

**THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AS A METRIC FOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT: AN APPLICATION IN SAMOA ***

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Abstract

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have outlined an alternative approach to appraising the success of economic development that goes beyond material success to encompass concerns of social development. In particular Sen and Nussbaum argue for a capabilities approach for measuring development. This paper describes the application of their theoretical framework to a local case study in the South Pacific Island Nation of Samoa. The Women in Business Foundation promotes and advocates women's interest in business, and stimulates and supports small business initiatives in the village environment. The main finding of the study is that success of this programme appears to have been the result of recognising potential capabilities among its participants, rather than as a result of creating new capabilities. This may have implications for other applications of the capabilities approach to economic development.

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THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AS A METRIC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN APPLICATION IN SAMOA

1. Introduction

Economists working in the field of development have highlighted the need to examine fully what is the ultimate aim of their work. As Streeton (1994, p. 232) argues, “we should never lose sight of the ultimate purpose of the exercise, to treat men and women as ends, to improve the human condition, to enlarge people’s choices.” The capabilities approach (CA) of Amartya Sen (1999) provides a new approach that concentrates on this enlargement of people’s choices by concentrating on the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities as a measure of appraising success in development. On the macro scale, work has been completed on the macro scale to develop such indicators as the Human Development Index to quantify development in terms of capabilities. However little has yet been done on the micro scale in applying the CA to evaluating particular development and poverty reduction projects. The objective of this research is to explore the usefulness of the CA for appraising a particular self-help development project in a small Pacific Island Nation, Samoa.

Traditional appraisal techniques for development projects have typically concentrated on looking at the amount spent, or the goods provided or the extra income earned. In formulating means of appraising the projects using the CA, the expectations of the participants as to what they see as valuable should be central. Finding out what are the incentives that are important to participants before the projects begin is an important part of this. In any such appraisal it is also important to incorporate the extent to which existing capabilities have been developed and to which active participants have been engaged in expanding their own choices. In the groups interviewed in this study these increased choices ranged from being able to pay fees for more education for children to being able to be seen as more generous donors to local churches. Also noted was the ability to be responsible for the generation of sufficient income to upgrade sanitation facilities, the ability to improve the fortunes of the family, the ability to engage other

members of the family in the project and being able to be involved in the revival of traditional crafts.

While traditional analyses of income levels are acknowledged as important in the appraisal process it is argued here that the CA provides a more comprehensive and meaningful analysis through the use of the terminology such as functionings and capabilities. Sen (1999 p75) defines functionings as “various things a person may value being or doing.” This includes basics such as being educated, receiving necessary nutrition, avoiding premature death. Sen (1999 p75) defines capabilities as “the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for a person to achieve.” A capability is a substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations – less formally the freedom to achieve various possible lifestyles. The ultimate measure of development projects could then be the extent to which they allow people the ability to expand these alternative combinations of in ways, which are meaningful to them (see Schischka 2002).

Hence, the main conclusion reached in this study was that the aim of development projects should be to expand people’s choices and to help individuals and communities to uncover and develop capabilities *that they already have*. Development projects should operate on the premise from the beginning that they can increase functionings rather than believing that they are creating or giving capabilities. Development projects should be looked at as opening up capabilities that people already have and expanding the freedoms and choices of communities and individuals.

The paper begins in section 2 with an over view of the Women in Business Foundation in Samoa. Section 3 describes the study methodology and section 4 outlines an example of one group that was interviewed. In section 5 the study findings are presented, while in section 6 related these findings to the capabilities approach. Finally the conclusion and application to development programme appraisal and funding are contained in section 7.

2. The Women in Business Foundation, Samoa

The Women in Business Foundation was founded in 1990 as a non-governmental organisation with the aim of involving women in business. The WIBF Annual report (2002a, p1) states the WIBF vision is “That women and youth in Samoa are able to contribute fully to the development of themselves, their families and their country through income generation, job creation, and participation of women in the village economy”. The Foundation aims to promote and advocate women’s interest in business, to stimulate and support small/micro business initiatives and to facilitate and nurture cooperation between community groups and government. All of the WIBF programmes emphasise the use of resources that are readily available in the village environment. This could be said to include the resources of the capabilities that the participants had in the various activities that they became involved in. In fact it is stated that in a Women in Business pamphlet (undated) that “projects aim to help clients realise their potential”.

