

REMOVING UNFREEDOMS

Introduction to the Colloquium at the LSE on “Removing Unfreedoms” on 7th July

2003-07-02

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is a rare honour for me to introduce the background to the work and set the context for the ideas that have culminated in this colloquium.

Urban Context for a new approach

Cities have surely become the places from which the directions for new development policies must emerge. They can either become centres of intense community conflicts or the centres of social, economic and political development. Cities can power national development and this makes them the obvious recipients for carrying out the changes in policy that Sen is advocating.

Development is heuristic

I would like to deal with a question that has surfaced in almost every discussion about development in connection with this project. The accusation is that Sen’s Development as Freedom is yet another universal prescription. Development literature is full of universal prescriptions about development goals and therefore what is different about Sen’s approach. Even in the field, the more typical NGO comment is that they are tired of smart academics that come at regular intervals to visit them with new theories of development and new ways to evaluate their achievements. For them, participatory work with the community would become endangered if they were to keep realigning their objectives to fit into the changing frameworks of development. Perhaps it takes longer to implement a development objective than to hold a development theory steady.

Development cannot be protected from the turmoil’s that are whizzing past us almost everyday. Development is heuristic and subject to continuous re-definition because its knowledge base is continuously growing. It is therefore in this context that I would like to place the importance of Amartya sen’s work. To-day we can talk about Sustainable Human Development because the knowledge base of what spurs human progress has expanded enormously since the cold war. In the old days, rates of economic growth were easy to target and easy to measure through gross national

product or national income. Human Development on the other hand has multiple targets, multiple agencies and multiple agendas. We must accept the diversity of activities as well as diversity of concepts as being part of the fundamental definition of development to-day. Development initiatives will have different bits and pieces that tend to rattle around in the box of development literature.

Essentially what Sen is saying is that it is possible to have a common overarching goal of development which can contain all these rattling bits and pieces as long as we re-describe these pieces and link them together as essential parts of an organic whole. This overarching developmental goal is “Enhancing Individual Freedoms”. In defining this overarching goal, he is asking us to consider some different ways to think about human development. Particularly in three ways:

Firstly development goals eventually need to target the individual human being. The thrust of development needs to reach deeper than the community, and deeper than the household. The individual citizen is society’s most important component and also its ultimate agent of change. Each human being has the ability to gain free agency but is often prevented from doing so by obstructions or constraints on his or her social, political and economic opportunities.

The engine of continuous development, therefore, is each citizen and successful development is that which enables that citizen to constantly search for higher opportunities and a life of higher personal value. This does not preclude that such a search could be undertaken through collective support but it does mean that any collective obstructions do not have a priority and have to be addressed together with individual obstructions.

Secondly, that development will succeed if the process removes these obstructions in a multi-objective strategy. This multi-objective strategy can be understood better if they are categorized into sub- headings which Sen calls the Five Freedoms. The five types of freedoms that individuals need are access to *Political Freedoms, Economic Facilities and Social opportunities, and to expect Transparency Guarantees and Protective Security*. All five are interconnected and equally important. They are like the five equally important sides of a box in which development is contained. The fuller the development levels in the box, the lower the levels of obstructions. This multi-objective strategy has cultural and spiritual dimensions that further the goals of enhancing human values that can invest the future of each being with other meanings than just survival. The obstructions to the

five freedoms are thus the filters through which one can evaluate the level of development of an individual, a household, a community, a city or a nation. Ideally, a Freedom Index could be devised for micro and macro observations. Let me, very briefly, describe these freedoms:

Political freedom is not just a macro level concern. It presumes the need of a democratic representative system, one that works upward from the grass root community micro level, where collectives do not inhibit voting patterns. It is imperative that citizens should determine who should rule them and they must have the right to criticize not only their household collectives but also the authorities.

Then **Economic Facilities** – an often neglected instrument. Facilities are needed to provide citizens with opportunities and freedom to access economic resources for housing, buying and selling produce, Unobstructed access to offering and engaging labour, commodity markets and finance in their locality is a must for development.

The third interrelated instrument of freedom is **Social Opportunities**. This concerns the arrangements and choice of opportunities that citizens have for education, health care and other community facilities to live a better life and to contribute to economic and political activities.

