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Improving on the Capabilities Approach as a framework for the evaluation of international development projects

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Commerce and Management

at
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by
Allan Eduardo Castro-Rodriguez

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Abstract

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by

Allan Castro

Amartya Sen developed the ideas underlying the Capability Approach, followed by abundant debate by other authors. This approach to development economics provides an alternative to traditional ways to determine the welfare of human being, arguing that the expansion of freedom and choices to seek a fulfilling life (the capabilities) of an individual are better indicators of welfare than materialistic measurements of success. The literature regarding this approach to development is extensive; however, this approach is not commonly used in the practice of initiatives such as development projects, especially for its evaluation stage, where the demands for accountability in a project implementation result in the exclusiveness of evaluation methods such as income comparisons as well as measurements of efficiency and quantities of goods delivered.

This research joins recent literature about the operationalisation of this approach for its use as a framework for the design and especially the evaluation of development projects, by evaluating the effects of a project on its participants’ expansion of freedoms to do activities and pursue paths and activities in their lives that they have a reason to value.

A case study was conducted in the Country of Honduras, studying a development project by the NGO ‘Libre Expresión’ which focuses on the provision of courses to supplement the education of young adults from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Qualitative research
methods such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used to identify the
capabilities of the beneficiaries of the project and analyse them in relation to the project’s
activities and how the participants’ perceive that their freedoms and choices for their lives
have changed in the course of their participation in the project. The results ranged from the
discovery of capabilities by some of the participants, to a pre-existing knowledge of
capabilities and the desire to further expand them by others. These results and their
implications are discussed in the context of previous literature on this topic.

**Keywords:** Capabilities, Capability Approach, development, development project, education,
project evaluation, Honduras, poverty reduction, Sen.
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*I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul...Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD. (Psalm 31)*
# Table of Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ....................................................................................................................................... v

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................ vii

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................ vii

Chapter 1 Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1

1.1 The Capability Approach and development projects ........................................................................ 1
    1.1.1 Research Objectives ........................................................................................................... 2
    1.1.2 Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 2
1.2 Honduras country context .................................................................................................................... 3

Chapter 2 The previous literature on the Capability Approach and development initiatives .................... 8

2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 8
2.2 Economics, development and poverty ............................................................................................. 8
    2.2.1 Measurements of poverty ................................................................................................ 9
    2.2.2 The Capability Approach to development ..................................................................... 10
    2.2.3 Operationalisation of the Capability Approach ............................................................. 14
    2.2.4 Basic capabilities as formulated by Nussbaum ................................................................ 18
2.3 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 20

Chapter 3 Methodological considerations and application in this research .......................................... 21

3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 21
    3.1.1 Research Objectives ........................................................................................................... 22
    3.1.2 Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 22
3.2 The use of qualitative research methods .......................................................................................... 23
3.3 Capabilities-based participatory analysis for development initiatives ............................................. 25
3.4 The use of focus groups for data collection ....................................................................................... 26
3.5 Stages of the study ........................................................................................................................... 29
3.6 Selection of project and recruiting of participants .......................................................................... 29
    3.6.1 Details about the focus groups .......................................................................................... 30
3.7 Topics considered for the interview as Guiding points and questions ............................................ 31
3.8 Guiding points and questions for the Focus Group interviews ....................................................... 32
3.9 Moderation of the focus groups ...................................................................................................... 35
3.10 Analysis and reporting .................................................................................................................. 37
3.11 Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 39
Chapter 4 Findings from the focus groups ................................................................. 40

4.1 Introduction 40
4.2 Ability to learn a new skill 40
  4.2.1 Skills learned by the participants of Libre Expresión’s project 42
4.3 Increase in self confidence 42
4.4 Increased employment opportunities 46
4.5 Access to information and technology 48
4.6 Social relations and volunteering example 49
4.7 Conclusion 50

Chapter 5 Discussion and conclusion........................................................................ 51

5.1 Introduction 51
5.2 Identification of the capabilities of the beneficiaries of Libre Expresión’s development project 52
5.3 How the functionings and capabilities obtained or discovered by the participants of the development project are being used 56
5.4 Values of the capabilities for all the stakeholders 60
  5.4.1 Differences between the capabilities as valued by the project participants and by the other stakeholders 61
  5.4.2 Endogenous and exogenous factors causing differences in how the capabilities are valued by different stakeholders 61
  5.4.3 Sets of functionings and capabilities; universal or self determined? 63
5.5 Limitations of this research project and suggestions for future research 64
5.6 Conclusion 68

Concluding remarks about this research 69

References .................................................................................................................. 71

Appendix A : Focus Group Session Moderation Guiding Points ............................... 76
List of Tables

Table 1  Human development data for selected countries ........................................... 4
Table 2  References to capabilities by the focus groups participants........................... 52

List of Figures

Figure 1  Capability Approach – The links................................................................. 13
Figure 2  Alkire's criteria for basic capabilities.......................................................... 17
Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 The Capability Approach and development projects

Poverty reduction projects have for decades been an important part of the development assistance provided to developing countries. The mechanisms for delivery of aid have become more sophisticated as the experience of Development Agencies increased. However, evaluation has not always been a priority and traditionally the projects were designed and implemented in a “top-down” manner, with little or no input from the targeted beneficiaries of the project.

Current research has shown that a more inclusive approach, with the participation of a project’s intended beneficiaries throughout all the stages of the project’s cycle increases the chances of project success, in large part due to the increased understanding of the development problems by the designers and the increased sense of ownership by the beneficiaries, increasing the sustainability of the project.

The design and evaluation procedures for international development projects have been based on a series of economic tools, for appraisal and evaluation ex-ante and ex-post, estimating costs and values for a project’s costs and benefits, effectively measuring the amount of goods provided or the increase in income for its stakeholders. However, it is now commonly accepted that approaches like the use of poverty lines do not take into account the wider aspects of poverty and well-being (Baulch and Masset, 2003, p.441; as cited in Schischka, 2004, p.13,14).

Last decade, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen developed the ideas underlying the Capability Approach (CA), which focuses on the development of human potential by increasing the options or capabilities available to them, rather than just the provision of commodities to alleviate poverty. This enables people to choose a life that they have reason to value, measured by the freedoms enjoyed and not only by wealth. These ideas are well suited to
provide an alternative framework on which to base the design, implementation and evaluation of development projects.

This research project aims to expand previous work on the Capability Approach, specifically studying its application as an alternative framework of ideas to use on the design and the evaluation of development projects, using the identification of themes of valued capabilities for all the project stakeholders.

The aim of this research project is to understand whether Sen’s Capability Approach, as well as the contributions of other authors on this topic, are still relevant in relation to a development project that is currently being implemented in the country of Honduras. For this objective, a methodology was created according to the following research objectives and questions:

### 1.1.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research project is to discover whether Sen’s CA framework can be applied to a case study in Honduras, consisting of a development project currently being implemented; and whether the capabilities identified with the methodology used would match the criteria developed by authors such as Sen, Nussbaum, Alkire and others.

Additionally, this research project aims to produce new knowledge in the debate concerning the universal or self-determined nature of the sets of capabilities, with particular attention to an application to development initiatives.

### 1.1.2 Research Questions

To study the application of the CA to development projects, the following research questions were defined:

1. Can participants identify and discuss new capabilities they have learned or discovered while participating in the development project?
2. Are the participants already using any of their capabilities to achieve new functionings or capabilities, or planning to do so?

3. Are there any common valued capabilities for all of the stakeholders of the development project?

4. Are there any significant differences between the capabilities as they are valued by the participants and the expectations of the other stakeholders?

The following report elaborates on the work done to address the above mentioned objectives and questions, starting on this chapter with this introduction, as well as a brief country context of Honduras; followed on Chapter 2 by a survey of the literature related to the topic of the Capability Approach and how it relates to development projects. Chapter 3 elaborates on the methodological considerations and tools used for this research project. Chapter 4 outlines the findings from the focus group sessions conducted with the participants of the development project, which was the main research tool for the collection of data for this research project. The chapter focuses on presenting the views, opinions and perception of the participants in relation to the topic being studied. Chapter 5 builds on all the previous chapters to present the analysis, implications and discussion related to the subject, and finishes with recommendations about future research possibilities and the conclusions of this research project.

1.2 Honduras country context

Honduras is a republic of Central America. It has a population of approximately 7.5 million and a land area of 112,492 Km², roughly the size of the North Island of New Zealand. The official language is Spanish, and the majority of the population identify themselves as Christian, either Catholic or Protestant. The distribution of the population is 45% urban and 55% rural (INE, n.d.). Half of the urban population is concentrated on the metropolitan areas of the two largest cities, the capital city Tegucigalpa, and San Pedro Sula, the latter being the most industrialised city of the Country. The majority of
the population is of mixed Spanish and Amerindian ancestry “mestizos”, with small minorities of Indigenous groups and population of African-descend. (honduraslive, n.d.).

The country became a Spanish colony almost from the time of its discovery in the 16th Century, and gained independence in 1821. It has a constitutional democratic political system, with a history of fragility with several military coups occurring in the last century and one as recently as 2009. (honduraslive, n.d.).

Honduras is a country with a medium level of Human Development, and lower middle-income with a GDP per capita (PPP US$) of 3,796; a life expectancy at birth of 72 years and a combined gross enrolment ratio in education1 of 74.8%. In comparison, a High Human Development country like New Zealand has a GDP per capita of 27,336; a life expectancy of 80.1 and combined gross enrolment ratio in education of 107.5%. In Honduras, 60% of the population is below the poverty line.

Table 1  Human development data for selected countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
<th>Kenya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human development index value</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (years)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined gross enrolment ratio in education (%)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>107.5</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (PPP US$)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>35,812</td>
<td>27,336</td>
<td>14,104</td>
<td>3,406</td>
<td>3,796</td>
<td>2,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population living below $2 a day (%)</td>
<td>2000-2007</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini index</td>
<td>1992-2007</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- a. Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.
- b. The Gini index lies between 0 and 100. A value of 0 represents perfect equality and 100 absolute inequality.
- c. Data refer to a year other than that specified.
- d. UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimate.
- e. For the purposes of calculating the HDI, a value of 100% was applied.
- f. World Bank estimate based on regression.


1 The combined gross enrolment ratio in education consists of the number of students enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of theoretical school age for the three levels. (UNDP, n.d.).
The education level in the Country is low, with one in every six persons unable to read or write. The average number of years of study for people older than 15 years of age is approximately 9 years in urban areas and only 6 in rural areas (INE, n.d.). The education system faces huge challenges in delivering both quantity and quality of education, as frequent disagreements between teacher unions and the Government result in significant disruptions to the schools’ calendar. Standardised international tests also show that educational achievement is low (PNUD, 2007). Middle class families try to afford a private education alternative, as these schools do not have the calendar interruption problems, yet the quality can vary widely between different education providers.

In relation to the low education and income levels, access to technologies such as Internet access is very limited, with government surveys showing only 10% of the population declaring to having access in the month before the survey, and of these almost 80% had only casual access through “internet cafes” and not regular access at home or work. (INE, n.d.).

The disadvantaged conditions of the rural areas result in high migration rates to the cities. This increases problems such as high urban unemployment rates and low wages. There is also a significant disparity in the distribution of income; and the resulting poverty, as well as the rising unemployment levels creates a problem of high crime rates, with drug trafficking and street gangs or “maras” being a major security concern in the cities. (World Bank, n.d.).

The economy of Honduras is the most open of Central America. It is based on international trading of agricultural products, traditionally bananas and coffee, with a recent diversification to other products such as seafood and timber. In 1998, the natural disaster caused by the Hurricane Mitch destroyed a large amount of agricultural land and infrastructure in the country, causing more than 5,000 deaths and billions of dollars in damage that “set back development by decades” (World Bank, n.d.). The main drivers of economic growth are international family remittances sent by nationals abroad, as well as the “maquila” exporting industry (consisting mostly of manufacturing of textile products). The largest trade partner of the country is the United States of America. The open economy makes the country vulnerable to external shocks such as the global
recession, and the falling prices of agricultural products has resulted in reduced income and purchasing power in the Country. Recent efforts are trying to develop the tourism sector, particularly in the ‘Islands of the Bay’ zone as well as archaeology-oriented tourism in the Mayan civilization ruins at Copán, but the sector still represents a minor percentage of the national income.