In 1999 the UN Pacific Human Development Report recognised that “a poverty of opportunity” was being experienced throughout the Pacific islands; and that this was more widespread and insidious than “a poverty of income”. The Women in Business Foundation (WIBF) of Samoa identified this phenomenon as early as 1991 and have been addressing the problem ever since. The Foundation has a vision of the women and young people in Samoa being able to contribute fully to their own development, as well as that of their families and communities, through income generation and participation in the village economy.

Until quite recently, Samoan villages relied on a subsistence economy and were largely self-sufficient. Since independence, the main flow of cash into the rural areas has been through remittances from family members living elsewhere, especially overseas. The programmes of the WIBF are concerned with reducing this dependence on remittances and engaging families more directly in the cash economy. A major focus has been the production of coconut oil, using a specially imported and low cost technology. There are export markets for coconut oil in Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the USA. The women and families involved have been trained, not just in the process but also in the management of their finances and time. An overseas export market is being developed for their products. Another successful programme

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has been the weaving of 'fine mats', which formed the basis of traditional Samoan culture. This craft had been badly neglected, but the WIBF has encouraged village women to relearn the old skills, and has found sponsors to buy the mats. Other activities include organic farming, bee keeping, soap and paper making, tapa cloth design and making and micro-finance schemes.

One of the advantages of the fine mat programme reported by WIBF (2002 p6) is that it addresses the damage done to the much prized "ie sae" by changes to the culture over the years. The "ie sae" are the large intricately designed mats that were made for centuries by skilled craftswomen and valued as gifts for special occasions such as weddings. In recent times much of skill involved in creating these fine mats had been lost. Now the fine mat programme has resulted in fine mats being produced that are equal to, if not better than, the fine mats made many years ago. At the same time, the weavers have the opportunity to remain in their home village and earn an income. The fine mat project was originally started at the Ministry of Women's Affairs. After taking over the project, WIBF (2002a p6) reports that they turned the activity into a form of employment for village women. They have targeted single mothers and in 2001 had 81 women weavers earning a weekly wage. All the weavers are from families, which have no regular cash income, and in some cases this income is the only source of cash for their daily needs. WIBF (2002c p3) reports that the income earned by weavers in the first three years of the project is nearly WS\$140000.

The coconut oil project began in 1996 and depends on overseas markets for its success. Products include coconut oil, soap and natural insect repellent. The organic farming project grew out of a need to find export markets for the coconut oil. WIBF (2002a) reports that the last certification visit was in April 2002 where it was recommended that thirteen farms be fully organic, with another four to be in conversion status. As well as coconut oil, there are exports of organic bananas, ginger and dried fruit. The bee-keeping project has 33 families involved with training being provided by NZAID. Honey is sold on the local market and financial and business advice is offered as well as training.

Many people living in the rural areas of Samoa are dependent on remittances from relatives living overseas for cash. Therefore WIBF has set up a micro-finance programme to introduce

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rural families to the cash economy and to saving, using cash that has been earned in their own environments. The need for this was outlined in the annual report (WIBF2002a p9):

For years rural villagers had lived a subsistence existence, because any cash they used was earned by family members living away from the villages. They have not been able to earn cash regularly in the village setting, and as a result, have not learned how to manage the cash they have received...They (the participants) are introduced to an income generating activity and trained in managing the money they earn. Being able to regularly save money they have earned themselves and participate in a loan scheme encourages their participation in the cash economy. They learn by doing.”

Consequently WIBF considers that their programmes are successful. They are working to reduce the dependence of many rural villagers for their cash needs on remittances from relatives living overseas. WIBF feel that they have been able to introduce rural families to the cash economy, utilising cash that has been earned in their own environments.

The micro-finance scheme works through a savings and loan account that is effectively a small bank “owned” by all the contributors to the scheme. In 2002 WIBF (2002c p2) reported that the working capital was WS\$4500. This capital was growing slowly through the payment of interest on loans. In the first three years of the project there were 245 loans totalling WS\$48000. Loans for business expense, education and household expenses were the main reasons for loans being granted. Significantly there have been no defaulted loans during this time. WIBF attributes this situation to their policy of not giving loans to people who cannot repay them.

