaches



Service based approaches



Being educated
Maintaining meaningful relationships
Political participation

Capability approach?

Can look for alternatives / think about practices

Issues with using the capabilities approach

1. What are the important capabilities?

Nussbaum's central capabilities

1. **Life** – being able to have a normal length life
2. **Bodily health** – being able to have good health
3. **Bodily integrity** – security, mobility, sex and reproductive health
4. **Senses, imagination and thought** – includes education and creative expression
5. **Emotions** – being able to have attachments, develop and express emotions
6. **Practical reason** – being able to engage in critical and ethical reflection
7. **Affiliation** – having the social bases of self respect; being able to live with others
8. **Other species** – being able to live with concern for other species and nature
9. **Play** – being able to play, laugh and engage in recreation
10. **Control over one's environment** - political and material

Sen's participatory approach

- Sen always refused to define essential capabilities
- Maintains these have to be defined through deliberative democracy
- Gives cultural specificity and political legitimacy



Issues with using the capabilities approach

2. how to operationalise (e.g. measure?)

Probably not as a national definition (cf Human Development Index)

Better as a community level tool?

May have advantages for household assessments

Summary: benefits of a capabilities approach

- A multi-dimensional view of energy poverty
- Idea of differential needs is built in
- Can question the relationship between services and outcomes: doesn't assume a specific level of fuel or service is needed
- Opens up different spaces for interventions (depending on individual causes, situations, outcomes)
- Better connection with work on poverty, deprivation, and energy poverty in the developing world.