Fourthly are **Transparency Guarantees** that need to be put in place to ensure that citizens can pursue their own free lives and interact with each other and with the authorities without hindrance. We are all aware of the abuses of transparency guarantees that democratic and undemocratic regimes practice in various parts of the world.

And lastly there is the instrument of **Protective Security**, the institutional arrangements for a social security net to protect and support citizens in times of dire need and to protect them from the consequences of man made and natural disasters. Perhaps the tragic events in some African countries will best illustrate the importance of this instrument of freedom.

It should be emphasised, all these five freedoms are connected to each other, each of them is of equal importance, and each has to be tackled simultaneously in the development process. In other words, development will inevitably get distorted if only one or two of these objectives are given a priority by using the argument that some of

the freedoms can come afterwards. Although a government or collective may give priority to one freedom as the most significant pursuit, for example security of land tenure as an economic freedom, in the long run having such a narrow goal could hinder healthy development of each citizen. Likewise it is unacceptable to have a dictatorship in order to gain quick growth in national income.

The **third aspect** emphasised by Sen relates to evaluations. How does one evaluate whether any obstructions have been removed to judge the success of a freedom based initiative.

Pre-conditions

Removing obstructions in the life of citizens of a community requires not only an integrated approach but also the help of a variety of institutions and agencies that take it on board as a social commitment. Enhancing development is therefore not something you can pick at in an isolated way, it does need to be supported by a social commitment to make it successful.

Rights and Livelihood approach

. Like Sen's approach, the **Rights based approach** also places the individual at the centre of its concerns. The beneficiary of both approaches is the individual citizen because Human Rights belong to individuals (though sometimes to groups). Each individual has inalienable Human Rights that spring from the definition in the 1948 UN Declaration and other covenants which define these as being born free and equal in dignity and rights. Broadly speaking, these rights also cover, as does the Freedoms spectrum, economic, social, cultural and political aspects. The differences between the two approaches relate to the interpretation of the causes of poverty and the strategy required relieving this poverty. The Rights based approach assumes that there is a hidden bag containing fundamental rights (perhaps god given) that have to be taken or claimed from the authorities or those in power. It also assumes that these powers have the legitimacy to give these rights. Rights have to be wrested from exploitative authorities and the declarations and covenants are very much a part of a declaratory strategy which calls for the implementation of international institutional resolutions regardless of cultural or social endowments of the claimants.

The freedoms approach on the other hand is not declaratory and does not assume that freedom has to be re-gained. The enhancement of freedom is blocked by

obstructions to free agency of the individual which need to be removed without placing any single unfreedom as a priority. Each freedom consists of rights and opportunities and each of them needs to be gained “to advance the capability of a person”. But the obstructions to freedoms are not being held in a bunch by anybody in particular. Each of the freedoms is interlinked and their co-partnership results in strengthening each of them beyond their independent strengths. For instance, giving freedom of economic facilities and prosperity may lead to better access to social opportunities. The granting of all human rights does not automatically lead to achievements in all social, economical political and cultural domains because obstructions to free individual agency could still persist in open democratic societies.

Another development approach, **the Livelihoods approach**, supported by DFID, has similarities to the Freedom approach. Indeed the overlaps between them are more apparent than in the Rights based approach. Its objective of “restoring agency to poor people rather than regard them as passive victims” (Urban Livelihoods. Carole Rakodi. 2002). is almost identical to the objectives of the Freedoms Approach. The Livelihood Approach defines the conditions of the poor, not in terms of deprivations of freedoms but in terms of Five Household Livelihood Assets that are pentagon ally arranged without hierarchy:

- Human,
- Social,
- Natural,
- Financial
- Physical.

In the Livelihoods Approach, development is achieved by strengthening the asset base of the household.

The Freedom Approach, on the other hand, does not specifically confine the domain of obstructions to just the Household or the community levels. Rather it explains that the obstructions are prevalent and interconnected at all levels of a society - macro, meso and micro levels. These obstructions need to be removed by a concerted action that takes on board all the four categories of stakeholders (National and local governments, donors, civil societies including NGOs and local communities). Issues such as transparency guarantees, political freedoms and protective security are inclusive immediate objectives of the project that define the scope of the freedom approach beyond the household.