One of the important aspects of the micro-finance programme that WIBF believes important to its success is that it is developed locally to suit the local society and conditions. WIBF (2002a p10). Micro-finance in Samoa should not be compared with micro-finance schemes in Asian countries. This is because their situations differ considerably. In fact WIBF (2002a p10) states that:

Many of the reasons micro-finance works in Asia, are the specific reasons they do not work in the Pacific. For example, we have found that using group pressure and utilising peer pressure does not work in Samoa. Our experience has been that when women have not been able to make a payment, they have just stayed away from meetings, and were not unduly worried that they could not make a payment.

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WIBF management believes that the main reason for this is that participants have had their cash needs taken care of for too long by the remittances system and have not learned how to take responsibility themselves for the cash they receive. An important feature is that although the participants are grouped in villages, they save and apply for loans individually.

While women are keen to start a project but often find it hard to follow through because they have many village and church commitments. Adimalaga Tafuna'i is Executive Director of WIBF and gave a paper to the New Zealand Development Studies Network conference in December 2002. She wrote about the "poverty of opportunity" in Samoa. She feels that while many people believe that there is no poverty in the Pacific as many Pacific people have adequate food and housing: "Our rural populations are so isolated that they are denied the opportunities people in rural areas take for granted and in the most part rely on remittances from family members for all their cash needs" Tafuna'i (2002p1).

As noted above, the UNDP (1999) also observes the encompassing image of poverty in the Pacific is poverty of opportunity. Tafuna'i believes that people's talents, skills and aspirations are frustrated and wasted, thereby denying them the opportunity to lead productive and satisfying lives. She believes that while poverty of income is often the result, it is poverty of opportunity that is the cause. Tafuna'i states that the majority of the participants in the programmes are almost totally dependent on remittances for their income when they start. WIBF uses small-scale technologies appropriate in the villages they have enabled the participants to realise their aim of providing much of their own income needs. They are providing opportunities. In the perspective of the Capability Approach they are enabling people to realise their own capabilities to have control over their own life to increase the choices that they and their families have. They are active participants rather than passive recipients. Related to this is introduction that WIBF participants get to a banking system through the micro-finance programme. They can learn about saving and about loan repayments.

As well as being superior to remittance income it is possible to contrast WIBF programmes with the installation of the Yazaki Automobile Parts factory in the capital of Apia. While the latter does provide income and employment it is seen by some such as Tafuna'i as not

addressing the problems of rural depopulation and urban overcrowding. From the perspective of the capability approach it is also necessary to question whether people's choices and opportunities are expanded as much in a factory as they would be in programmes such as those provided by WIBF.

3. Study Methodology

The author visited Samoa over a two-week period in January 2003 to undertake 13 focus group interviews. Small groups of participants in the Women in Business Foundation programmes were interviewed on location in their villages where their production takes place. The researcher travelled with the field staff of Women in Business on their regular visits to the workers in the rural areas of Samoa. Interviews were either carried out by the researcher in English or in Samoan by Aiga, the WIBF field worker if the participants did not have sufficient English for the researcher to conduct the interview. The interviews were tape-recorded and hand written notes were taken during and after each interview, based on Aubel's (1994) guidelines for group interview techniques. In particular, Aubel suggests "that the group interview technique can be used by programme personnel to help them understand the attitudes, knowledge and values of the groups with which they work and for whom they are designing programmes", and defines the focus group interview as a "semi-structured discussion of a given topic by a homogenous group of 6-10 individuals" (Aubel, 1994, pp. 1 and 2).

Considerable planning took place to maximise the opportunity for the participants to talk openly about the key capabilities that they felt they had developed by their participation in the WIBF programmes. There was recognition given to the fact that many NGOs such as WIBF have limited resources to conduct such analysis. Consequently the study was carried out over a period of two weeks and recognising the limits of the resources of WIBF so as not to put undue burdens on the participants, field staff or management of the foundation.

It might be possible to question the objectivity of the responses of the participants in the focus groups as they were conducted in the presence of field workers. However free range was given to the researcher to cover any topics. Where a WIBF field worker conducted the interview in Samoan, the tapes of the interviews were returned to New Zealand where a native

Samoa with no connection to WIBF was used to translate all the tapes into English. Given the limits of time and financial constraints it was considered impractical to do otherwise. Although some focus group guides argue for a neutral location it was believed that the most natural location for the interviews to take place was in the village where the participants felt at home and were able to express themselves freely.