Another important source of income for the country is the reception of international aid. After Hurricane Mitch, the country started programmes that focused on adjusting its policies in order to become eligible for the cancellation of its external debt, through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative; and reaching the culmination point of this initiative in 2005. Several international aid organizations, as well as multilateral, bilateral or private entities maintain programmes and other forms of aid and cooperation for the country, done in a direct manner, or by supporting the government programmes or the activities of local NGOs. The aid is oriented especially towards rural areas, on which lie most of the challenges to the development of the country, such as high levels of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. (World Bank, n.d.).

As part of their support for the development efforts of the Country, organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank have studied the complex situation of the Country, and have identified the main challenges ahead. Besides challenges such as reducing poverty and focusing public expense, a significant challenge identified is how to address the low levels of education throughout the Country, to which the low productivity and high poverty rates are attributed. Education is identified as “the single most important growth determinant for Honduras” (World Bank, 2006, p.15). Another important challenge is the citizenship agency, or lack thereof, with “Honduran citizens restricting themselves ever more to private lives and losing the capacity of collective action over society and its development” (PNUD, 2006, p.3). This is attributed to the increasing levels of crime and violence, which in turn are attributed to a general lack of economic opportunities.

Honduras’ efforts for development have been guided by the framework outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which was drafted as part of the HIPC initiative requirements and is inspired on the Millennium Development Goals, using similar goals.
and the same timeline to reach these goals on 2015. The progress on reaching these goals is mixed, with “significant yet still insufficient progress on reaching the goals” (PNUD, 2007, p.xx).

In this moment of crossroads, there is optimism in the Country and even after recent political disturbances and the global recession; there is hope for recovery and progress in the development of the Country².

Chapter 2
The previous literature on the Capability Approach and development initiatives

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a survey of the literature related to the capability approach, as well as its relation to development activities. Section 2.2 discusses the topics of development and poverty, followed on section 2.2.1 by how the poverty has been traditionally understood and measured. Section 2.2.2 elaborates on the capability approach and its link to development. Section 2.2.3 discusses about the operationalisation of the capability approach by development initiatives. The chapter ends with section 2.2.4 outlining Nussbaum’s list of universal capabilities and section 2.3 with the conclusions.

2.2 Economics, development and poverty

The science of economics has been traditionally concerned about the allocation of scarce resources. Throughout the world millions of people have a level of scarcity that threatens their existence. Hunger, lack of shelter, sickness and the fear for tomorrow are only some of the crude realities that the poor endure each day.

The concern of many, from governments to multilateral agencies and individuals, national or foreign is the eradication, or at least the reduction of poverty. Economic growth and development have become an essential goal for poor countries and others that support them. Major development organisations such as the World Bank and various United Nations agencies have a mandate and an official discourse related to poverty and the actions related to its eradication; from debt relief to macroeconomic stabilisation or transfers and donations, and implementation of programmes for this objective.
In order to formulate policies and interventions aimed at reducing poverty it is necessary to understand and analyse what constitutes poverty, as well as identifying who are the poor. Thanks to the efforts of the abovementioned organizations, the approach to understand, or at least measure poverty was concerned with the traditional economic focus of utility and its maximization. This led to a monetary approach to define and measure poverty that has mostly retained dominance in the description and analysis of this issue. More recently there have been considerations about the multidimensionality of poverty and its relation to human rights and the basic needs derived from these rights, conducting to new approaches to the understanding of deprivation and poverty. Even the monetary approach recognises the multidimensionality by trying to capture the essence of deprivation under the metrics of income and its comparability between individuals.

2.2.1 Measurements of poverty

The way poverty is understood and thus measured is important as it becomes an interpretation of reality and the way to alter this reality, through policy measures that reflect these different views of what constitutes a good society and the solutions to its problems.

The measurement of poverty and inequality is an old topic. Authors like Pigou (1912) and Dalton (1920) (as cited in Atkinson, 1998, p.10,11) had expressed in a utilitarian framework the idea that income inequality could be measured as the distance between the actual distribution and the equal distribution, many others followed in the development of these ideas, as studies of poverty singled out the bottom of the income distribution for particular attention, and the universal practice became to count the number or proportion of the population that is below the poverty line. Sen (1976) called this approach into question, as it gives no clear indication of the degree or the severity of poverty.

The definition and measurement of poverty, given its multidimensionality, is faced with many issues. Laderchi, Saith and Stewart (2003:3-6) identify several issues, the first of which is the space in which poverty is defined and how that space is captured by the
indicators chosen. Should poverty be measured in the space of utility and resources or in terms of the freedom to live the life that one values; or measure what may be achieved as opposed to what is actually achieved by an individual?

A second issue is the question of the universality of the definition of poverty. This is of special concern to international organizations as it poses the question of whether a definition of poverty and the indicators to measure it as they are applied to one society can and should be applied to other societies, with little or no modification at all. For the monetary approach it quickly becomes clear that its universality has to be put in doubt, as the criteria of utility in material terms is not always compatible with the way of life of societies that are not as prosper in monetary terms yet seem to be happier than many in the West.

Another concern is the way in which to separate the poor from the non-poor. This is a crucial question in the measurement of poverty. The use of poverty lines brings the question of how is this line adopted and justified, and according to which social context or absolute standard of deprivation. In the end it is clear that application of poverty lines cannot be separated from a social context.

2.2.2 The Capability Approach to development

Development economists have moved away from the traditional thinking of economic development as growth in per capita GDP, as this does not necessarily translate into increases to the well-being of the majority of the population, and fails to notice the deprivation that is considered a lack of provision of human rights.

Considering the limitations of previous ideas, there have been efforts to develop new conceptions of development that have the human beings as the ends rather than the means of development. This thinking sees human development as an improvement in the quality of life which is equitable and consistent with the fulfilment of human rights.

The most recognised contributor to development economics is Amartya Sen, who received a Nobel Prize for his contribution to “social choice, welfare distributions, and
poverty”, and has greatly influenced the fields of economics and philosophy as well as international organizations such as the United Nations agencies and the World Bank.

Sen critiques that welfarism or utilitarianism does not clearly distinguish between different kinds of desires, and reminds us that there is more to life than just the pursuit to achieve more utility from income and consumption.

In an alternative to traditional welfarism and the focus on individual utilities, Sen’s development of the “capabilities” concept made a case that the standard of living should focus on “neither commodities, nor characteristics, nor utility, but something that may be called a person’s capability” (Sen, 1983b, p.160-163). Sen argued for a chain of:

\[
\text{Commodities} \rightarrow \text{Characteristics} \rightarrow \text{Capability} \rightarrow \text{Utility}
\]

In which “the third category –that of capacity to function- that comes closest to the notion of standard of living” (Sen, 1983b, p.160-163).

\textit{Capability} refers to the ability to do or be something. Given a commodity, for example a book, as well as personal characteristics like literacy, and external circumstances, an individual has the capability or choice to be or do something, like learning a new skill. The achievement (utility) itself is called a \textit{functioning} by Sen. In the Capability Approach (CA), the increase in well-being can be interpreted as either the actual functioning; or the options or capabilities a person has.

\textit{Functionings} is the other important concept of the CA. These are the various things a person can do or be in life, and the alternative combination of functionings is a reflection of the capabilities of a person and his choices.

The capabilities of a person and their expansion are the basis of the capability approach to development. As Sen writes: “The process of economic development is best seen as an expansion of people’s capabilities, and development is seen as a process of emancipation from the enforced necessity to ‘live less and be less’” (Sen, 1983a). In this sense, development becomes the liberation from necessity as a result of the growth of the freedoms enjoyed by the individuals.
From the CA perspective, poverty is defined as a deprivation of capabilities. The failure to achieve certain basic or minimum capabilities results in the inability to achieve functionings to minimally sufficient levels for individuals to realise their potential to live the lives they value.

In contrast to the monetary approach, the CA puts emphasis on the characteristics of quality of life. While the monetary approach can only indirectly measure those outcomes, the CA focuses on non-monetary indicators to evaluate the well-being or deprivation. Rather than putting the monetary indicators as ends, the CA sees them as means, but not the only means, to fulfilment of a valued life. The CA goes beyond as it takes into consideration the characteristics of individuals as the capabilities to transform resources into outcomes they value, their functionings.

It becomes clear that there is no standard combination of ‘more is more’ as with income or consumption, as different individuals in different settings will need different resources to achieve their valued functionings, even if these desired functionings are the same for both individuals. Consider the need to achieve social standing or prestige through education. While arguably all societies value achievements in education, different cultures place different values and consequently increases or reductions in social standing derived from educational achievements or lack thereof, and the magnitude in which it helps to achieve a more valued life. The CA and assessments based on this framework have to consider that some people will need more resources than others to obtain the same functionings.

The links of the capability approach are summarised by Laderchi, Saith and Stewart (2003, p.16) and can be seen in diagram no. 1. Income plays an important role as individuals obtain commodities, and the characteristics of these commodities combined with the personal characteristics of an individual form a capability set. The choices made by the individual with this capability set will result in the functionings or achievements of the individual. Of note is the role of social income, which through publically provided goods, provides utility to the individual and combines with the commodities obtained with the private income. The main difference with the monetary approach is the expansion beyond the utility provided by income and subsequent consumption to include the
characteristics of the individual and the choices made in the use of resources in the context of a given environment, and the resulting capability set and the following functionings or what the individual can be or do.

The development of Sen’s contribution sees the expansion of freedom as both the primary end and the principal means of development. In his work *Development as Freedom*, Sen notes the connection of freedom with capabilities, and the connection of many freedoms with each other and how they strengthen each other. Political freedom promotes economic security. Social opportunities facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities generate resources for social facilities. The possibility or freedom of choosing between different alternatives or utilisations is an important component of the functionings and the resulting wellbeing.
As significant as it is as a contribution to the current of thought about development, the CA could not be without critique. The main criticism to Sen’s work is the lack of elaboration on his part on a possible set of valuable functionings, as well as the failure to provide a complete account of interpersonal comparisons (Qizilbash, 1996). Also critiqued is the use of the concept of wellbeing as a subjective achievement according to the reality of an individual. Frankfurt (1971, as cited in Qizilbash, 1996) argues that human beings have the capacity to form second order desires, which are desires to desire. Derived from this view is a conception that in underdeveloped countries people have limited capacities for doing and being as they desire to, and they will adjust their desires and expectations according to this reality. Adjusting the desires in the direction of realistic possibilities may result in people being contented without achieving much in terms of wellbeing, being severely deprived and still feel a sense of satisfaction because of having achieved according to their expectations.

2.2.3 Operationalisation of the Capability Approach

Many organizations working on development still use the monetary approach or other quantitative methods of assessing poverty even with its limitations. While Sen’s Capability Approach provides a theoretical framework that sheds light on the multidimensionality of poverty and stimulates the research for possible solutions to this problem, why is its use not generalised? One of the main reasons is the need for comparability, even if incomplete or even flawed, as well as the need for accountability and progress evaluation, which is easier when based on quantitative indicators, which by nature are objectively more comparable than qualitative or other subjective means of analysis.

Significant effort has been made in operationalising Sen’s CA. By this, it is meant the transformation of the theory into an object of practical value. As noted by Comim (2001), some critiques to Sen’s approach have suggested that the multidimensional and context dependent nature of the approach might prevent it from practicality or operationalisation. Sen and sympathisers of the CA acknowledge to some extent the concern about empirical difficulties, for example Robeyns (2005) has noted that “despite
the fact that Sen published commodities and capabilities in 1985, the number of empirical applications is still quite limited”. Alkire (1998, p.3 as cited in Comim, 2001, p. 3) observes that “Sen has not specified how the various value judgements that inhere in his approach, and that are required in order for its practical use...are to be made” and that “without some specification –and simplification- the capability approach cannot be used efficiently”. These authors have analysed the challenges and difficulties regarding the operationalisation of Sen’s CA.

According to Sen (1985), possible sources of data for the operationalisation of the CA include but go beyond market purchase data and responses to questionnaires to include non-market observations of personal status. Sen also observes that “the capability set is not directly observable, and has to be constructed on the basis of presumptions (just as the ‘budget set’ in consumer analysis is also constructed on the basis of data regarding income, prices and the presumed possibilities of exchange). Thus, in practice, one might have to settle often enough for relating well-being to the achieved –and observed- functionings, rather than trying to bring in the capability set (when the presumptive basis of such a construction would be empirically dubious)”. Finally, Sen (1999) argues that “the assessment of capabilities has to proceed primarily on the basis of observing a person’s actual functionings, to be supplemented by other information”.

