

***Entitlements and Development: Critical Analyses of Intersections with
Inequality and the Environment***

This essay discusses the work of Amartya Sen, primarily centered around the book *Development As Freedom*. This paper situates Sen's contributions within a broader discussion of entitlements, development, and capabilities (and inequality and the environment). It begins with some brief points from the Sen (1999), and then work through the chronology from where much of this emerges. Therefore, critiques and expansions of Sen are explored primarily through Gore (1993), Qizilbash (1996) and Watts (2000). These responses are primarily based on Amartya Sen's earlier work in the 1980s, so the essay briefly summarizes a few ideas from this earlier Sen too.

Summary:

Sen's 1999 book *Development As Freedom* is based on a series of lectures that he delivered to the World Bank in 1996 and 1997. Sen states that his reason for placing these lectures in book form is to reach out beyond the World Bank, international organizations, and national government policy maker circles into the public arena. While in the preface Sen expresses deep thanks to James Wolfensohn for the invite, he writes, "The World Bank has not invariably been my favorite organization...all this made it particularly welcome to have the opportunity to present at the Bank my own views on development and on the making of public policy" (1999: xiii).

In these selected chapters, Sen continues to work to expand the conceptions of development from strict and narrow interpretations of income- and GNP-based definitions to expanded notions of entitlements, capabilities, and freedoms. His notion of development is approached here primarily through the lens of 'freedom'. He works to clarify developmental goals that strive to remove substantial 'unfreedoms' while concurrently expanding "the real freedoms people enjoy" (1999: 36), and endeavors to draw further attention to the processes of development. These expansions are considered by Sen to be both the primary end and the principle means of development. Freedom is considered here as involving "both the *processes* that allow freedom of action and decisions, and the actual *opportunities* that people have, given their personal and social circumstances" (1999: 17). Sen devotes much attention to various interconnected elements of instrumental freedoms, concerned with "the way different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general, and thus to promoting development" (1999: 37). He then focuses analyses on how systems of evaluation of development are based upon particular frames and sources for informational input. He works to utilize capability approaches in order to enlarge considerations of progression through development, and to improve the quality of efforts to expand freedoms that are indispensable to this effort.

Amartya Sen first framed the concept of entitlements in the seminal work *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981). This was written as an effort

to expand upon and improve the narrow economic conceptions of hunger, famine and deprivation that dominated western development model perspectives. Sen challenged the 'conventional' conceptions of poverty (food per capita) as he stated, "starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat. While the latter can be cause of the former, it is but one of many *possible* causes. Whether and how starvation relates to food supply is a matter for factual investigation" (Sen 1981:1). This was a large break from orthodox and hegemonic thinking regarding poverty at the time. Sen offered a new approach to poverty and deprivation analyses, putting activities such as food production within a network of relationships. It was an entitlement and endowment approach. The exchange of entitlements were defined as the trading for collections of commodities, or producing them, and the function that specifies the set of alternative commodity bundles that the person can command respectively for each endowment bundle. Endowments referred to the ownership bundle. These bundles were considered to be mediated and determined by many factors, including employment opportunities, race, caste, gender, and power inequality.

At the time of the writing of the book, Sen reflected on some limitations to this entitlement approach. He admitted that there were ambiguities in the specification of entitlements; they concentrated on rights within the given legal structure in that society, while some activities were illegal, and the assumption of perfect information dictated people's food choices. These were harbingers of critiques to follow, some building upon, and others dismantling this conception of hunger and famine.

Gore followed with the 1993 paper that intended to enrich the extended entitlement analysis by Sen, and promote what could be called a 'broadened extended entitlements analysis'. Gore contended that while Sen's philosophical arguments were sound, key shortcomings of his analysis made it incapable of adequately analyzing hunger and famine. Sen's 'consequence-sensitive' and 'rights inclusive' approaches to ethical evaluations of entitlements/endowments are complicated by a fuller analysis (1993: 439). Gore's more broad approach drew from, a number of literatures, bringing into question moral, ethical, and legal issues, along with gender issues and questions of access, in both theory and in practice. Gore outlined about eleven key critiques and improvements that could be made to entitlement analyses. A few of these included paying more attention to illegal practice in entitlement analyses, further analysis of contestation and communication of meaning, more exploration of negotiation, and a more detailed disaggregated look at local level processes.

Qizilbash's 1996 paper contributed to this discussion through his advocacy for a more refined vision of entitlement analyses, along the lines of definitions of freedom and values. These new contributions then provided a more nuanced, and hence improved, account of the meaning of 'human development' and 'well-being'. He critiqued Sen's work by its treatment of 'freedom' and 'the good life' as universal, and attempted to offer more culturally heterogeneous notions of these ideas, along with connections between them. Qizilbash felt that Sen's undertaking of pluralism in this manner was merely cosmetic and thereby not sufficient.

Watts also entered into the entitlements debate by certain critiques of Sen through his 2000 paper *Development at the Millennium: Malthus, Marx and the Politics of Alternatives*. These emerged chronologically after Sen's *Development As Freedom*. Among his remarks, he stated that Sen did not pay enough attention to what causes entitlements to change or come into being at more meso- and macro-scales. Also, Sen needed to account more for how entitlements are protected and/or promoted, and through that, there was a need to better address explicit democratic governance issues. However, Watts comments, "one of the great strengths of Sen's approach to hunger is that its entitlements are part of a larger architecture of thinking about development as a state of well-being and choice or freedom" (2000: 89).

The contributions of entitlements analyses have challenged the 'economics-as-the-bottom-line' mode of thinking, and brought discourse on poverty, capabilities and well-being into the more fruitful domain of political economy. Ultimately, from the narrow economic analyses of poverty to these empirically rich conceptions of entitlements, many find that contributions such as those described above contribute viable tools for more accurate and precise conceptions development.

Some Talking Points:

1. What has made this expansion of poverty analyses appealing to researchers as well as hegemonic discourses such as those purported by World Bank? What factors might make this legible to those communities, and others?
2. How sufficiently and appropriately does Sen treat heterogeneous human agency within this analytical framework? An example of a particular reference to human agency can be found on page 53: "The people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs". How might this be a response to some Gore criticisms (see 1993: 447)?
3. Does the 'capability approach' put forth by Sen (1999:74-) – defined as "the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for [a person] to achieve" (1999: 75) – effectively bridge these notions?
4. Do the diverse conceptual underpinnings of freedom and the resistance of formulaic and universal considerations of freedom put forth by Sen help to further advance entitlement analyses?
5. How do entitlements and endowments play out in reference to exchanges, when capabilities are treated as commodity bundles? What are some limits to this analysis?
6. How might one further critique the foundational bases upon which Sen rests his capability and entitlement analyses?
7. How might entitlement-endowment mapping look in some places in the United States?
8. How effectively can Sen's entitlements-endowments analytical framework deal with measures of inequality? What are some of the suggested improvements posited by Gore (1993) etc.?

9. In discussing prudential values, Qizilbash states, “The lack of a sense of community and various forms of traditional social activity, the perception of a fragmented and atomistic existence in the more ‘developed’ counties, leads some to view the ‘underdeveloped world as, in certain respects, more developed and civilized than the West.” (1996: 157) How might this interact with notions of social capital as discussed by authors such as Jonathan Fox (1996; 2000)?

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