An indication of the freedom that the participants felt in talking openly was that some expressed negative comments about WIBF along with many positive comments – for example in the Alo Family enterprise there were complaints about the price that producers received for some of the products that they made and sold and the need to work with WIBF to get a higher price. Other interviewees also talked freely about the struggle that they had in the early days of their involvement in the project. The coconut oil producers of Si'umu village talked about their disappointment that the oil sales were not going as well as they had expected, in particular the slowness in developing markets for selling more oil.

Before arriving in Samoa, the researcher undertook a three day workshop in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation at Massey University in December 2002 which was organised by the Aotearoa New Zealand Development Studies Network and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (the New Zealand Government's foreign aid agency). This proved invaluable in providing the necessary skills in focus group interviews in development programmes. The researcher also read widely on the topic of focus group interviews. Aibel (1994), Greenbaum (1998), Edmunds (1999), Greenbaum (2000), Rose (2000) provided inspiration. He also met with the director, Adi Tafuna'i. From the time of arrival in Samoa the researcher received the full cooperation of the management and staff of WIBF. Two WIBF field workers Aiga and Toafitu were especially helpful in completing the study, since they were essential in getting access to the participants, and in translation and interpreting. A copy of the discussion guide used during the interviews is provided in the appendix to this paper.

4. Example of an Interviewed Group

A typical group interviewed was at the village of Faletagaloa on the Island of Savaii. This is one of the poorer parts of Samoa. It is remote from the capital and lacking in employment

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options. Agricultural potential is limited by the pervasive volcanic rock and in the recent past cyclones have wrecked havoc with village resources. There is a group of up to 15 women and their families involved in WIBF training. Many in the group attribute their involvement to the inspiration Mrs Uaea Lamese who joined in 1996 and encouraged many others to come along.

Before the WIBF programmes commenced in the village many of the women occupied their time by cooking, washing and looking after the children. There was a lack of income for the family and a lack of self-confidence amongst the people. Many of the women did not know how to weave simple baskets.

The hopes and expectations that women had when they started centred around their wish to earn more money to build up their aiga (family). They also wanted to be able to make the handicrafts well. Some of them talked about those who had started making products but who had found the work to be too time consuming and demanding and had not continued. Some had left after a while and then came back later.

Through the work of WIBF the women were able to recognise the ability in themselves to weave baskets hats, mats and other handicrafts such as making tapa cloth and sewing. They started by making these products for themselves and their families but they soon came to take them to markets to sell and received advance orders for the items as their skills developed.

“Before we didn’t have the skills and didn’t know what we could do...now we are very happy because we have the skills to make many things and we can take them to the market and sell them.” Mrs Uaea Lamese Village elder.

The women talked about the increased choices and opportunities that this work had given them. They have been able to give more money to the church, which is a very important part of Samoan life. It is Samoan custom to read out the size of donation given by each family during the church service. Many expressed considerable pride in being able to be seen as more generous donors.

The consistency of their new income was very important to the interviewees. In the past many of the families had only irregular income from selling taro and coconuts that were surplus to

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their requirements. Others were reliant on remittance income from overseas family members which was not always regular, was a strain on those family members in the long term and did not involve the recipients active involvement.

They were able to pay for their children's school fees easily and allow their children to go further on in education. Some reported that they were able to ensure that their children had better school lunches, which they thought helped their education. Another area where they thought that their choices had expanded greatly was in clothing. With the extra income and confidence they now had they could afford better clothes for themselves and their family members. The ability to purchase correct school uniforms for their children was a source of considerable pride.

Health was another area that this group thought that there had been considerable changes. Before the WIBF programmes were established some described themselves as "lazy". Many only had the opportunity to earn cash sporadically; most were reliant on others for cash that they needed. By being able to earn their own income, a number of the interviewees reported that the well being of themselves and their families had improved. They could consistently afford better quality food and they could upgrade the sanitation facilities of their houses. Along with the handicraft skills, many were able to learn how to use traditional Samoan medicine and massage techniques for the first time. The regular socialisation that went with teaching and making handicrafts allowed the participants to learn these and other skills that were beneficial to their health.

