

Human Agency and Capability: A bottom-up perspective
from North Central Nigeria
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation engages an academic discourse around the Capability Approach, and how human agency and functioning is understood in North Central Nigeria. The goal is to contribute a top-down theoretical and bottom-up communitarian human development model that is complementary, and that understands how human agency and functioning is interpreted in North Central Nigeria and its application in Development Studies. This argument is built on the thesis that what people value determines their development. I explore the conversation on the applicability of Sen and Nussbaum's conceptualization of the Capability Approach. Both Sen and Nussbaum correct an earlier focus and emphasis on a quantitative measure of human development by making a case to measure 'what people value' using the instrumentality of democracy. I argue that Sen and Nussbaum's Capability Approach is incomplete/top-down requiring bottom-up practical relational approaches to concretize it. I accomplish this by bringing in Alkire and Denuelin's recommendations on the need to prioritize and show applicability of capabilities in policy using empirical data from the field.

I demonstrate that a Capability Approach focusing on what people value requires a bottom-up methodological approach in two ways. First, I demonstrate that the incompleteness of the Capability Approach is its inability to recognize the role of institutions, history and cultural realities. I argue that institutions as rules of the game and patterns of social interaction constitute the core of democratization processes but are not adequately situated. Secondly, I demonstrate that a Capability Approach that is 'fully human' has to contend with, and give the right measure of analysis to 'being' and 'doing' using empirical field data. As a response, I present primary data to show how the people define development, understand Being through self-consciousness based on belonging as value. I contend that this informs their interpretation of human agency and function. In concluding, the dissertation argues for complementarity in application of top-down functional theoretical approaches with bottom-up practical relational models.