On a microeconomic level, the CA would allow people to express their criteria for discrimination regarding what they consider a good life. Since wellbeing is what needs to be measured for the operationalisation of the CA, the attention should be on the range of functionings of an individual. (Comim, 2001)

Should the assessment of wellbeing be based on relative or absolute measures of what is ‘needed’ by individuals? Harrison (2001) argues that both aspects should be considered, at least with respect to measures of poverty. In the case of relative aspects, “the measurements can reveal how much an individual with particular personal characters who lives in a particular place and time needs in order to achieve a certain absolute standard of well-being”. Harrison concludes that operationalising the CA involves three aspects: the definition of the capability measure; the measuring itself; and the use of the
measurement for policy purposes. The definition of the capabilities will determine the actual data needed for measurement.

Sen has been criticised for not providing a comprehensive list or classification of valuable functionings or capabilities (Doyal and Gough, 1991; Clark, 2002; Nussbaum, 1988; as cited by Clark, 2005). But Sen left the CA in apparent incompleteness deliberately, refraining from providing or endorsing a list of fixed or unique capabilities or functionings as ‘objectively correct’. By doing this, “Sen manages to avoid the charge of paternalism by leaving each and every person with the freedom to define his/her own set of functionings” (Clark, 2005). Many other authors have tried to fill this void and prepared a substantial list of functionings or capabilities (Nussbaum, 1995; 2000; Saith, 2001; Alkire 2002 and Clark, 2002, as cited by Clark, 2005). They all have made their lists with a vision of universality, so these can apply to different cultures in regard to what is a good life; but they inevitably face the criticism of being paternalistic and overlooking cultural and historic differences (Clark, 2005).
Clark (2005) argues that the way for completing the CA without imposing ethnocentric or elitist views on other people and societies involves “drawing directly on the values and experiences of the poor”, but recognises that there is no guarantee that this approach will always provide significant results, as preferences could have adapted to or distorted because of circumstances; or the poor may lack the knowledge to make informed judgments about an alternative lifestyle that increases their well-being. Schischka (2005) found that the most significant achievement of development projects, from the perspective of the CA, in both developed and developing countries, was the participants gained knowledge about capabilities they did not know they had.

The approach of self determination of capabilities and functionings is endorsed by Sen, and he limits himself to provide examples of what valuable capabilities are, like being

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**Figure 2  Alkire’s criteria for basic capabilities**

Generalising from Sen’s arguments in defence of life expectancy measures as capability indicators, Alkire suggests six criteria that achieved functionings must satisfy to be considered possible indicators of basic capabilities. These are the following:

1. The functioning belongs to the capability set (is itself valuable) OR the functioning is directly associated with the capability set (highly correlated, etc).
2. The functioning pertains to a basic human need, i.e. that without which one’s life may be blighted.
3. The functioning is not significantly dependent on any non-basic prior functioning.
4. The functioning is not dependent on the presence of uncommon ability or interest.
5. A level of achieved functioning which is widely recognised to be ‘basic’ can be specified and empirically observed.
6. Provision of the functioning does not necessarily compromise freedom to pursue other significant functionings in the long term.

Although a list is not provided, the guidelines may be used to decide whether a functioning does or does not qualify as an indicator of basic capability.

nourished, healthy, avoiding preventable morbidity, etc. Clark (2005) also presents more complex social functionings recognised by Sen as relevant for assessing poverty and human development, for example “achieving self respect, appearing in public without shame, entertaining family and friends and taking part in the life of the community”.

2.2.4 Basic capabilities as formulated by Nussbaum

Nussbaum (1993) argued “that any democracy should support a basic set of capabilities, formulating a list of ten capabilities that are necessary to ensure the fulfilment of a life according to human rights principles. The ten capabilities Nussbaum argues should be supported by all democracies are:

1. **Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. **Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. **Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. **Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

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5. *Emotions.* Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. *Practical Reason.* Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. *Affiliation.*

   1. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

   2. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.

8. *Other Species.* Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. *Play.* Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over one’s Environment.*

    1. *Political.* Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

    2. *Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to
seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.”

A question for an initiative of a relatively small scope of development, such as a project or programme, would be about how many of Nussbaum’s capabilities can be addressed, whether expanded or newly achieved, for any participants of a given development project by its implementation. While the list of capabilities is meant for policy purposes, a micro-level addressing of this list is clearly a consideration for development initiatives.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented a survey of literature related to the Capability Approach, starting with an overview of the understanding of poverty and its measurements, followed by the development of Sen’s ideas that form the Capability Approach. The literature also studies how Sen’s ideas were eventually expanded by other authors and have gained relevance as a philosophical underpinning for designing, implementing and evaluating development projects. With this theoretical base, the following chapter explains the methodology used for this research project.
Chapter 3
Methodological considerations and application in this research

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations and the tools used for this research project. The main goal of this project is to analyse the Capability Approach in the context of a development project of Honduras, and research questions were formulated with the basis of identifying the capabilities as expressed by beneficiaries of the development project and based on this, further analyse and discuss the implications of these findings in light of previous work on the subject of the CA. With the above mentioned considerations, the methodology used relied on qualitative and participatory research methods, and as implemented in this research project, it borrows significantly from the work of Schischka (2005), in that the methodology could be adopted if so desired by the NGO in charge of the development project implementation, meeting the needs of the NGOs for implementation on a regular basis, while taking into account their constraints of financial time and resources. This is to be achieved by establishing a methodology that takes into account all of the stakeholders, producing the minimum possible impact on the daily operations of the project, and on the activities of its beneficiaries, while providing a significant insight into their perceptions and realities related to their capabilities and functionings and how these have been expanded by a development project initiative.

After outlining the research objectives and research questions in sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, this chapter continues in section 3.2 with the rationale for the use of qualitative research methods on evaluating development initiatives as a preferred, but not necessarily exclusive method, compared to quantitative tools. Section 3.3 there continues with the design of an appropriate method to relate the capability approach to the development projects, in an inclusive, participatory manner. Section 3.4 details the use of the focus
group technique as the preferred method for the data collection of this research project, elaborating on its use and the specifics of this project. Section 3.5 outlines the essential steps for this kind of methodology; in section 3.6, the planning stage of the research project is described, specifically the selection of the development project to be studied, as well as the recruiting of the participants. Section 3.7 is an outline of the topics considered for inclusion in the moderation guide and questions list for the focus group; followed in section 3.8 by the moderation guide and question list, including the rationale behind each of them. Section 3.9 explains the procedure of focus groups moderation. Finally, section 3.10 details the analysis of the data and reporting of findings, with section 3.11 presenting the conclusion to the chapter.

3.1.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research project is to discover whether Sen’s CA framework can be applied to a case study in Honduras, consisting of a development project currently being implemented; and whether the capabilities identified with the methodology used would match the criteria developed by authors such as Sen, Nussbaum, Alkire and others.

Additionally, this research project aims to produce new knowledge in the debate concerning the universal or self-determined nature of the sets of capabilities, with particular attention to an application to development initiatives.

3.1.2 Research Questions

To study the application of the CA to development projects, the following research questions were defined:

1. Can participants identify and discuss new capabilities they have learned or discovered while participating in the development project?

2. Are the participants already using any of their capabilities to achieve new functionings or capabilities, or planning to do so?
3. Are there any common valued capabilities for all of the stakeholders of the development project?

4. Are there any significant differences between the capabilities as they are valued by the participants and the expectations of the other stakeholders?

3.2 The use of qualitative research methods

“For programs engaged in healing, transformation, and prevention, the best source and form of information are client stories. It is through these stories that we discover how program staff interact with clients, with other service providers, and with family and friends of their clients to contribute to outcomes, and how the clients, themselves, grow and change in response to program inputs and other forces and factors in their lives. There is a richness here that numbers alone cannot capture…”

(Kibell 1999:13, as cited in Patton, 2002).

The traditional methods for assessing poverty levels as well as the methods for project design as well as evaluation of its impact, through the use of quantitative measurements of income or consumption in the case of poverty, or the amount of goods provided or income generated in the case of project results, has been shown to have many limitations from a theoretical point of view. But the practicality of implementing this approach also has important operational limitations, but beyond these are also other considerations, particularly for smaller entities like NGOs or community based organizations. The quantitative measurement of progress requires the use of tools such as surveys, which in turn need a significant commitment in terms of resources, particularly financial as well as of number and capacity of trained personnel. Many smaller NGOs do not have sufficient resources to undertake the expensive use of quantitative tools in the different stages of a project’s cycle, nor the time or trained personnel required for these tasks. Considering these limitations, a methodology for design and evaluation using qualitative tools is an option that would provide affordability and still provide a small organization the
information necessary to determine if the progress and work done at any particular stage of a project cycle is having the required results and meeting the project’s design goals.

The use of quantitative indicators has also been criticised traditionally for the analysis of social policy and related actions. Veenhoven (2001) argues for the use of subjective indicators for the following reasons:

a) Social policy (and its implementation) is not limited to material matters; it is also aimed at matters of mentality, and as such, these substantially subjective goals require subjective indicators.

b) Progress in material goals cannot always be measured objectively, providing opportunity for supplementing with subjective measurements.

c) Inclusive measurement is problematic with objective substance. Using subjective satisfaction as identified by the individuals better indicates the definition of quality of life.

d) In the case of social policies, objective indicators do not completely inform policy makers about public preferences, leaving room for additional information from opinion polls and similar instruments of survey. This is also true in smaller settings such as development programmes.

e) There is the need to distinguish between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’. Needs are not observable as such, but their gratification materialises in the length and happiness of peoples’ lives. This final output criterion requires assessment of subjective appreciation of life as a whole.

These criteria, though intended for policy makers, can also be applied not only by them, but also by other decision makers, such as staff from development organizations on their initiatives.
3.3 Capabilities-based participatory analysis for development initiatives

A method of project evaluation based on the Capabilities approach has the aim of having the minimum possible impact on its beneficiaries, while giving insight about their capabilities, particularly as they perceive that these have been enhanced by their participation in the project. “The fulfilment of these capabilities could then be monitored on an ongoing basis by the funding agencies and thereby become the metric by which the development initiatives could be appraised” (Schischka, 2005, p. 64).

Any given development project would have different stages in its project cycle. Long (2001, p. 64) describes this project cycle as “…the period of time during which a project is first formulated, then designed, negotiated with recipient authorities, implemented, monitored and evaluated.” Any of the stages of the project cycle could be evaluated, but ideally, this should be done in a participatory manner. As noted by Feeney (2004:144, as cited in Schischka, 2005, p. 64):

“It is vital to conduct participatory poverty assessments, social assessments and stakeholder analyses as the first steps in any intervention. These findings should then inform policy, shape priorities, and determine appropriate mechanisms…With indigenous tribal, or ethnically distinct populations, culturally appropriate plans should be based on a consideration of the options preferred by the beneficiaries or affected groups”.

The focus on discovering the capabilities that the participants of a development project gained, or that they themselves discovered they already had, is an ideal indication of the success of a development project. The main goal of any project is to improve the lives of its beneficiaries, and the increase or discovery of existing capabilities will almost certainly result in this increase of welfare.
3.4 The use of focus groups for data collection

Due to the underlying idea of the Capability Approach, and in support of the idea of participation as a basis for project design, implementation and evaluation, the methodology for a capability-based project design and evaluation should consist of focus groups as well as individual interviews done in a participatory manner, with flexibility of time and questions to enable the full participation and commentaries from the participants regarding the effects of the project implementation on their capabilities and human development. This method of data collection is less extractive than a conventional survey method and allows for the full participation and ownership of the information by all the stakeholders.

The reason for interviewing is to allow the researcher to enter into the other person’s perspective, to learn their stories and what is in their minds (Patton, M. 2002, p. 341). Patton also gives the example that in programme evaluation interviews, the aim is to capture the perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders, and the look and feel of the programme to those involved in it. The interviews are also ideal to learn about expectations and the changes perceived by the participants due to their involvement in a given programme. For this, a framework must be created in which the participants can respond with comfort, honesty and accuracy to any questions by the interviewer.

The selection of the geographical area of the project to be studied allows for the interviews to be conducted in the language of the project beneficiaries (Spanish), so this would allow easier and more direct interaction between the participants and the moderator/interviewer.