Project Design

How does one connect between a theoretical discourse on development goals and the ground reality of projects? In the case of the freedoms approach, so far it remains largely unexplored. In order to take the development objectives of the Freedom approach as a project goal, one will need to design projects in a different way.

Projects are the instruments through which development initiatives are taken and they provide ways to deliver, over time, the stages for implementing. Therefore there is an important link between giving the five freedoms substance on the ground and the stages of the project cycle that hopes to deliver its developmental objectives and I would like to discuss how the Freedom Approach could influence these stages.

Any project cycle has four main stages:

1. Defining the Context or framework for the approach.
2. Identifying the problem and designing the project.
3. Planning and implementation of the activities that compose the project.
4. Monitoring, evaluating and assessing the impact of those activities.

1. Defining the Context or framework for the approach.

This defines the location of the project in the wider development challenge not only of the country but within the landscape of the surrounding socio-political, economical and cultural environment. In designing a project that will remove unfreedoms, it is important that at this initial stage of the project cycle, the context is defined in such a way that primacy is given not only to the community but also the five interlinked development objectives which are defined within the constraints and obstructions not only at the national, group or collective level but also at the individual level.

Thus when describing the context of the socio-political landscape, one needs to consider the existing knowledge base and skill availability of the community and the households and how one can strengthen or change it or give it commercial opportunities. Similarly, one will need to define the possibilities for self management based, again, on the capabilities of individuals and the steps one needs to take to enable this to take place.

In defining obstructions, we will need to define both gross level and micro-level obstructions. The gross level obstructions affect the community as a whole and need a role to be played by the authorities. Micro- level obstructions, on the other hand,

affect different individuals in a community in different ways and need a range of solutions that are defined in the project activities. These obstructions could be caused by the household, community or state level causes.

2. Identifying the problem and designing the project.

The project design, at this stage of the cycle, will define the nuts and bolts objectives and the activities to reach those objectives. At this stage, a distinction will be made between the macro obstructions that are shared by the community as a whole such as land tenure or lack of infrastructure or environmental hazards, and the micro obstructions that afflict in different ways each member of the community. The important point to remember is that the project activities do not give priority to macro obstructions over micro obstructions. Thus the lack of drinking water for the community is as important a constraint as the inability of one carpenter in the community to find work or the inability of a girl to be educated because of household attitudes.

3. Planning and implementation.

The project activities that are listed in the previous stage have now to be put into action. For instance, it may be part of the project strategy to start with something small like a savings circle. Such an activity may give rapid results that are tangible in the eyes of the community. Alternatively, there may be another way to form a collective to enhance inter community communication. For instance, some sort of group formation initiatives could be taken at this stage to list the individual obstructions as well as community obstructions. Strategies for removing obstructions in all the five domains of unfreedoms would be elaborated in this section.

Implementation is inevitably a complex part of the project stage because we are expecting to initiate actions at macro (community) level as well as micro (individual) level and we are expecting to address actions in all the five domains of unfreedoms. We are also dealing with individual obstructions that have macro, meso and micro causes. For instance in assessing the obstructions to social facilities, we may find that an individual may be prevented from gaining education because of an absence of schools in the area, or the wrong medium of education in a community or because the father does not agree to educate a child.

4. Monitoring, evaluating and assessing the impact.

The removals of obstructions to freedoms are the broad development objective of the project. This development objective of the project is delivered by enhancing the agency of each individual of the community to change his individual life. The success with which the project is able to enhance individual freedoms becomes subject to monitoring and evaluation. Clearly the traditional externally led blue print deductive evaluation approach cannot come up with the right answers because the project design has already proposed substantial components of inductive community led evaluation initiatives. Thus one needs to go further in our evaluations and accept judgemental conclusions in addition to numerical measurements, to accept interpretive conclusions in addition to descriptive ones. In evaluating the results of a freedom approach one will need to accept that there could be variable outcomes that are not pre-determined in the project design. Also one will need to accept that the community and its individual households could well be engaged in self led evaluations that may or may not be easily observable to external evaluators.

I would like to hand over to Jane Samuels who will explain our case study.