A consistent theme was that the WIBF programmes have allowed for much more sharing with others of knowledge in a wide range of activities that added to their health and their sense of well being. All members of the group felt like active participants in the programmes whether teaching or learning. Related to this were the unexpected advantages that they received from being able to confidently interact with range of people that they met in their transactions in the market. They were now much more able to share their problems and were not scared to say something when they felt it necessary. Many thought they were now able to be a good influence on others in their village who were not in the programme. Some interviewees related how male members of the family had joined production and become very supportive. One

women told of how she was now earning so much from regularly weaving the fine mats that were in demand that her husband had given up his fishing job to take much more responsibility for child care so that she could concentrate on weaving. Clearly other peoples choices have been expanded because of these women's involvement.

Many talked about the pride they now had being able to improve the family's fortunes by contributing to paying bills for electricity, and other household accounts. In the Samoan tradition if one member of the family earns money then it is their duty to share. They now felt that were better able to help in this way. Some also talked of their new-found confidence in being able to budget the family's finances.

It was felt by many that housing was another area where opportunities they now had had expanded. They now could afford many of the materials for a "fale palagi" This is a house with more permanent materials such as a corrugated iron roof and walls that were made of stronger materials. They had the opportunity to see these features as attainable and appropriate for them by the frequent visiting and bonding that occurred during their programmes. Previously they would have seen these materials as neither appropriate nor attainable for them. These more permanent materials meant that they would in future be much less constrained by the need to do major repairs made necessary by the major cyclones that visit the area each year. It was also felt that cleanliness in sanitation facilities, kitchens and housekeeping had improved in a similar fashion.

5.0 The Study Findings

All of the groups agreed there had been an impact on their lives because of their involvement in WIBF. The main increased choices and capabilities that the respondents thought important are discussed below.

5.1 Ability to generate their own Cash income from local sources.

Most of the people reported that the initial impetus for their involvement was to find a source of income for the family It was felt by many that they WIBF programmes enable them to expand the use of local resources such as coconut. The coconut oil producers of Si'umu

village found that their geographic isolation meant that they were lacking other ways of earning cash than those closer to town (the capital Apia) may have had. The Alo family enterprise group reported that making bags is their main source of income. Others such as the Tufutafoe community talked about the new found choices that they had because of the regularity of receiving weekly income from the village shop that WIBF helped them to set up. In this area there was considerable destruction during the 1990s due to major cyclones. Many of the people were left without incomes from their regular work of fishing and farming. The WIBF programmes helped to set up fine mat weaving programmes and other handicraft production that helped the local community regain their pride and self-confidence. Later WIBF staff came to realise that the villages isolated location made it too hard for local people to do their shopping at other locations. Consequently being able to shop locally for basics such as sugar and salt has been helpful to all people in the village but has been particularly helpful in giving some of the young people skills in managing a retail outlet.

A number of respondents talked favourably about the micro-finance scheme and how it shown them they had the ability to save for major expenditures. The scheme also allowed them to borrow and repay large amounts where necessary.

5.2 Employment. The Si'umu village coconut oil producers felt that they had the opportunity to offer family members employment. When the markets expanded for the oil they are producing they would be very keen to offer employment to people outside the village. Others reported that they felt that the work experience they gained in the WIBF programmes helped them to realise the benefits of having continuous work rather than stopping and starting all the time when they needed the money. This, it was felt, could provide them with useful skills were they able to gain other employment in the future.

5.3 Supporting the Family (Aiga) All of the groups mentioned the ability they felt to support their family because of their involvement in the WIBF programmes. Many respondents talked of the pride they felt because of their enhanced ability to expand the fortunes of the family. Some respondents related that they had come to be a major source of money for the education of their younger brothers and sisters. A number of the older people interviewed expressed pride in the fact that they could be financially self reliant and they now have to ask

for little or no help from younger relatives in Samoa or overseas. In fact a number expressed pride in the fact that they were now able to contribute to the cost of their grandchildren's education. Conversely younger members of some groups mentioned that they felt pride in being able to better look after elderly parents and grandparents especially to be able to afford medical care when it was required. Many respondents related that work on the WIBF programmes allowed them to contribute financially to important family events such as weddings and funerals while giving them the time flexibility to take time off to participate fully in these and other events. The Avao handicraft group related how one of the main unexpected changes that they experienced, was the extent to which their husbands and other family members became involved when they realised the extent to which the programmes could increase the fortunes and opportunities for the whole family.