Ideally most of the interviews should be performed without the participation of the Funding Agency personnel with the aim of increasing the reliability and objectivity of the opinions and comments of participants, particularly on issues related to the Funding Agency. On the other hand, due to their knowledge of the projects and its beneficiaries, the participation in some of the meetings of the Funding Agency personnel as facilitators can help in the interaction between the researcher and the people interviewed. Previous experiences in the application of this methodology have shown that even in the presence
of field workers from Funding Agencies, the objectivity can be maintained during the interviews (Schischka, 2005, p.94).

Due to the size of the selected project for this study and the number of its beneficiaries, not all of the beneficiaries could be interviewed or able to participate in the focus groups sessions. The participants in the sessions were selected to represent all the beneficiaries, to enable to obtain insights of the participation in the project and of the distribution of its benefits, and enable all people, to be able to voice their opinions and concerns about the projects and its effects on the expansion of their capabilities.

The focus groups and interviews were recorded and notes were taken to facilitate the analysis of the data obtained. The results of this analysis are intended to be shared back to the stakeholders of the project to maintain the participatory nature of the methodology and to allow them to maintain ownership of and take advantage of the findings derived from this study. The information obtained was also supplemented by documents about the project analysed. Project design documents as well as progress reports were considered alongside the information obtained from the participants and the project personnel; as well as any observation made about interactions, agreements or disagreements between individuals.

For the design of the interview, the interview guide approach was used. For this approach, a list of the questions or issues to be explored is made. Then, the interview guide is prepared to ensure that these questions and issues remain within the same lines between the different interviewing sessions. According to Patton (2002, p.343), “the interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined”.

This approach to interviewing is selected as it maintains a certain degree of structure to enable good use of time available for interviews. As the goal of the data collection for this research project was to avoid any interference to the daily activities of the project explored, this method helped to make the best use of the time available while also
maintaining flexibility to explore individual perspectives and experiences in a focused manner.

The guiding questions for the focus group interviews focused on answering the research questions of this research project. For this, the types of questions considered were, in no particular order, of the following kinds (Patton, 2002 p.348-353):

*Experience and behaviour questions*, which focused on the experiences of the project’s participants, both before and during their involvement in the project.

*Opinion and values questions*: These questions focus on what people think of any given experience or issue, in this case, their participation in the project and the resulting outcomes.

*Feeling questions*: These types of questions aim to elicit emotions and to reveal them to the interviewer. The results should show any change in the feelings about self or about the situation in which the people interviewed live.

*Background/demographic questions*: These are standard questions for identifying the characteristics of the people being interviewed. Learning about age, education, occupation among other things help locate the respondents in a certain group or in relation with other people.

In order to be able to judge the success of development projects using techniques such as focus groups, the development organizations have to allow scope for the participants of the projects to express their opinions in their own words (Schischka, 2005, p.71). Chambers (1997, p.162, as cited by Schischka, 2005, p.71) states that “The values and preferences of poor local people typically contrast with those of better off outsiders and professionals”. It is the latter who usually assess the progress and success of the projects set up to help the poor.
3.5 Stages of the study

The stages of the methodology used were based on Schischka (2005, p. 68), with tailoring to suit the objectives of this research project. The five essential steps outlined by Morgan (1998) are: Planning the process; developing the discussion guide; recruiting the individuals who will participate in the focus groups; the moderation of the focus groups; and the analysis of the data collected and reporting of the findings.

3.6 Selection of project and recruiting of participants

The primary data source for this research was obtained through the study of an international development project. The selection of this project was based on the criteria of it being of a manageable small scale (micro-project); it is backed by a well established development aid organization or by the government; and most importantly, having a participatory focus with objectives compatible with the Capability Approach.

Considering the criteria for selection of the development project and methodology of the research, consisting in the evaluation the project and the direct interaction with its stakeholders, the development project used for this research project is implemented by “Libre Expresión”, a NGO supported on different projects by organisations such as the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Organisation, the Ministry of Culture, and more recently by the European Union. The organisation has the objective of increasing awareness on topics such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), cultural diversity, and political participation on the city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

The project observed is the “Education for Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods’ Youth Project”, and it focuses on providing courses in English language, Computer Skills and Visual (graphic) Media (VM) to young adults from low-income neighbourhoods of the city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The courses are repeated regularly, with duration of each ranging from 6 to 8 months, each time with a new group of beneficiaries. The activities of the project range from small business management training to photography workshops.
to foster social interaction and increase awareness on topics such as political participation.

During the initial stages of the research project, communications were carried out with the personnel of the NGO who would be the counterpart in Honduras. Communications were by email and phone, and finally a meeting with the Director of the NGO before the start of the focus group sessions. These communications helped make the arrangements regarding the number, dates and duration of the focus group sessions, as well as the methodology for conducting the sessions and the target number of participants.

### 3.6.1 Details about the focus groups

The focus groups consisted of semi-structured interviews with groups composed by the participants of the project studied. These sessions were moderated by the researcher based on the guiding points (section 3.8). The semi-structured nature of the focus group technique means the sessions are conducted as a conversation, where the participants felt free to comment and share their experiences and thoughts as they saw fit. Other than keeping the conversation within the basic guiding points, and facilitate the participation by everyone, including the less vocal members of the group, the moderator (researcher) avoided intervening or influencing the focus group.

The numbers of participants were kept small, with numbers from five to ten; or up to twenty participants, to facilitate participation and the expression of opinions. The groups were normally separated according to the course they were taking, either English language, computer skills or Visual Media; but on occasions to different group were present on the same focus group session.

The focus group sessions were conducted during the normal hours in which the participants of the project participate in the project’s activities, with the intention of avoiding any inconvenience to the participants’ daily schedules. The duration of each session had a scheduled duration of one hour, but with care of not limiting the opportunities of participation; this meant that if there was abundant participation by the participants, the duration of sessions were in some cases extended with their approval.
Notes were taken and the sessions were recorded to facilitate the review and analysis of the information. The participants were informed about the recording of the sessions, as well as of other considerations following the requirements of the University Human Ethics Committee. The detail of the groups as they were interviewed, as well as the comments and findings resulting from the sessions are outlined in chapter 4 and further discussed in section 5.2

3.7 Topics considered for the interview as Guiding points and questions

Before drafting the guide and questions to be used for the focus group sessions, as described in the next section; it was necessary to consider possible topics and possible responses to these topics from the participants. The example of Schischka (2005), but especially of Patton’s (2002, p.345) example of an evaluation interview guide for participants in an employment training programme served as a model, then it was tailored for the purposes of this research project. This is detailed as follows:

a) Demographics of the participants

Names (Given only, for moderation purposes only); age; backgrounds in family, education, life in general.

b) What has the participant done in the program?

Any activities, experiences and groups they have been a part of.

c) Achievements?

Skills obtained; outcomes achieved; knowledge gained; things completed.

d) How has a participant been affected by their participation in the project?

Feelings about self and about the project they have been a part of; interpersonal skills.
e) **What aspects of the project had the greatest impact on the participants?**

   The courses themselves; relationships with staff; relationships among peers; the way treated in the project; any other experiences.

f) **What do the participants think of the following categories, and their possible impact on their lives?**

   Country situation related to: Work; education; health; politics; society; crime rates.

g) **Plans for the future?**

   Work plans; study plans; lifestyle expectations/plans

h) **What does the participant think of the project?**

   Strengths/weaknesses; things liked/disliked; things that should be changed.

### 3.8 Guiding points and questions for the Focus Group interviews

The questions as well as the guiding points used in the moderation of the focus group sessions are detailed as follows:

*Introduction and explanation to the potential participants the details of this research project, what would their participation involved, the type of data collected and the way it would be used.*

The starting point of the focus group sessions was meant to provide the opportunity for all participants to become familiar with the idea behind the interview and make sure they understood the details of their participation before deciding to take part in the session. After the agreement to participate, a brief casual conversation helped “break the ice” so the actual questions and guiding points could be discussed. The guiding questions are as follows:
1. When and why did the participants become involved with the group (development project)? What was their life like before joining?

This first question was made following the introduction, and was formulated as a continuation of the casual talk started before. The first part of the question was designed to provide an insight to the motivations and aspirations of the project’s participants. This question also served to explore the demographics of the participants. As they elaborated about the second part of the question, the participants, as expected, gave details such as their approximate age, occupation, education as well as an approximation of their family income levels and livelihoods.

2. Ask about what were the participants’ expectations when joining the development project group; trying to maintain the focus on the choices and opportunities the participants had before joining and expectations for their involvement with the group.

This was meant to be a continuation of the first question and to provide additional focus on any capabilities the participants had already identified in themselves and the initiative they had in achieving any functionings. Would the participants state that they already knew what their abilities were; and were they trying to build on them to further expand their capabilities? Or would they only be participating by chance in the project, with uncertainty as to what outcome would result from their participation?

Special care was taken to minimise the use of academic terms such as ‘capabilities’ and ‘functionings’, asking instead about ‘opportunities’ or ‘abilities’ in order to ensure a good understanding by the participants. This question was open ended, and the participants would frequently refer to their past experiences, and how they felt these experiences would limit or increase their choices for present and future plans.

3. Ask if the participants think their involvement with the group has changed their knowledge about the choices they now have; what they are capable of and what can they achieve on their own.
This was considered the most important question of the focus group sessions, together with the next one. Abundance of time was given for each participant to elaborate as much as they wanted on their commentaries, and there was more interaction with them than in any other question, with the objective of getting a more detailed panorama of their perceptions and how they recognised or not the changes in their capabilities as a result of their involvement with the development project. Many of the participants gave elaborate comments about how they felt the project had changed them and mentioned their future plans and the level of influence of their experience with the project in those plans.

As part of the design of the question, a reminder for the observation during the session and for the following analysis was made to note any dependence or independence gained from project participation in their future expectations and plans. When considering this question and anticipating possible answers by the participants, the question of whether any new capabilities or functionings obtained on their experience with the project would condition any future plans. The results of this were mixed and are further discussed in the next chapters.

4. Extending on the last point, try to guide the conversation on identifying any capabilities on the following categories: Education skills; Health; Social interaction with community/peers; change in perception of status/self-confidence; income/finance or any other category mentioned by the participants of the focus groups.

As a supplement to the previous question, the participants were encouraged to comment about their opinions about categories that were considered to be the most likely affected by the project. It was expected that the participants would give their opinion about these topics and then follow up with their perceptions about how their involvement with the project had changed their capabilities.

In relation to these topics, the participants did elaborate considerably on their opinions, though not so much on the perception of the relation of these topics with their capabilities or functionings. Still, this information helps build and understand better the participants of these focus group sessions.
5. Ask for any additional questions or comments. Give an opportunity to reflect and voice their opinion about this focus group process.

This question intended to allow the participants to give any feedback about the focus group session, and to further express any opinion they felt they wanted to share. It was considered important to let the participants express their opinion and voice any opinion or concern they might have related to this data collection procedure.

6. Summarise, give thanks and finish the session.

The interviewer would make a brief summary of the points mentioned during the focus group session and give thanks to the participants. Another reminder to the participants about the handling and use of the data collected was made, followed by giving thanks for the participation in the focus group.

3.9 Moderation of the focus groups

The moderation of the focus groups is an essential part of the data collection. A good moderation is necessary to incite the participants to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions.

The methodology used for this research project was intended to be participatory. As Schischka (2005, p.79) noted, “the emphasis in participatory analysis is to empower the individuals involved. The process should be to enable participants to ‘find out’ and ‘reflect and analyse their own experience’...The moderator is the facilitator of this process in the group”.

A key issue of the moderation is the perception that the participants have about the moderator. It is essential that the moderator is perceived as neutral and open or understanding of any and all of the opinions expressed by the participants of an interview or focus groups; only then will the participants will feel comfortable enough to express
their opinions completely and in confidence, providing the full range of information that
the researcher requires.

To establish the integrity of the moderator at the initial stages of the fieldwork is
essential, as written by Chambers (1997, p.134; as cited in Schischka, 2005, p.80):

“Early actions by outsiders can include transparent honesty about who they are and what
they are doing; and participation in local activities, especially being taught and
performing local tasks. Personal demeanour counts, showing humility, respect, patience
and showing interest in what people have to say and show, wandering around and not
rushing; and paying attention, listening, watching and not interrupting.”

Patton (2002, p.331) gives some of the guidelines used on this research project for
conducting the interviews and focus groups. The most relevant are: First, the interviewer
should build rapport at the entry stage, and has to remember that the observation is
being done both ways. Also important is to pay attention to relationships and the way
these change throughout the fieldwork; maintain the discipline in taking detailed field
notes at all the stages of the fieldwork. Finally, it is important to separate description
from interpretation and judgement; and consider and report how the observations made
may have affected the observed, as well as how the researcher may have been affected
by the participation and observation.

