Dr John Schischka
Principal Academic Staff Member
School of Business
Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
Madras Street
PO Box 540
Christchurch 8015.
Phone: 64-3-9408201
Fax: 64-3-9408648
Email: schischkaj@cpit.ac.nz

The Capabilities Approach and Appraising Community Development Programmes in Christchurch.

This paper summarises the results of a participatory appraisal methodology study carried out with groups of participants in two Christchurch based community development programmes - Sydenham Community Development Project and Manuka Cottage in Addington. Based on the capabilities approach of economist Amartya Sen the methodology extends strategies used in previous studies of participant perspectives in development initiatives in Vanuatu and Samoa. Analysis of the transcripts of the focus groups conducted in these studies reveals significant outcomes from both programmes. Particularly important was the ability of the participatory methodology used to gain the perspectives of a wide range of participants, a number of whom are marginalised from mainstream society. The predominant views among participants in all groups are reported. The prevailing sense of local ownership of both programmes together with the reputation of the community development workers are key motivators in attracting people to the projects and retaining their involvement. Discussion is provided of the limitations and difficulties encountered during the course of the study. A major theme in all of the discussions was that participants had experienced a significant increase in their confidence. Many saw their time in the programmes as very important means in becoming more involved in the community and making new contacts.

1) Introduction

There has been a paucity of effective appraisal techniques in evaluating development programmes, particularly those that have used positive evaluations in terms of what participants will be able to do after they have been involved for a time and how participant's inputs can be of value in improving the development programme. Rather than concentrating entirely on changes in income levels or on deficiencies such as illiteracy rates, the capability approach (CA) offers the opportunity for development programme funding applications to

concentrate on what people can do to expand participants' choices and opportunities. Consequently, development organisations applying to funding agencies should demonstrate how their funds can find or enhance participants existing capabilities and expand choices about things that they valued. It is important these organisations should be helped to establish their own appraisal methodologies before the project is approved and commenced so that they can judge their own performance in assisting the participants to enhance their capabilities – and that this is on a continual basis. Amartya Sen (the founder of the CA) (1999 p291) notes that "…in pursuing the view of development as freedom, we have to examine…the extent to which people have the opportunity to achieve outcomes they value and have reason to value." It is in this context that the research related in this paper has been conducted. Research is needed to establish some criteria by which it is possible to determine the extent the participants in poverty alleviation and community development projects are achieving outcomes they value and have reason to value so as to continually enhance the effectiveness of the programmes.

2) Two Christchurch based community development programmes

This paper relates the application of the CA based participatory monitoring and evaluation of two community development programmes in Christchurch. The two programmes are based in lower socio-economic suburbs of inner Christchurch - Manuka Cottage in Addington and the Sydenham Community Development Project. Both the programmes are jointly funded by Family and Community, (a Division of Anglican Care) and the Spreydon-Heathcote Community Board of the Christchurch City Council.

The programmes were established, (Manuka Cottage in 1993 and Sydenham Community Development Cottage in 2000), in response to initial needs identified by the funding