5.4 Making Handicrafts for Sale Some of the producers such as those involved in the Alo Family enterprise reported that they already had the ability to make some handicrafts before they became involved in the WIBF. These people started by helping their mothers or grandmothers weave bags when they were about 10 years old. Some started by making school bags for their own use. What involvement in WIBF programmes allowed them to do was to improve their skill and gain markets for their products. They became the main suppliers of bags and other handicrafts for Aggie Greys, which is a major tourist establishment in the capital.

Other interviewees such as the producers in the Apia Market believed that WIBF programmes had helped them enhance the design of the products that they made and thereby increase their sales. Others talked about the business skills that they had gained by being involved in the programmes. The Avao handicrafts group in Savaii talked about how their horizons had been expanded when they found that the goods that they made could be sold outside of the village, to divers and surfers who came to nearby beaches and then to other people from outside their island such as tourists.

5.5 Involvement of Other family Members.

Group members such as those in the Alo Family enterprise, related an unexpected benefit was the extent to which other male family members became involved in the production of the bags and other handicrafts that they made. A common situation was for the women to specialise in the weaving while the men did all the extra decorations. There was also considerable surprise in the extent to which the development of undiscovered talent amongst other younger family members helped them to gain confidence and skills for the future.

5.6 Revival of Traditional Crafts

Some of the older members of the groups who had been working the WIBF projects for some time expressed considerable satisfaction in being able to revive traditional skills that their grandparents had practised before them. Mrs Vi Vipae the matriarch of the small island community of Manono related how she learnt to weave the much-treasured fine mats from her old female relatives when she was young. For much of her life she continued the making these mats on her own. The field staff of WIBF discovered her skills not long after the foundation was established. Now every women on the island has a mat that they are working on and, even though some take significant time out when church or family obligations intervene, most of the time the villagers now have the ability to practise the old skills which otherwise may have been lost. With the help of WIBF Mrs Vipae has come to be recognised as a highly regarded teacher and a main source of the revival of fine mat weaving skills throughout Samoa. There is evident pride in the whole Manono Island community that they have had been the able to be instrumental in this revival. The success of this has reached outside Samoa as expatriate Samoans living in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA are now frequently paying thousands of dollars for these much prized mats, which are part of their heritage and very important gifts at times of celebrations. Even other Polynesian Island people visit now to search for these fine mats.

5.7 Contribution to the local Church and Community

Traditional Samoan village life is very much centred on the Church and the sense of community is strong. One of the main themes that came through in many of the focus groups was the ability that participation in the programmes of WIBF gave them to contribute more resources

to the local church. Although this may not be a traditional measure of development, clearly from the perspectives of those involved in this study, being able to provide for better equipped and financed churches is important.

Another person who has been an inspiration in this renewal of old skills is Mrs Natia Tautua. She is based in Apia but travels with WIBF field workers all over Samoa to help “teach other women and pass down her knowledge to young ones.” One of the big unexpected benefits that groups she works with, relate is that the women are now able to help others who are in need particularly to work together to spread their newly acquired skills and self-confidence as well as the regular income generating opportunities.

Producers at the Apia flea market who are relatively urbanised were interviewed. They report that one of the main abilities they have found with participation in the WIBF programmes is that it provided them with unexpected social benefits. This included the opportunity to help others and receive help in other areas of their lives as they were separated from their traditional village community support base. Some in this group had experienced life outside in Samoa in such places as urban New Zealand or Hawaii. On coming back to Samoa they found that WIBF programmes provided them with ability to use skills that they had learnt in their foreign travels while also giving them the opportunity to reintegrate with Samoan communities.

5.8 Reduced Reliance on Remittances

One of the major problems in Samoan villages identified by the management of WIBF is that of over reliance on remittances of money from over seas relatives. A number of those interviewed in the groups mentioned that one of the unexpected outcomes of their participation was that they had less reliance on these remittances and took pride in being able to provide income for themselves and their families from a local source. The Tufutafoe group reported that “ they now don’t rely on family overseas because they have enough finance from their business to support their families.” Others mentioned that their family lacked someone overseas to help out but that through the income earned by WIBF they felt better able to be on equal terms with other villagers who had remittance income.