The aim for the fieldwork was that the focus groups would be performed without the
participation of the Funding Agency personnel with the aim of increasing the reliability
and objectivity of the opinions and comments of participants, particularly on issues
related to the Funding Agency. On the other hand, due to their knowledge of the projects
and its beneficiaries, the participation in some of the meetings of the Funding Agency
personnel as facilitators can help in the interaction between the researcher and the
people interviewed. Previous experiences in the application of this methodology have
shown that even in the presence of field workers from Funding Agencies, the objectivity
can be maintained during the interviews (Schischka, 2005, p.94). At the focus groups
sessions, the best approach was considered to be an initial intervention by project staff to
introduce the researcher to the participants, to explain the process of interviewing and
allow the building of confidence, so that later the researcher could moderate without the participation of the project staff.

### 3.10 Analysis and reporting

The analysis of the information was organised in a way that illuminates the key issues related to the topic of the use of the Capability Approach to evaluate if the project is resulting in positive outcomes for its beneficiaries. For the organisation and analysis of data, computer software (Nvivo) was used to facilitate the coding, linking and structuring of data. All the findings from this process were then compared to the theory derived from the literature review in order to draw the final conclusions of the research.

This study followed the methodology developed by Schischka (2005), which in turn followed the ‘nine ingredients’ of qualitative analysis outlined by Krueger (1998, p.9, as cited by Schischka, 2005):

- **a) Analysis must be systematic**

  The entire methodology was set up in an analytical manner, from the formulation of the questions and guiding points for moderation, to the moderation of the focus groups itself. Every focus group session was recorded and notes were taken to create transcriptions that could then be analysed. The analysis was facilitated by the use of software (Nvivo) to code, and also to identify themes recurrent in the data obtained.

  Schischka (2005, p.82) argued against the use of computer packages, as “the aim of this study was to come up with a metric that could be easily used by a variety of participants and practitioners in development and poverty alleviation programmes. It was considered that these people would not necessarily have access to such programmes”. In the case of this research project, which focuses more on identifying capabilities and comparing the results with previous literature, the use software was used to facilitate the analysis. Schischka demonstrated that if necessary, this procedure can be avoided depending on the resources available. What was replicated from Schischka (2005, p.83) was the main objective of the analysis: “The main task in
the coding of this case study was to identify distinct functionings and capabilities that the participants felt had developed for them during the course of their participation in the programmes. What was important was that participants and the field staff or supervisors would be easily able to identify the choices that had developed”.

b) **Analysis must be verifiable**

The support for the analysis, such as the audio recordings and notes taken can help on verification of the analysis. The participants were asked to confirm their statements at the end of each session, when a summary was made at the end of each focus group session; this allowed checking if their opinions and ideas were recorded correctly.

c) **Analysis requires time**

The analysis started as soon after the focus group sessions had taken place, so any learning could be used in following sessions. The analysis also continued long afterwards the data collection period.

d) **Analysis is jeopardised by delay**

Delays were avoided, as even though there were records of the sessions, the ideas and other thoughts could be ‘lost’ if not subjected to analysis soon after the data collection period.

e) **Analysis should seek to enlighten**

This is an essential end of any research, but this project also meant to strengthen the discoveries and learning of its subjects, by asking them to voice their thoughts about their involvement with the development project and the resulting outcomes.

f) **Analysis should entertain alternative explanations**

Much thought was given to the statements made by the participants of the focus groups, and all the possible explanations for the outcomes of their participation in the project.
g) Analysis is improved by feedback

During the focus group sessions, an immediate feedback was received by the participants as this was designed for the guiding points for the moderation. Unfortunately the resources of this research project would not allow follow up of the participants long after the data collection period. Additional feedback was received from project staff after the data collection period. Finally, as any other academic research project, feedback was received by peers and supervisors, through discussions, reviews and presentation of results.

h) Analysis is a process of comparison

One of the objectives of this research project was to compare the results with other literature that focused on this topic, in order to validate the theories used as basis for the research.

i) Analysis is situationally responsive

As Schischka (2005, p.84) noted: “The dynamic nature of the qualitative research such as these focus groups required the researcher to be continuously reappraising the technique used and their suitability in the different situations”.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodological framework used for this research project, specifically, the use of focus groups as a qualitative research tool for the evaluation of a development project based on the theory established by Sen’s Capabilities Approach; identifying the capabilities of the project’s participants. This methodology uses many of the ideas and procedures established in previous literature, as one of the objectives of this research project is to compare results and confirm the use of this methodology for the above mentioned purpose. The next two chapters present the findings of the focus group sessions and the discussion of these findings in the context of the literature on the topic of the Capability Approach.
Chapter 4
Findings from the focus groups

4.1 Introduction

During the focus group sessions with each of the groups of the Libre Expresión’s (LE) Education for Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods’ Youth Project, the participants all agreed that their involvement with the project has increased their opportunities or capabilities, and it has resulted, or will eventually result, in positive outcomes for them. The capabilities or choices identified by the participants are discussed below.

This chapter contains the details of the findings from the groups interviewed, describing how the participants perceive that their participation in the development project have expanded their capabilities and essentially increased their choices and possibilities for their future plans. This chapter focuses on presenting and describing all the issues raised and discussed in the focus group sessions; the following chapter presents the analysis, discussion and implications of these findings related to the objectives and questions of this research project. The capabilities identified during the focus group sessions are detailed as follows:

4.2 Ability to learn a new skill

Due to the focus of the project, the most commonly identified capability was the ability to learn a new skill, which in the case of English language skills, and computer skills especially, are highly valued by Honduran society and the labour markets respectively.

Three different kinds of groups were interviewed, corresponding to courses in English language, Computer Skills and Visual (graphic) Media (VM). All three kinds of groups had a high degree of satisfaction with the fact that they learning a new skill. The groups of Visual Media and Computer Skills expressed that they were satisfied with the fact that
they were learning by doing, for example by learning to take and edit photographs in the case of the VM group, or by utilising the computer in the case of the other group.

The members of the English Language group in particular, but also the Computer Skills group showed confidence that the skills they were learning would eventually result in increased employment choices and wages. The participants felt they had achieved an additional qualification, which they were proud to include in their curriculum vitae. These two skills that the courses provided them are still uncommon in the workforce of Honduras, but they are increasingly becoming a requisite, or at least an advantage to have, for office-related work, especially the computer skills. Having English language fluency also opens the possibility of applying for higher paying jobs.

While most of the participants joined the project because of the recommendation of counsellors from a different project or by their peers, some of the participants expressed that they joined the project because they had a high interest in learning the skills offered by the courses, as they already had plans to use those skills as a preparation for enrolling in higher education, pursuing career paths in fields such as Graphic Design, Information Technology or Foreign Languages. This finding revealed that some of the participants had a consciousness of their capabilities before becoming participants of the project, and they were taking advantage of the courses and the skills these provided to further develop their functionings.

“Yo vine porque pensé que recibir los cursos me iba a servir para la carrera que estoy estudiando. Yo estudio diseño gráfico y pensé que aprender sobre fotografía y lo que enseñan aquí sobre arte y cosas visuales me serviría para mi carrera...O sea, yo ya venía con la idea de que podía aprender, y que esto me iba a ser muy útil después para algunas clases que voy a tomar en la universidad...también la experiencia para después trabajar”.

“I came here because I thought that the lessons would be of use to me because of the studies I’m doing in the university. I study Graphic Design and I thought that learning about photography and the things taught here about art and visual media would be useful to me for my career...I mean, I already came here with the idea that I was able to learn these things, and that this was going to be very useful later for some of the courses I will be taking (later) in the University...also the experience I get for working later”.
4.2.1 Skills learned by the participants of Libre Expresión’s project

The most obvious and basic functioning obtained by the participants is the skill itself that is provided by the courses taken. This was the objective of the development project and of the participants when they decided to enrol for the course. These skills are English language; computer skills and Visual Media. Each participant made a decision about which of this courses he or she would enrol in, depending on their individual preferences, aspirations and guidance or recommendations of their peers, family or other development professionals with whom each of the participants had contact prior to deciding to enrol in any particular course.

Not all of the enrolled participants ultimately achieved the skills provided by the courses, as some decided to drop out of the courses and not finish. Usually, abandoning of any course occurred at the early stages of the courses, and the main reason for withdrawing, according to project staff, was the lack of confidence about the personal capacity to successfully undertake the study required for the course. This is further discussed in the following chapter.

The skill provided by the courses is the main reason for joining the project and it is also the starting point on which other functionings and capabilities became apparent in the context of this development project. These are outlined in the following sections and discussed in the following chapter.

4.3 Increase in self confidence

The beneficiaries of the studied development project are young people from low income sectors of society. The majority of them are daughters or sons of single mothers and/or with large families. A common occupation for the mothers of the participants is to run a small shack at the local market. The students attend the public schools of the city, which have a series of problems and arguably do not provide the same standard of education as
many of the private alternatives. Because of these and other factors, the participants of the development project usually are at a disadvantage in terms of education and opportunities or choices to use their full potential. Some of them struggled to enter higher education, and a few failed the admission exams, reducing their self-confidence and having a setback in their professional aspirations. When confronted by this perceived failure, these participants felt disoriented as to what their plans should be now, mentioning that they were looking for jobs as a sort of transition while they figured out if they should attempt university admission again, or if they should focus on making a career that did not involve higher education.

“Se siente bien saber que uno tiene la capacidad de aprender un nuevo lenguaje. Porque es algo que se valora aquí, si la gente sabe que uno habla inglés, eso le da un cierto…la gente le reconoce a uno que es bilingüe…”

“It feels good to know that I was able, that I had the capacity to learn a new language. Because this is something that is valued here, if people knows that I can speak English, that gives me a certain…people gives recognition to someone that is bilingual”.

“…y uno se siente bien pensando que puedo hablar con alguien que viene de afuera, o tal vez yo me podría ir a los Estados y poder hablar allá…entonces uno se siente bien en su interior de saber que tengo la capacidad de aprender este idioma, porque no es fácil y hay gente que piensa que es muy difícil y que no podrían aprender; pero yo si pude, aunque me costó un poquito”.

“…and one feels well knowing that I can talk to someone that comes from overseas, or maybe I could go to the United States and be able to talk there…then I feel well knowing that I have the capacity to learn this language, as it’s not easy to learn and there’s people that thinks that it’s too hard and that they could not learn; but I was able to learn it, even though I struggled a bit”.

During the focus groups discussions, the participants talked about an increase in their self-confidence, which they attributed to their participation in the project, specifically to their successful completion of the course taken. Some related about how before their
involvement with the project, they had tried to gain admission to the university right after completing secondary school, but failed the required exam of admission, and how this setback caused many of them to feel insecure of their skills and their ability to continue to higher education. After taking part of and nearing a successful completion of one of the courses offered by LE, many commented about how they felt an increased sense of achievement, and that with this empowerment, they were considering sitting the admission exams again in order to be able to gain entrance to university and get a higher education degree.

“Yo hice el examen de admisión de la universidad y no pase. Quería estudiar enfermería y entonces no pude entrar...pero ahora me dan ganas de volver a probar a ver si puedo esta vez...Me gustaría poder estudiar informática, me gustó mucho lo que aprendí en este curso”.

“I sat the admission exam for the University and I failed. I wanted to study to be a nurse, but then I could not gain entrance...but I feel like I would like to try again maybe this time I'm successful...this time I would try to study Computing, I enjoyed a lot what I learned in these lessons”.

In the focus group session with the computer skills course students, the discussion revealed an interesting capability discovered by the students. After finishing the computer course, many participants expressed that they wanted to enrol in a university to gain formal qualifications in computer-related areas, as they gained a significant interest in this area due to their participation in LE’s project. Interestingly, another group of students also felt empowered to pursue university entrance in order to gain formal qualifications, but as their self-confidence was increased by their success in the computer course, they expressed their desire to study in areas of education such as nursing or human resources, which are unrelated to the computer skills gained in the courses they had just taken. This shows a significant capability: the self-confidence resulting from their participation in the education projects. This sense of accomplishment by the participants, and the subsequent realization of their capability to undertake higher education is one of the most significant outcomes of the education project.
The participants of the computer skills courses expressed that in the public school system, which they attended, there are no computer courses offered, and that some of them, as well as some of their school peers would not know even the most basic computer skills, such as turning the power on for a computer. This lack of computer skills at the point of finishing secondary school meant that the successful completion of the computer courses provided by LE increased even more their sense of achievement, which resulted in a considerable empowerment gained, and that gave them the determination to try for a second time to gain university entrance.