agencies in needs analyses. Initially community development workers were employed to facilitate the programmes with aims to address the social isolation evident in the communities, to re-establish the family support networks in the community and to increase the residents' stake in their neighbourhoods.
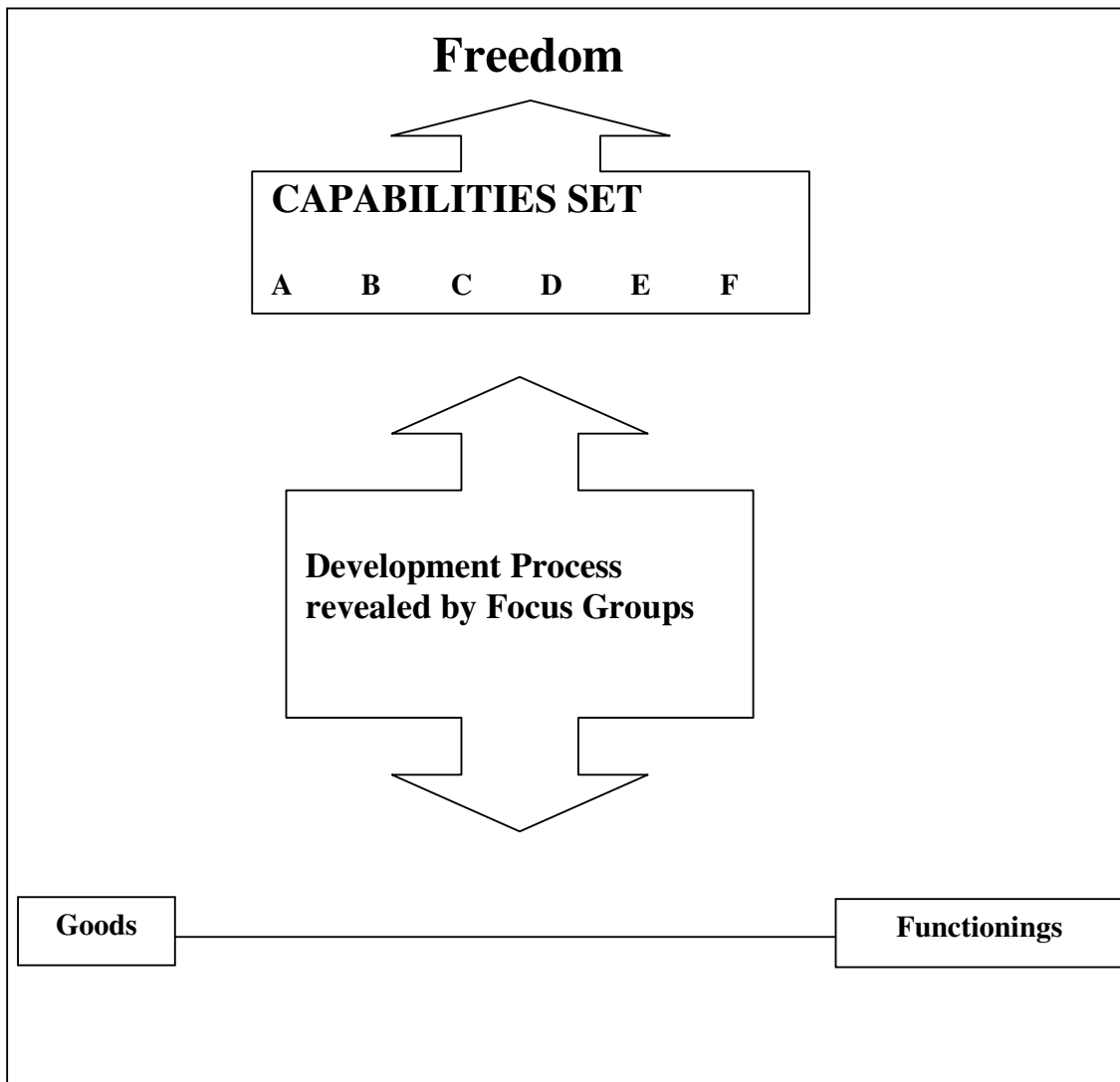
3) The Capability Approach to Development

The participatory appraisal methodology based on the CA of Amartya Sen allows for evaluation of a programme's progress in terms of criteria that are especially relevant to the participants in the programmes. Criteria such as these are often overlooked and there is a tendency to concentrate more on traditional measures of income. Yet non-income criteria are highly relevant to the people involved. Sen (1999, p. 87) argues that "…in analysing social justice, there is a strong case for judging individual advantage in terms of the capabilities that a person has, that is, the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value." Furthermore Sen suggests that "…in this perspective, poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty."

The basic approach adopted in the focus group interviews conducted with participants in the two Christchurch community development programmes and described in this paper is to enable a wide variety of participants in different groups to describe the capabilities that they felt had been enhanced by their involvement in development initiatives and poverty alleviation. It is argued that in order to fully appraise the extent of success of development initiatives it is necessary to include measures other than just incomes. The strategy has been to search for all the ways in which the participants considered that their lives had changed for the better by increased choices becoming available to them.

The process involved in the focus group interviews with the participants within the CA can be shown diagrammatically in figure one.

Figure 1: The Capability Approach and the Focus Group Methodology

Freedom

CAPABILITIES SET

A   B   C   D   E   F

Development Process revealed by Focus Groups

Goods   **Functionings**

This diagram shows that the CA can indeed be operationalised using focus groups to appraise the development processes that are going on in the minds and lives of those participating in

the programmes. The diagram shows that this appraisal is an overtly qualitative and subjective process – the participants are describing in their own terms the potentials within themselves and their communities that are being developed when they take part in the community development programmes. By looking back at the time they have been taking part they can see how their lives and their perspectives have altered since they received the 'goods' of the community development buildings and equipment and started to develop the 'functionings' that they have reason to value. They can also reflect on the way in which their 'capability set' is expanding.