6. Sen's and Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach

Amartya Sen developed his thinking on capabilities and development in a number of decades – see for example Sen (1985a, 1985b, 1992). In Sen (1999) where he elaborates this approach fully the main theme of development is to develop human potential. Economics should be about developing the capabilities of people by increasing the options available to them. This Sen contrasts with the traditional framework of economics, which he feels has been about maximising utility by producing more goods more efficiently. Nussbaum(1999, 2000) has utilised the concept of human dignity as the basis for her perspective on capabilities. In Nussbaum (2000 p60) she argues that people should “ be able to live with a full menu of opportunities and liberties, and thus be able to have lives that are worthy of the dignity of human beings”.

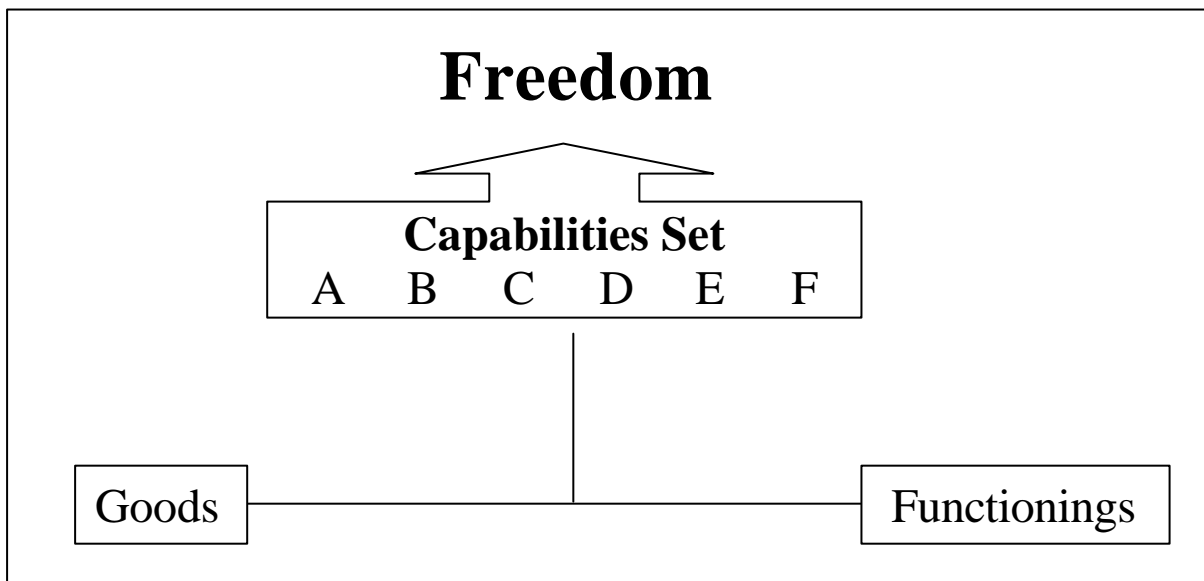
Sen (1999 p11) writes about “the medieval distinction between “the patient” and “the agent”. Sen clearly believes that the CA is a “freedom centred understanding of economics and of the process of development is very much an agent oriented view. Furthermore he states that “with adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs. There is indeed a strong rationale for recognising the positive role of free and sustainable agency.”

The capabilities approach can be represented in figure 1 below. While development agencies can provide goods and increase functionings it is possible to argue that development has only truly occurred when the free and sustainable agency mentioned above is developed and participants are able to actively expand their own capabilities set.

The research reported in this paper supported the capabilities approach, but also revealed something new. The patterns that were observed were that the work of WIBF helped to recognise capabilities *that already existed*. The field workers of WIBF act as facilitators to recognise potential capabilities that the participants in the projects already have. Perhaps we could say that development is people learning to recognise their own capabilities; that is, people discovering that they can do things. This is very much in concurrence with what Sen

advocates that people should be active participants rather passive recipients of cunning projects (Sen 1999). Alternatively, we might say that what is important in development is the discovery process; that is when people or groups discover that they have capabilities. The major conclusion reached in this research is that development may not involve so much *giving* people capabilities but rather it is helping people to recognise their own capabilities *that already exist*.

