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...)

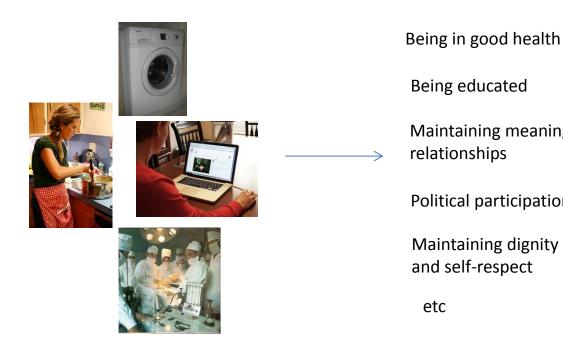




What if we apply this to energy?

What is energy for?





Being 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





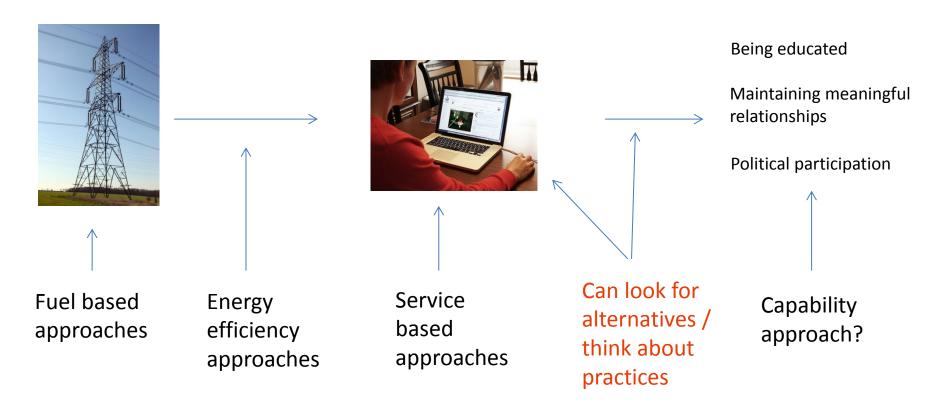
A capabilities definition of energy poverty?

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







Issues with using the capabilities approach

1. What are the important capabilities?





Nussbaum's central capabilities

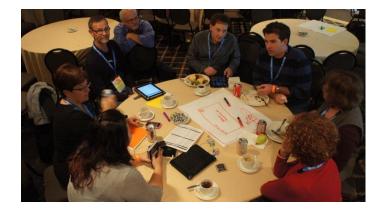
- 1. Life being able to have a normal length life
- 2. Bodily health being able to have good health
- 3. Bodily integrity security, mobility, sex and reproductive health
- 4. Senses, imagination and thought includes education and creative expression
- 5. Emotions being able to have attachments, develop 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.