In the case of the English language courses students, they also had a similar increase in self-confidence like it was reported by the Computer skills participants, but it was in a different manner. The English language courses participants do not share the self-confidence oriented drive to improve their professional career, as much as they expressed an increase in their personal sense of achievement. English language is valued by Honduran society not only as a skill required in a globalised world, but rather as personal accomplishment. The participants mentioned that they felt proud that they learnt a new language, and that now they could do things such as travel and communicate with the people abroad, and also talk to the foreigners visiting the country. This was mentioned as something of high personal value by the participants.

“Yo me gradué de perito el año pasado pero me gustaría estudiar lenguas extranjeras, entonces en el proyecto de “Alternativas” me dijeron de estos cursos y que me iban a servir para ir mejor preparada si quería estudiar lenguas…entonces pensé que era una buena idea y me inscribí para recibir los cursos de inglés”.

“I graduated last year from High School and I would like to have a career in foreign languages, so in the project “Alternativas”, I was told about these English lessons and that they may be useful to prepare myself if I wanted to do the foreign languages…so I thought that it was a good idea and I enrolled to receive the lessons”.

As expected, there is also a sense of value of the English language skills for professional purposes, and there is a case of a participant mentioning that this course was for her a preparation for her plans to study the Foreign Languages programme at university. As
detailed in the following section, the participants also felt that the English language skills would enhance their marketability when applying for a job.

Together with the increase in self-confidence, the participants of the project had an increased optimism. A common theme during the focus group sessions was the criminality that is common in the country, and how the participants are exposed more than others to it, on a daily basis, as they have residence in low-income neighbourhoods. The opportunity to get an education and additional skills, and the increase in self-confidence and self-esteem facilitated by the learning, they argued, changed them “in a good manner” and they believed that if more people had the opportunity to participate in these programmes, the problem of criminality and the poverty underlying it could be mitigated.

4.4 Increased employment opportunities

During the focus group discussions it was mentioned by some of the participants that one of the main reasons for joining the project’s courses was to increase their employment opportunities. Many of them at the time of joining were trying to get a job, either as an alternative or supplement to starting higher education. Most of the jobs the students were looking for are junior administrative work, such as accounting assistants; this is because secondary school specialisation in accounting/commerce is a common education path for many students in Honduras.

“Yo en mi caso pienso que poder hablar otro idioma, especialmente inglés me va a servir mucho para poder conseguir un trabajo. Cuando aplique puedo poner en mi curriculum que tome cursos de inglés y eso es algo que se valora por la gente que lo entrevista a uno”.

“I reckon that in my case, being able to speak a foreign language, especially English, is something that will be very useful for me to be able to get a job. When applying, I can write in my Curriculum Vitae that I took English lessons and that is something that the people that does the [job applicant’s] interviewing would value about me”.

46
The participants expressed that they observed that the skills being provided by LE’s project were highly valued in the labour market, especially the computer skills, followed by English skills. A few of the participants noted that since a few years, modernisation of administrative work was extending even to small businesses and organizations, and that even though in school they had learned to do accounting and related tasks “by hand”, many businesses were already using computers with software programs for doing those same tasks. Other participants noted that they especially valued the skills learned in software such as Microsoft Office, because it had now become a “must-have” skill for applying to virtually any office-related work.

The participants of the English language courses also had a sense of a potential advantage provided by the courses for job-seeking purposes, though not as much as the Computer Skills group. The participants expressed that if their curriculum vitae showed that they had foreign language skills, it would be an advantage or maybe even a deciding factor for getting a job, according to some of the participants. When asked about the particular kind of job that would require the language skills, the participants expressed that in their opinion, any job could benefit, even though anecdotal information from other sources and a brief scan of labour market advertisements during the data collection period showed that at that moment, few jobs have a foreign language skill requirement, but certainly in the near future this could change. This idea of an advantage is related to the increased self-confidence that the successful completion of the courses gave to the participants.
4.5 Access to information and technology

“A mí me gusto mucho lo que aprendí en este curso, porque ahora me puedo comunicar con mi familia que vive fuera del país por medio de correo electrónico, porque aprendí como abrir una cuenta…antes no tenía pero ahora me puedo poner en contacto con ellos”.

“I liked what I learned in this course, because now I can communicate with my family members that are living outside the country by email, because I learned how to open an account…before I didn’t have one but now I can get in touch with them”.

In addition to the advantages of getting computer skills, the participants of that group expressed their satisfaction on learning how to take advantage of information technologies such as the Internet. Many of the participants commented that before getting involved with the project, they did not have an email account or accessed the internet regularly. They mentioned that the lack of internet access was mainly due to the difficulties they had before to navigate through web sites or use search engines. These participants later learned to open an e-mail account and use search engines to look for information. At this point, they related how they quickly grasped the potential of this new ability; initially they realised they could keep in touch with relatives living overseas via email or by using social networking sites. The participants also expressed that later they realised they could also use this new skill to search for information that could be beneficial for them in both short and long term. The uses they commonly thought about were related to getting and using information for study purposes, or to look for job opportunities.

“Si, yo pienso que esto me sería muy útil, porque ahora puedo encontrar información para hacer trabajos de la ‘U’, y pienso que también podría buscar otra información que me podría ser útil en el futuro, como buscar trabajo y cosas así”.

“Yes, I think that this is going to be very useful for me, as now I can find information to do assignments, and I think that I could also search for other information useful for me, like jobs and things like that”.

48
4.6 Social relations and volunteering example

The participants of the development project, regardless of the course in which they took part, expressed that they learned more than they expected, and some even compared the courses with the lessons they got, if any, from the schools or private providers’ courses they attended previously, and their opinion always favoured the current courses. When asked why they considered that they had better results in this occasion, the participants unanimously attributed their success to the dedication of the instructors, and the quality of the personal relations between instructors and students, and also between peers.

“Este es mejor...porque en los otros solo le dan a uno la clase y ya estuvo, en cambio aquí los maestros se toman el tiempo y son más dedicados, entonces por eso yo aprendí más aquí…aunque al principio se sentía que era un poquito desordenado, pero después mejor y yo siento que aprendí bastante aquí”.

“This one is better...because in the other [external courses] they only give the lesson and that’s it, but here the teachers take time and are more dedicated, that’s why I learned more here...even though at the beginning [the courses] were a bit disorganized, but after a while it improved and I feel I learned a lot here”.

Most of the instructors participating in the projects are volunteers, and the students expressed admiration about the initiative taken, the time given, and the effort made by these volunteers in order to contribute to improve the welfare of other people. They expressed that they felt they were given an important example of contribution to the community, and to Honduran society in general, and that they would like in the future to volunteer, or contribute in other ways, to development projects or similar initiatives to the ones they have benefited from.
The participants’ desire to follow the examples of the volunteers could result in a future provision of help or sharing of experiences by the project’s participants with new generations of beneficiaries of development projects.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the focus groups with the participants of Libre Expresión’s development programme. These sessions were prepared as the main methodological tool to identify the capabilities and functionings of the participants and serves as the basis for the analysis and discussion presented in the following chapter.

From the data obtained from the focus groups sessions, it is evident that the participants of the development project had a clear consciousness of their goals and expectations before becoming involved with the project by enrolling on the courses. However, many other capabilities and functionings were discovered and identified that resulted from participation in the project, like the newfound discovery of the implications of access to information and its related technologies. The next chapter provides a discussion and implications derived from these findings.
Chapter 5
Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The last chapter summarised the findings from the focus groups, as stated by the participants in the development project. This chapter provides analysis and further discussion of these findings, beginning in section 5.2 with the identification of the capabilities, including how they emphasized some capabilities over others, which was used to assign a value to each capability, according to group. Section 5.3 elaborates on how these capabilities are being used, or planned to be used by the beneficiaries of the project. Section 5.4 provides a discussion about the capabilities as valued by different stakeholders, including section 5.4.1 detailing any differences in the values of each capability given by the individual stakeholders; and a discussion in section 5.4.2 about factors, whether exogenous or endogenous that influenced the value the stakeholders placed in the capabilities identified. Section 5.4.3 discusses about the capabilities identified and how these results can support the sides of the debate on whether there is a universal set of capabilities or if there’s an individual context that establishes a set of capabilities that is unique to each individual or group. In section 5.5 there is a discussion of the limitations of the methodology used for this research project as well as suggestions for future research on how to expand on this work. Section 5.6 presents a discussion of the implications of this research project and its results. Finally, section 5.7 gives concluding remarks.
5.2 Identification of the capabilities of the beneficiaries of Libre Expresión’s development project

During the focus group sessions with the participants of the courses provided by Libre Expresión’s (LE) project, there were many references to the capabilities and functionings, some of these were expected by the participants before joining the project, and others were discovered later in their participation. Measurement of the frequencies in which the references to any capability were made was performed using qualitative analysis procedures, and this helped to analyse and grade the levels of importance that the participants gave to each of the capabilities identified and expressed during the focus groups. The identification and grading of the capabilities is shown in the following table:

Table 2 References to capabilities by the focus groups participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>Focus Group 1 (English Language Courses)</th>
<th>Focus Group 2 (English / Visual Media)</th>
<th>Focus Group 3 (Computer skills)</th>
<th>Focus Group 4 (Computer skills)</th>
<th>Focus Group 5 (English / Visual Media)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to learn a new skill</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased employment opportunities</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong / Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Intermediate / Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information and technology</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None / None</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>None / None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relations</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Intermediate / Strong</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Intermediate / Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering example</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Intermediate / Intermediate</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak / Intermediate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The frequencies were measured subjectively based on the processing of the recordings and transcripts of each of the focus group sessions, using as a guide the categorization and emphasis given to the remarks made by the participants, as well as the time dedicated to this subject during the session; and then classifying the frequencies in which any given capability is referenced in the categories: ‘strong’, ‘intermediate’, ‘weak’ or ‘none’. No numeric ranges are given, as the groups had different number of participants and duration, making impossible to make direct comparisons with numeric frequencies.
As shown on the above table, the most referenced capability in the focus group sessions was the ability to learn a new skill, together with the skill learned itself. This is no surprise as the focus of the project is on delivering new skills to its participants, specifically on the three areas that were being covered by the project: English language; Computer skills and Visual media skills. All of the groups interviewed mentioned this capability with more frequency than others, and many participants explicitly mentioned that this was the most important achievement that they obtained from their participation in the courses they were enrolled in.

There is a distinction between the skill learnt, whether English, computing or visual arts; and the discovery of the capability of learning or getting the skill. While for most of the participants it was clear that if they managed to complete the course they would achieve a skill, what is notable is that many of the participants realised that they had the capacity to learn, even subjects they perceived as challenging such as English and computing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this discovery led some of the participants to re-evaluate the possibility of pursuing further education or career options, which would involve attempting to gain admission into universities after previous failed attempts. This is a significant achievement for LE’s project from the CA perspective, as this is an expansion of choices of lives for the participants that may lead them to more fulfilling and satisfying lives.

The second most frequently referenced capability is the perception by the beneficiaries of the project of an increase in employment opportunities. By analysing the data, it was found that there is a relationship between this perception and with the previously mentioned capability of the ability of getting a new skill (and actually getting it). Particularly interesting was the fact that many of the participants made the conscious decision to join the courses to learn a new skill that they could later apply as a foundation for eventual careers in the field and also to increase their potential for becoming more marketable when applying for jobs. While the qualitative nature of the research does not allow the provision of precise statistics, the coding and analysis process gives a rough estimate that around 30% of the participants of the focus group are in this category of
persons with previously identified goals for achieving functionings and capabilities. The rest of the participants either fell in the categories of joining because a suggestion from peers or other projects’ staff, this group is the largest with at least two thirds of the participants, and the last group is of other participants who also found out about the courses by other means. There is some overlapping between the first and second groups, with some of the participants acting on the opportunity they identified from the recommendations of others.