Figure 1: The Capabilities Approach



This could also be seen as the difference between two main ways of attaining cash in the villages studied. The income earned by those in WIBF programmes involved active participation and conscientisation. In the terminology of the CA they involved the increase in choices, the removal of capability deprivation by the development of capabilities. It can be argued that this project is demonstrating what Sen (1999 p85) means when he calls for “focusing directly on the substantive freedoms of the individuals involved...” and for a “general approach that concentrates on the capabilities of people to do things- and the freedom to lead lives- that they have reason to value.” There is the income attained by the system of sending remittances back to Samoa by migrants to countries such as NZ and Australia. While this is a common family obligation, it is recognised as both an excessive burden to the migrants and as

robbing many of the Samoan villages of the initiative of being responsible for earning their own income. The remittances represent *an obstacle* to people discovering their own capabilities.

7. Conclusion: Application to Development Programme Appraisal and Funding.

It is apparent that WIBF programmes have achieved some considerable success from the perspective of those involved. To a large extent it could be said that their success has resulted from the participants active involvement in discovering a range of capabilities that they already have and using these abilities in a way that will have meaning for them rather than others. An example of this is the great pride that many held in being able to be greater contributors to their church and to the fortunes of their aiga (family).

These are the kind of criteria that could be overlooked by major funding agencies who might concentrate more on traditional measures of income. Yet the former type of non-income criteria are very relevant to the people involved. Sen (1999, p. 87) argues that “in analysing social justice, there is a strong case for judging individual advantage in terms of the capabilities that a person has, that is, the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value.” Further more Sen believes that “in this perspective, poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty.”

It is therefore the conclusion of this researcher that in appraising development projects, it is important that the criteria used recognises that poverty involves this deprivation of capabilities rather than just lack of income. It is also important that the measures used appraise the extent to which they advance the capabilities that the participants inherently have, as well as the substantive freedoms they wish to enjoy and help them to better lead the kind of life they have reason to value. These criteria are certainly the ones that the participants consider to be important in the future. They could be said to provide a much more comprehensive analysis than just looking at increases in average income. These criteria can be seen to be considerable motivational factors for ongoing involvement and conscientisation of participants as they are ones that mean something to them.

The Capabilities Approach in Samoa

There has been a paucity of effective appraisal techniques in evaluating development programmes, particularly those that have used positive evaluations in terms of what participants will be able to do after they have been involved for a time. Rather than concentrating entirely on income levels or on deficiencies such as illiteracy rates, the capability approach offers the opportunity for development programme funding applications to concentrate on what people can do to expand their choices and opportunities. One of the main lessons drawn from this study is that while cash can be “given” through remittances, in contrast capabilities cannot be “given”. Rather, successful development could be said to be occurring when the participants are actively involved in discovering and developing the capabilities that they *already have*. This applies to groups as well as individuals.

Consequently development organisations applying to funding agencies should demonstrate how their funds can find or enhance their existing capabilities and expand choices about things that are valued. It is important these groups should be helped to set up their own appraisal metrics before the project is approved and commenced so that they can judge their own performance in assisting the participants to enhance their capabilities – capabilities that the participants formulate in an ongoing basis. Sen (1999 p291) notes that “in pursuing the view of development as freedom, we have to examine...the extent to which people have the opportunity to achieve outcomes they value and have reason to value.” This study has attempted to determine some of the criteria by which it is possible to appraise the extent the participants in a development project in Samoa are achieving outcomes they value and have reason to value.

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Women in Business Foundation (undated) Technology Tradition Trade: Women in Business Pamphlet

Appendix: Notes used for the focus group recorded interviews

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

- 1) When did you join the group, how did you come to be involved-choice or not? What was your life like before you joined?
- 2) What were your expectations when you joined - especially concerning the choices and opportunities that you might have?
- 3) What new choices and opportunities do you think you have had since your involvement in the programme?

PAUSE AND THEN PROMPT WITH THE FOLLOWING HEADINGS:

- education/skills
- health
- housing
- social/community/family/friends
- status/confidence
- income/finance
- other

Did you expect these changes?

- 4) What did you think of this focus group process?
- 5) Summarise, ask if there was anything that was missed and promise to provide a summary of my research findings.
- 6) Thanks