Implicit in the two-way arrow of the diagram leading from the focus group is that there needs to be continual re-evaluation of the goods and functionings incorporated into a project. Development is acknowledged as a dynamic process and the needs of a group of participants will change over time.

Previous studies have been carried out by the author and colleagues based on the CA. The research reported here utilises similar methodology used in previous studies of participant perspectives in development initiatives in Vanuatu (see Schischka 2006, Swain, James and Schischka 2008) and Samoa (Schischka 2005)

4) The Methodology Used in this Study

There are two main aims to the research described in this paper – firstly to provide stakeholders in Community Development programmes with a participatory tool whereby they can regularly take part in the appraisal of the programmes. The second aim of this research is

to test the application of this methodology in a different cultural context from that of Vanuatu. In the research conducted in Vanuatu (see Swain, James and Schischka 2008) it was found that interviews based on the concept of focus groups allow for evaluation of a programme's progress in terms of criteria that are especially relevant to the participants in the programmes – what they have reason to value. The interviews with participants in the indigenous development programme were able to give an indication of the expansion of capabilities in terms relevant to the participants.

One of the main arguments in favour of the use of focus groups is their relatively easy application for both the participants and the community development workers working in the programmes. While they require considerable preparation before and after to work well, the concept of sitting together for a group discussion in a familiar environment is seen to be one that has parallels across many cultures. This is not to say that the use of other participatory techniques would not be possible in other circumstances. In designing this research, however, it was considered that the concept of a focus group would be an approach that would be possible for all groups to manage and to be part of on a regular basis.

From another perspective the focus group interviews search for motivational factors for ongoing involvement and conscientisation of participants since these factors are criteria that mean something to them. The discussion guide developed for use in the interviews (included as appendix one and developed in consultation with the community development workers) aims to determine whether similar insights can be obtained into the perspectives, capabilities and motivations of the participants in the Christchurch community development programmes. Included in the discussion guide is opportunity for participants to provide suggestions for future development of the programme.

5) Results

Analysis of the transcripts of the focus groups conducted in these studies reveals significant outcomes from both of the Christchurch community development programmes. A predominant sentiment reflected in the interviews with the participants in the various programmes was the sense of local ownership. As noted in the previous section scope was provided in the discussions for suggestions for programmes to develop. However almost without exception those involved indicated that ample opportunity was given for people to contribute their ideas to the programmes during the years the programmes had been operating.

To a considerable extent this sense of local ownership can be attributed to the reputation and skills of the community development workers who were seen as key motivators in attracting people to the projects and retaining their involvement. It was apparent that there were considerable ongoing benefits to a range of participants who felt that they had some power and control within the programmes. This appeared to be related to another major theme revealed in the transcripts of the interviews which was the opportunities to develop increased confidence. Some developed leadership skills within the groups they participated in while others found new found abilities in the individual activities they undertook such as painting and craft.

Another common feeling related were the significant opportunities for involvement in the community they lived in and the chances they had to make new contacts. Many of those who participate in the programmes have limited or no access to regular social contact through employment opportunities and some had minimal contact with their own families.

The opportunity to meet regularly with others in a community setting was important for many and resulted in other related benefits. A number of respondents reported significant health benefits because of their involvement in the projects primarily because they had the opportunity to be more physically active and socially engaged. Also contributing to this greater sense of well being was the increased access to social and health services that the participants reported they gained because of their engagement in the community development programmes. While there are many such services available in Christchurch city it is clear from the comments of the participants in these groups that many have found it difficult to be aware of, and to access, these services. Many reported that, since they started attending the community development programmes, they not only became aware of more services but also felt much more confident to be able to handle the processes involved in using them.

Another related advantage was the connectedness and stability that the respondents felt through their participation in the local community development programmes. Many of the participants reported that they felt marginalised from mainstream society or had lead quite transient lives. No matter what their current or previous circumstances they considered that Manuka Cottage and Sydenham Community Development Programme provided them with a sense of continuity and permanence that they had previously lacked. Another key outcome related by those interviewed was that the friendships they formed through the activities of the development programmes and the ability to help each other.

The following are some quotes from participants in the focus groups which illustrate the choices and opportunities that they felt they had received form their participation in the community development programmes.

- "In the first session we were asked what would we like to learn about…surprising…I'm not really used to this sort of opportunity…instead of just having it given to us."

- "I'll tell you what … we all come in … we've all got different things… problems or just loneliness … not accepted in society and we've all come together and help one another … and support one another and make lovely friends"

- "Instead of taking pills you laugh"

- "I got more involved in other community things after coming here"

- "We swap stories about healthy things"

- "Makes me feel like the power is coming from me"

  "Manuka provides something stable…a home…a chance to participate".