Most of the participants expressed that after being in the courses for a certain amount of time; they eventually thought that their opportunities for getting jobs were now increased by the skills they obtained, regardless of what they thought when they first joined the courses. The exception was from the group of the Visual Media course, this group did not consider as a whole that the skills learnt would enable them to increase their employment opportunities. This is expected as this is not the objective of this course, and in the country the skills provided by this course are not as highly valued in the labour market as the English language or computing abilities. However, there was the case of one participant of the VM course that fell into the category of the project beneficiaries that joined the courses with the conscious idea of enhancing pre-identified capacities. This person was a student of graphics design in a local university and joined the course as a primer on the skills needed for this chosen career path.

“Yo vine porque pensé que recibir los cursos me iba a servir para la carrera que estoy estudiando. Yo estudio diseño gráfico y pensé que aprender sobre fotografía y lo que enseñan aquí sobre arte y cosas visuales me serviría para mi carrera…O sea, yo ya venía con la idea de que podía aprender, y que esto me iba a ser muy útil después para algunas clases que voy a tomar en la universidad…también la experiencia para después trabajar”.

“I came here because I thought that the lessons would be of use to me because of the studies I’m doing in the university. I study Graphic Design and I thought that learning about photography and the things taught here about art and visual media would be useful to me for my career… I mean, I already came here with the idea that I was able to learn these things, and that this was going to be very useful later for some of the courses I will be taking (later) in the University…also the experience I get for working later”.
Another frequent mention was the opportunity for social relationships that the courses were providing the participants. This was identified to be related to the other capability of the beneficiaries of the project receiving a volunteering example from their instructors and other project staff. Even though this last functioning was the least mentioned by the participants of the focus groups, it was mentioned as significant influence on the thoughts and lives of some of the participants, so much that some of them would like to eventually follow this example of giving back something to a community or to others who have the need.

All the identified capabilities were common to all the groups interviewed, with only varying degrees of importance given by them. The exception was for the capability provided by the gain or increase in access to information and related technologies. This was only mentioned by the groups of participants of the computer skills courses, as they were the only ones who had the opportunity to do the activities that led them to discover this capability.

Finally, all groups expressed an increase in their self confidence, regardless of their reason for joining or the course they were involved with. This skill was not mentioned as much as others, yet when mentioned it was described as something of significance by many of the participants.

As detailed on the table above, there are differences on the frequencies with which the participants made reference to the main identified capabilities and functionings. Some of these differences are clearly accountable, such as the increase in employment potential provided by gaining English or computing skills. Other differences are difficult to explain. A possible explanation could be the randomness of the focus group session, in which some participants would reinforce a comment by their peers and thus increase the frequency detected in the coding and analysis process, but explaining other differences would require further analysis and profiling of the beneficiaries of the project, which is one of the identified limitations of this research project, as mentioned in Section 5.7.
5.3 How the functionings and capabilities obtained or discovered by the participants of the development project are being used

The focus groups with the participants of the development project was intended as a research tool to identify capabilities and functionings that the participants gained in their participation in the project’s activities, or the ones that they already had but only discovered after their participation in the project. An unexpected discovery resulting from the focus groups sessions and analysis was that the participants already had identified that they had the possibility to achieve certain capabilities before joining the project.

As defined by Sen (1992, p.40), Capabilities are “...the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. Capability is, thus, a vector of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another...to choose from possible livings.”

Some of the participants have clear consciousness of their capabilities, as showed when they stated that they wanted to achieve different particular outcomes, or choose between different options or possibilities for their future plans and livings. What the participants did not have before or while participating in the project was the complete set of functionings they believed they required in order to be able to choose, and achieve, the kind of life they desire for themselves. They were mostly aware that they still lacked some skills, or functionings that would enable them to achieve their goals.

With their decisions, the participants demonstrated to have an insight of what they required in order to achieve a certain Capability or set of capabilities they felt they needed. Hence, some of the participants made a calculated decision to participate in the project to acquire the skills or functionings necessary to achieve their goals. The participants identified the opportunity that their participation in the development project would provide them, and joined the project to take advantage of it.
It is to be noted that most of the participants were invited to participate (or recommended that they participate) in the courses provided by Libre Expresión’s (LE) project by the staff of another unrelated project that was helping the families (especially the parents) of LE’s participants. This means that initially the participants had the advantage of having trained staff identifying opportunities that would help them; but eventually, many participants came to realise by themselves that their participation in the project would provide them with skills, or functionings, that they could use to improve their choices for their life, that is, their capabilities.

This finding is different from what was expected in the initial stages of this research project. For example Schischka (2005) studied a more traditional development project in the Pacific island of Samoa. This project had as one of its main objectives to directly improve the ability of its participants to generate income through the project’s activities. In contrast, the project of Libre Expresión does not focus on directly enhancing the income generation capability of its participants, but rather provides an indirect support or benefit for its target group of beneficiaries. Clearly the potential of increased income generation exists, given the skills provided by the courses; but this is just one of many possible outcomes that could result from the functionings created or discovered. In the end, any particular outcome achieved, or not, resides in each individual participant, and how they utilise the skills provided by the project and other exogenous functioning towards gaining a capability and any desired outcome in their life. In this sense, the Libre Expresión is maintaining the ideas of the Capabilities Approach by delivering skills that provide the freedom to purse and lead a type of life that would be satisfactory to its beneficiaries.

Not all of the participants were so clear in their consciousness about their capacity and about the outcomes they want to achieve. Other participants were only involved in the project by chance, either by invitation from their friends, or out of curiosity. These participants, though not as defined in their plans for their future, benefitted highly from their participation. As mentioned on the previous chapter of the findings, many of these participants obtained not only the skills that the courses provided, such as English language, computer skills or visual media skills; but also had a significant increase in self-confidence as they discovered that they were capable of learning these new skills, and
also discovering that with these newfound functionings they could aspire to choices of life that they felt that probably were not possible before joining the project. Some examples of this are the participants who wanted to get enrolled in higher education programmes related to their new skills; as well as others that reckoned they should have a second try at gaining enrolment to university after failing a first time. This was an important outcome resulting from the development project, as the increase in self-confidence of its participants would enable them to better identify and pursue an increased number of life choices, thus enhancing their capabilities and eventually their quality of life.

The most common use the participants considered for what they gained from participating in the development project, after getting the skill itself, was the increase in their opportunities for employment. This relates to the decision of some of the participants to become involved in the project as means to an end, but also relates to the discovery of other participants that they could use these newly gained skills to enable them to qualify for better job opportunities. These participants expressed that they thought the skills they gained would enable them to get current with the modernisation that they were witnessing was taking place in many workplaces. At the time of the focus group sessions, none of the participants had yet used the skills gained as support for a job application. The main reason for this is that most of the participants are not yet at a point where they want to start applying for a job. Some of the participants interviewed were part of a group that was starting the courses; that in the case of English language as well as Computer skills run for a year or more. Additionally, the new functionings and capabilities of the participants meant that many will try to seek admission to higher education programmes, further delaying their entrance to the labour market. The possibility of supporting a job application with the skills gained from their participation in the development project is another significant functioning, that could later form a set together with any further education obtained by each participant and result in a significant capability, or freedom, to be used to gain an outcome in a life they value.

The access to information is another functioning the participants expressed they discovered as they participated in the development project. This was of course limited to the participants of the computer skills courses. This discovery was something new for all
of the participants in these courses, including the participants mentioned previously that joined the project already knowing the capabilities they wanted to achieve through their participation.

The main use of the access to information the participants mentioned, from a development perspective, was the possibility of using the tools of information-search to look for jobs. The relation between internet access and job search was studied by Fountain (2005), who arrived to the conclusion, among other things, that Internet access may afford a small advantage for finding a job, if only to the extent that other searchers may not be using that source of information.

Internet access was also being used for a more general search for information, and the significance of the links between internet access and development goes beyond looking for a job, but as Madon (2000) points out, it has been identified that it is strategically essential for a country to promote an increase in connectivity and access to information and communication technologies for its citizens, as “the marginal impact of improved network communications can be very high, leading to improved economic productivity, governance, education, health and quality of life, particularly in rural areas... wider connectivity within developing countries would improve the overall information infrastructure in these countries and thereby promote positive changes in socio-economic development.”

The final capability that resulted from involvement in the development project was an example of volunteering that the participants obtained from their instructors, who are professionals or senior university students in the relevant fields that have volunteered part of their time to teach in the courses provided by the development project. While in a first glance it would seem that imitating this choice would not provide much utility for the participants of the development project, there has been some debate about whether volunteering improves the wellbeing of people involved in it.

Meier and Stutzer (2008) compared empirically two different views about pro-social behaviour and more specifically, what causes people’s wellbeing or happiness, from the point of view of the involvement in volunteering activities. These two views compared are contrasting in that the first view points out that helping others is the way to
happiness, and the second point of view is that the selfish utility maximiser will be happier than the first person that accepts costs to himself in order to help others. The authors conclude that helping others provides a higher wellbeing than selfish utility-maximizing, and confirm empirically the causal relation between volunteering and an increased satisfaction in life.

The fact that the beneficiaries of the development project are considering and may in the future participate in volunteering activities is another functioning that can be part of a set of functionings (a capability) resulting in an improvement in their quality of life.

5.4 Values of the capabilities for all the stakeholders

The goals of the NGO Libre Expresión have been traditionally oriented to create awareness among the population of Honduras in relation to issues such as governability and freedom of expression, using methodologies that seek to empower its target audience (Libre Expresión, n.d.). Considering this, the launch of the education project implicitly has as one of its objectives the expansion of capabilities of its target beneficiaries, so they can improve their lives and make a change in their surroundings.

The main capability that is valued by all the stakeholders, that is the beneficiaries and the project staff, is the achievement of the skill provided by the courses. This is the essential objective and the measurement of success by either of the stakeholders.

All of the other capabilities identified in the focus group sessions are valuable to the NGO, but as the interviews with project staff reveal, the other priority is to maintain good relations between the staff, especially the instructors, with the students. This is meant as a way to create an environment of confidence and to encourage the students to feel secure and capable of achieving their goal of completing the course. This has the result of fomenting a good environment for learning and was referenced by the participants in the focus groups as an example to follow for some of them to contribute to the welfare of others just as they are benefitting now from the contribution of the other stakeholders.
5.4.1 Differences between the capabilities as valued by the project participants and by the other stakeholders

The interviews conducted with the project staff, as well as the focus groups with the beneficiaries, showed that there are common capabilities that are valued by both stakeholders. There are no significant differences on how the capabilities are valued by the stakeholders. As mentioned previously, the skill itself is the main capability valued by both groups of stakeholders, and good interaction between staff and students is also considered essential considering the starting disadvantaged status of the beneficiaries.

5.4.2 Endogenous and exogenous factors causing differences in how the capabilities are valued by different stakeholders

During the analysis of the focus group interviews, it became apparent that there are different values put on different capabilities by the participants. The commentaries and opinions expressed during these sessions provide an insight about the factors that influence how different groups of participants value different capabilities, and how some had already identified some of their potential to enhance their capabilities sets.

A significant group of the participants, roughly 30% of the total had already identified that they had potential and wanted to obtain a certain skill, to be used later to expand or increase their sets of capabilities and in consequence, their options to pursue certain choices in their life, related to possibilities of continuing their education or enhancing their abilities for their career choice. In the case of this group, the comments expressed during the focus groups sessions indicate that they were strongly influenced by project staff of a second development project that was exogenous to LE’s project. This project “Alternativas y oportunidades” (“alternatives and opportunities”) focuses on helping people from slums and disadvantaged sectors of society, and has activities from mentoring to support for income-generating activities such as micro-business support in the local-neighbourhood marketplaces. The participants expressed that they attend regularly meetings that are part of that project’s activities, and that they joined the courses provided by LE because of the recommendation of staff members from this
second project. Their comments show that their involvement with the second project is what gave them the increased perception of their capabilities and the focus to use their participation in LE’s project to achieve their desired goals.

As elaborated in section 5.7, one of the limitations of this research project was the late discovery of this exogenous factor represented by the project “Alternativas” and the inability to further explore and understand in detail the background of the participants in their daily lives context of activities and involvement with other development initiatives that may have provided with a more complete picture of the motivations and reasons for the decisions and actions of this group of participants.

A second group of participants expressed during the conversations of the focus groups that they joined because of recommendations from their peers, rather than from another project’s staff members. This group showed that they didn’t share the clear vision about their capabilities with their peers. Nevertheless, they also benefited greatly from their involvement with LE’s project and expressed that they had achieved capabilities of their own, such as the increase in self-confidence and the recognition of the advantages of access to information (internet) and related technologies such as the use of computers.

There is a group of participants in LE’s project that has not been mentioned much in this report, and is a small group of persons that dropped-out of the courses. This group obviously did not participate in the focus group sessions as these were conducted when the courses were already finished or about to finish, and the persons that abandoned the courses did so in the first two to three weeks of the courses. Unfortunately, it was not possible to track and conduct interviews with members of this group, so instead the information about it was constructed from the interviews with the project staff, as well as from comments made by the participants of the courses’ focus groups. From the statements made by project staff members, the main reason for this group to abandon the courses was a lack of confidence in their ability to successfully undertake the studies required by the courses, particularly the English language courses. The initial difficulties of learning a foreign language seem to have overwhelmed these participants to the point that they decided to quit the courses. The project staff mentioned that efforts were made to encourage these participants to continue in the courses, which were unsuccessful.
From the comments made by the participants of the focus group sessions, it can be derived that organisational and pedagogical problems at the start of the courses may have also had an influence in the decision of the participants that abandoned the courses.

Because of the impracticality of searching for this participants to conduct interviews, it is not possible to be completely certain of their motivations and the drivers of their decision to end their involvement with the development project, but at any rate, there is certainty that this group did not achieve any of the capabilities obtained by their peers that did successfully undertake the courses and it is likely that the former may have suffered a setback in the decrease of their capability sets by further losing confidence in their abilities and not enjoying the learning of new skills and development of functionings and capabilities. The project’s staff members are aware of this outcome for this group but nevertheless are recommended to continue their best efforts to retain any participants considering this action.

5.4.3 Sets of functionings and capabilities; universal or self determined?

On the question of whether the sets of capabilities are universal or self determined, while this research project has the limitation that its scope did not allow for a complete analysis of a large enough range of capabilities to enable a comparison with lists of capabilities elaborated by previous literature on the Capability Approach.

Considering this above mentioned limitation, the results of this research project agree with Schischka (2005, p.140) in that it “recognises that ‘the poor’ are a heterogeneous group, that poverty is a multi-faceted condition and that poverty reduction programmes should reflect this diversity. Consequently effective appraisal of these programmes should allow for, or even encourage, the changing and diverse perspectives of ‘the poor’”.

63
5.5 Limitations of this research project and suggestions for future research

As discussed in the methodology chapter, this research project used as its main research tool the focus groups composed of the beneficiaries of LE’s development project. Due to a lack of resources, it was not possible to establish a comparison group of people not involved in the project. Establishing this second group to analyse would serve the same purpose as it is commonly done in research involving statistical techniques; that is, providing a comparison between the two groups in order to identify which of the outcomes or benefits resulting from the development project are truly a result of the involvement with the project, and thus are not present in the persons from the second (control) group.

This limitation was identified in previous studies (Schischka, 2005, p.150) and it was not addressed in this study for the same reason of a lack of feasibility of establishing the control groups, considering the limited duration of the research project. This constraint meant that the analysis of the focus group sessions had to rely on the memories of the participants in recalling and indentifying how their involvement with the development project resulted in an increase in their functionings, and then studying their commentaries to complete the identification of all their gains in terms of functionings, capabilities and their expansion of freedoms and choices for their lives. It is recommended that given the necessary time, this methodology should be applied from the start of a development project; in the case of a project similar to this one, the participants should first be interviewed as soon as they enter the project, and prepare follow-up focus group sessions as the project continues and finishes. The multiple focus group sessions would help to have a broader set of data to understand how the project is changing the lives of its beneficiaries, without relying only on the memories and perceptions of the participants that can be biased depending on their experience of their participation in the development project.

Establishing a second group of people to be studied in parallel to the participants of a development project is recommended addition to any future initiatives to analyse a
project’s success or the outcomes for its participants using the lens of Sen’s Capability Approach. Ideally, a control group(s) would be composed of a similar number of participants as the group that is the focus of the research. Using an example of the details of this research project, the group would be composed of persons that share many things in common with the participants of the development project, such as their background in areas such as income, education, and residence. The obvious selection would be other beneficiaries of the project “Alternativas y Oportunidades” which is a project that was helping the families of many of LE’s project participants. The persons participating in the other project would share most of the characteristics of the participants of LE’s project. Unfortunately for this research project, the existence of the ‘Alternativas’ project only became evident around the middle part of the focus group schedule, and by that time it was not possible to prepare and arrange a group of participants to interview them in the same way as it was done with the originally planned focus groups.

Other possible participants of a control group would be former classmates from the high schools the focus group participants attended. This alternative was also deemed impractical considering the limited resources and time available for performing all the focus group sessions.

If a second (control) group were to be established, for example with the members of the ‘Alternativas’ project, it would have to be analysed just as the main group is analysed, and then the results of both groups would have to be compared in order to identify which outcomes can be objectively and unmistakably attributed to participation in the development project. With sufficient time available, this should prove feasible to do, so it would be recommended as an evaluation tool for a Development Organisation wanting to verify the accomplishments of its projects.

The application of any of these methods, especially the control group, would also help with the other identified limitations the methodology applied for this research project. One of these limitations is the possible ‘false consciousness’ by the participants. As Schischka (2005, p.151) noted, “the focus group discussions provide a means for those involved in the projects to actively reflect on their situation. There is the potential for the process of gradually raising the consciousness of the individuals involved as they increase
the awareness of their situation and how their valued functionings and capability sets are changing.” This was clearly not the case for the group of participants that already had a consciousness of why they were joining LE’s development project and what they wanted to achieve; but it is possible that this process of focus groups interviews could create a false consciousness by the participants, especially when considering other factors that can affect a focus group sessions such as the possibility that the participants will adjust their responses to satisfy the interviewer, as can be the case if a member of the project staff is present during the focus group sessions or conducting the interview themselves.

Considering the limitations of this project evaluation approach, the form used for this research project would be best used together with other evaluation methods in a complementary manner. The other methods can be either additional qualitative research approaches, or the traditional project evaluation methods.

The use of the focus group method can be complemented by the use of other qualitative approaches, such as participatory, ethnographic and textual analysis. For development projects the most common approach and the more likely to yield good information would be the participatory approaches such as interviews and participatory project design and implementation.

Quantitative tools are the traditional means to evaluate a development project’s impact, usually by doing a comparison of the incomes of the beneficiaries before the project started with the changes after the project has concluded, in order to determine the effect of the project’s actions on this variable. This is done with statistical methods and requires the use of surveys and control groups to be able to correctly attribute any outcomes to particular project activities. As mentioned in previous chapters, while this method would provide objective indicators of a project’s performance, it is not possible to be used by smaller development organisations without the required budget and staff capacity in numbers and training.

If a development organisation is able to conduct evaluation activities using both qualitative and quantitative research methods and integrate them effectively, this would provide a more complete set of information to assess the effectiveness of the development project. The use of both methods can compensate for the limitations
inherent in each and supplement each other to obtain higher quality data and information about causes and outcomes of both the project itself as well as of its beneficiaries. Rao and Woolcock (2003) argue that the combination of both approaches, called ‘Participatory Econometrics’, “allows the researcher to interpret the quantitative findings in context. The more narrative, personalised information provided by open-ended focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews, the better the researcher can understand a quantitative result”.

Given enough resources and time available, future research into the Capabilities Approach as a framework for the evaluation, as well as for other stages such as the design of development project, should attempt to use the ‘Participatory Econometrics’ or a similar combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to be able to obtain a more complete set of data and information, and subsequently be able to obtain new insights on this topic.

Another limitation identified is the limitation of the depth of analysis in terms of the beneficiaries and not just the project. While the level of analysis performed allowed to identify the main capabilities and functionings, and assign a frequency with which the participants mentioned them during the focus group sessions, and therefore deriving which capabilities are most valued or of higher achievement by the participants, the lack of further analysis into the lives and context of the participants meant that it is not possible to establish the reasons for the differences between groups when making references to a given capability. The question as to whether the differences are attributable to the randomness of a focus group session, as opposed to other significant causes that lie within a participant or the group itself is not possible to make conclusively with the data obtained from the talks of a focus group. This additional level of analysis would require further application of qualitative research methods and tools, such as personal interviews, observation and construction of personal and group profiles that were not possible considering the limited scope, time and resources available for this research project. It would be recommended for a project (of either development or research) with a span of several years to consider such level of analysis to better understand and explain the whys of these findings.
Finally, this research project identified many capabilities as described and discovered by the participants of LE’s development project, but this identification is of a limited range of capabilities that resulted from an education-oriented project. It is not a sufficiently large group of capabilities to enable comparison with universal lists outlined in the previous literature. Nevertheless, this study supports the conclusion of other literature, and Sen himself, that there are different contexts to different societies, and each individual has a different story, background and aspirations that reflect in a diversity and heterogeneity of values and sets of capabilities that lead to a healthier, happier and more valued life.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis and discussion of the capabilities identified on the participants of the development project of Libre Expresión. The analysis of the data obtained from the focus groups allowed to determine the values placed by the beneficiaries of the development project to each of the capabilities, as well as to compare between the perception of the participants and the project staff regarding the capabilities. There where exogenous and endogenous factors determining how different people valued different capabilities, reinforcing the conclusion of previous literature regarding the self-determined rather than universal nature of capability sets. The limitations of this research are discussed together with suggestions on future research to expand on this topic. Overall, the work of a development project is only a part of the outcomes for its beneficiaries, as previous knowledge of capabilities as well as influence from external sources can have a significant impact on decisions and aspirations of participants.
Concluding remarks about this research

This research studied the Capability Approach and how it relates to an undergoing development initiative in the country of Honduras. The development project that served as a case study for this research project varies from the more common project that focuses on improving the lives of a group or community by fomenting income-generation activities. The project of Libre Expresión focuses on providing courses on three subjects, English language, computer skills and visual media skills. The objective is to provide an opportunity for the beneficiaries of the project to develop a skill and also to have an opportunity for social interaction with peers and staff.

The findings of this research are that giving the opportunity to disadvantaged persons can have a positive effect in their life, allowing them to gain capabilities beyond what was originally intended by the development project. This discovery is of a process that allows people to strengthen the abilities or functionings they already knew they had, but did not have a previous opportunity to convert into a capability, allowing them to increase their options and choices to live a better life in a way that they find more valuable and fulfilling.

Comparing the results of this research with previous literature such as Schischka (2005) shows that in the case of this development project, the discovery of existing capabilities was smaller than the other cases, as the participants had already identified some of their abilities before joining the project, or gained new abilities or functionings as a result of their participation. The way the project was designed, as well as their target audience resulted in this particular case of some of its beneficiaries taking a conscious decision to join the project to transform their latent ability into a working functioning that could be used towards creating a future opportunity or capability for enhancing their opportunities and subsequently the quality of their lives.

On the other hand, this research project arrives to the same conclusion of Schischka (2005, p.139) that “...there is no implication in the methodology presented here that there is much greater value in having a considerably greater number of choices or capabilities. For some...it may be that having two or three possible choices of what to do
with their lives is of great importance to them. It may be of equal or less importance for another participant to have five or six capabilities in their capability set.”

Indeed the observation is that regardless of aspirations or expectations, the increase of capabilities results in different outcomes, whether expected or fulfilled, for the participants depending on their background and the diversity of the group of participants. Libre Expresión should encourage the exploration of the personal sets of capabilities by each individual participant as a supplement to their main objective of delivering a group of valued but specific skills; as the understanding, even at a basic level, of the expansion of choices can foment the pursuit of the functionings and capabilities to enable each of the individual beneficiaries to achieve a better life for themselves.
References


Appendix A:  
Focus Group Session Moderation Guiding Points

1. Ask about when and why they became involved with the group (development project). What was their life like before joining?

2. Expectations when joining the group. Focus should be kept on choices and opportunities as they had before joining and expectations for their involvement with the group.

3. Ask if they think their involvement with the group has changed their knowledge about the choices they now have—what they are capable of and can achieve on their own. (note any dependence or independence gained from project participation in their future expectations and plans).

   Extending on the last point, try to guide the conversation on identifying any capabilities on the following categories:

   Education skills
   Health
   Housing
   Social/community/family/friends
   Status/confidence
   Income/finance
   Any other

4. Ask their opinion about this (focus group) process. (Did they find it useful – reflecting on the topics?)

5. Summarise and ask for anything missing or any questions or comments. Mention about a later presentation of a summary of the research’s findings.

6. Thanks and finish.