6) Limitations

"Inadvertent ventriloquism" is a potential problem to be aware of in analysing the transcripts of the participants in the focus groups in this research. The focus group discussions provide a means for those involved in the projects to actively reflect on their situation. There is the potential that some participants in undertaking this reflection may adjust their answers so as to provide comments that they think the interviewers want to hear. Every effort was made by the interviewers to elicit honest responses and the frank discussions provided in the focus groups gave every indication that, in general, participants were being forthright in their views. Further research of groups involved in these and other initiatives could ascertain the extent to which this is occurring over time.

A final limitation of the focus groups was their ability to gain the perspectives of all participants in the community development programmes. Considerable effort was made to contact as many people as possible but some sections of the population in the areas of the programmes lead transient lives, consequently there are those whose views may not have been included.

6) Conclusion

Sen (1999 p291) notes that "…in pursuing the view of development as freedom, we have to examine…the extent to which people have the opportunity to achieve outcomes they value and have reason to value." Analysis of the focus group interviews conducted with participants in the two Christchurch community development programmes demonstrates the ability of the participatory methodology used to gain the perspectives of a wide range of participants, a number of whom are marginalised from mainstream society. The focus group methodology worked well with the participants in village development programmes in isolated regions of Vanuatu. The same methodology works well in eliciting responses and participation from participants in programmes in the urban Christchurch who are isolated in another sense. The long term aim is for the capabilities based focus group methodology to become part of the regular operation in different parts of the community development programme's project cycles with opportunities for local ownership and development. In this way it is not dependent on the outside facilitator but rather can be implemented by local community development workers as part of the development cycle that they are taking part in. The focus groups allow for a regular examination of the extent to which people have the opportunity to achieve outcomes they value and have reason to value. These focus groups should be used as a way of returning again and again to the participants in a continuous cycle

of appraisal that is incorporated into development initiatives. It is argued here, that it can be through the use of participatory methods such as the focus groups used in this study, that the poor and socially marginalised (whether they are in developed nations or developing nations) can realise these freedoms to achieve various possible lifestyles and thereby enhance their capabilities.

References

Schischka, J. A. (2002) "The Capabilities Approach as a Metric for Economic

Development." Paper presented to the Second International Conference on the Capability

Approach, Von Hugel Institute, Cambridge University, England, September 2002.

Schischka, J. A. (2003) "The Capabilities Approach as a Metric for Economic Development:

A Case Study in Samoa." Paper presented to the Third International Conference on the

Capability Approach, University of Pavia, Italy, September 2003.

Schischka, J. A. (2004) "The Capabilities Approach as a Metric for the Appraisal of Poverty

Alleviation Programmes." Paper presented to the Fourth International Conference on the

Capability Approach, University of Pavia, Italy, September 2004.

Schischka, J. A. (2005) "The Capabilities Approach in Economic Development."

(PhD thesis Lincoln University, Christchurch) .

Schischka, J.A. (2006) 'The Long Term Operationalistion of the Capabilities

Approach by a New Zealand Based Development Agency' Paper presented to the Sixth

International Conference on the Capability Approach, University of Groningen ,

Netherlands.

Swain, P., James, J. and J.A. Schischka (2008) 'Janis Blong TokTok Pri-Skul Blong

Vanuatu and the role of New Zealand Volunteers' VSA, Wellington

Sen, A. K. (1999) Development as Freedom. Alfred A. Knopf, New York

APPENDIX 1

The Discussion Guide Used in the Focus Guide

Introduction

Background to study, request for full participation and outline of what will happen to the results.

1)   When did you join the group, how did you come to be involved - choice or not? What was your life like before you joined?

2)   What were your expectations when you joined - especially concerning the choices and opportunities that you might have?

3)   Have you had any new choices and opportunities since your involvement in the programme?
PAUSE - PROMPT WITH RELEVANT HEADINGS IF NECESSARY TO DEVELOP DISCUSSION:

- education skills
- health
- housing
- social/community/family/friends

- status/confidence

- income/finance

- other

Did you expect these changes?

4) What suggestions do you have for the future of this programme? PAUSE - PROMPT WITH RELEVANT HEADINGS IF NECESSARY TO DEVELOP DISCUSSION

- Resources.

- Training.

- Community Involvement.

- Other.

5) What did you think of this focus group process?

6) Summarise, ask if there was anything that was missed and promise to provide a summary of research findings.

7) Thanks.