

# Using theory to inform the development of measurement frameworks: the Multidimensional Inequality Framework



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# About the project

The Multidimensional Inequality Framework and online Toolkits have been developed as part of a collaboration between researchers in Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and practitioners in Oxfam.

The initial project was funded by the LSE's International Inequalities Institute's Atlantic Visiting Fellows programme and additional funding for the CASE team to build a dedicated website and develop a toolkit, was provided by the LSE's Knowledge Exchange fund.



*Atlantic Fellows*

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# Why a multidimensional inequality framework?

- In recent years there has been a growing focus on inequality but although our knowledge and understanding of inequality has grown, we believe that there continues to be a too narrow focus
- The choice of outcomes is somewhat arbitrary and often more to do with the availability of data than theoretical consideration
- From a quality of life perspective, a capability approach perspective, the concept we are interested in is multidimensional
- If we are interested in assessing and analysing inequality in the quality of peoples' lives, we need a multidimensional framework

# **Multidimensional Inequality Framework – theoretical background**

- The MIF is theoretically grounded in the Capability Approach: we are interested in measuring inequalities in the capability for people to have a good quality of life (choice of dimensions/domains not arbitrary)
- Previous practical applications of the CA have focused on ‘capability deprivation’ and horizontal inequality (differences between groups in terms of meeting a threshold)
- The MIF is designed to measure ‘vertical’ as well as ‘horizontal’ capability inequality; picking up advantage as well as disadvantage and operationalising the concept that it is possible to have ‘too much’ as well as ‘too little’ (e.g., power and influence)
- We also draw on CA theory to identify drivers of multidimensional inequality and inform policy options.
- The theory informs the notion of ‘spawning privileges’ – top achievements in one domain likely to secure privilege in others – as well as ‘corrosive disadvantages’ and ‘fertile functionings’

# Capability approach

- Amartya Sen found the main existing approaches to assessing the quality of people's lives problematic
  - Economic approaches fail to take into account differences in need, or differences in the ability to convert resources (primary goods) into valuable things people can do or be (eg being well-nourished, warm in the winter, feeling physically secure)
  - Subjective approaches fail to take into account how expectations are shaped by experience or norms
- Sen developed a 'capability approach' to evaluating the quality of people's lives – the capability for people to a good quality of life in terms of valuable things they can do or be, and the freedom they have to choose the kind of life they have reason to value
- The capability approach is not just concerned with achieved outcomes (functionings – what people actually do or are) but also with the range of opportunities available (capabilities – what people can do or be)

# Multidimensional Inequality Framework – capability approach

In practice what does “theoretically ground in the capability approach” mean in terms of the features of the measurement framework?

- Theory is use to determine the overall structure – the choice of life domains/dimensions (capability list)
- It shapes the structure within the domains – the sub-domains and inequality indicators
- It influences the choice of inequality measures
  - Horizontal and vertical inequality
  - Although typically measures pick up ‘functionings’ (what people actually do or are), where possible, try to measure things that affect real opportunities in terms of what you can do or be (capabilities)
  - Operationalising the concept of ‘too much’
  - Treatment by others – being treated with dignity and respect, facing discrimination or being negatively affected by social and cultural norms

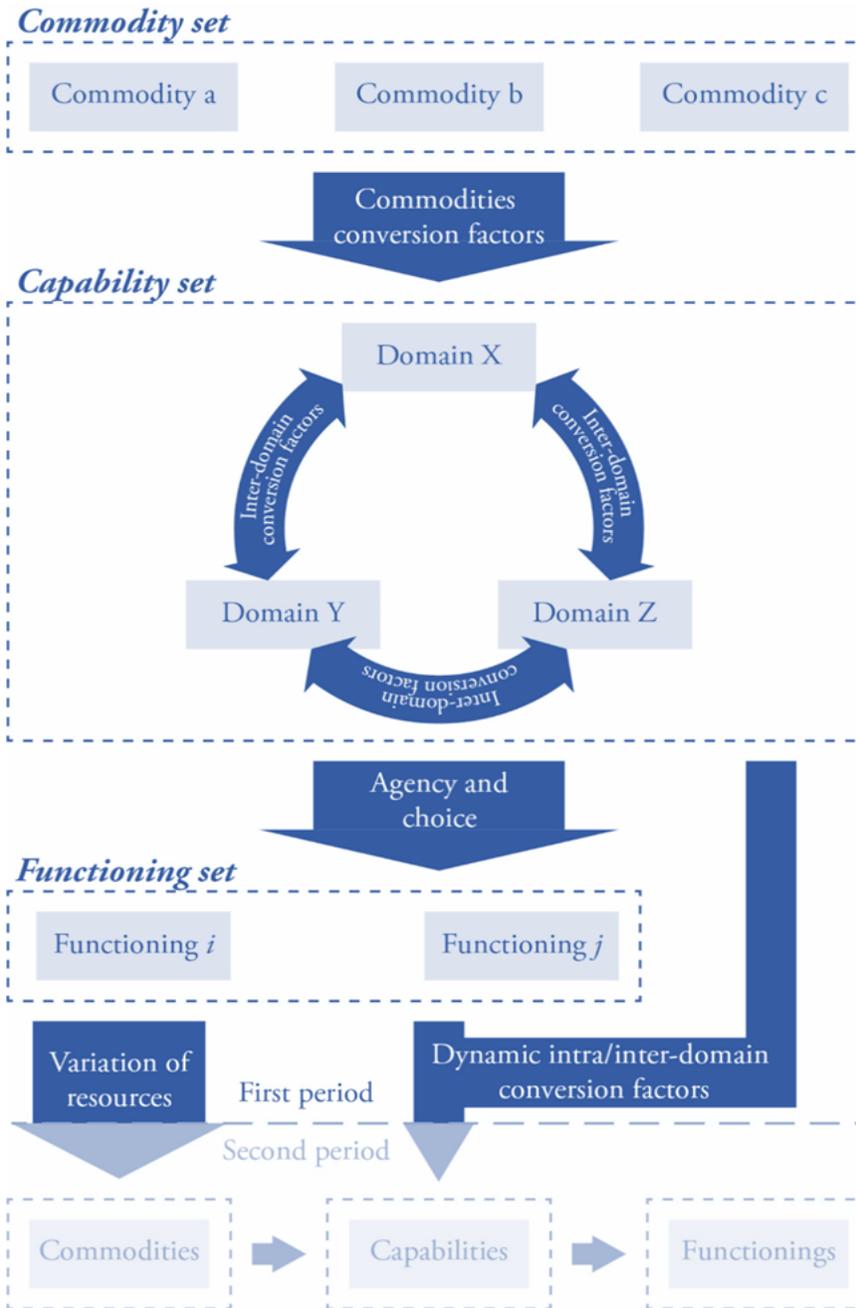




# Drivers of inequality

- The Capability Approach influences how we think about the drivers of multidimensional inequality
- We try to identify 'conversion factors' (particularly processes and structures) that can explain how a given distribution of individual resources ('commodity set') can result in greater inequalities in outcomes ('functionings').
- The theory also guides us to consider choice and agency. We are concerned about drivers of inequality that constrain choice, whether this is because of social or cultural norms (for example, restricting choice in terms of who you marry), the direct consequence of the behaviour of others or due to inadequate institutions or services.





# Summary

- The MIF was designed to measure and analyse inequalities in well-being in a systematic way. It is theoretically grounded in the Capability Approach.
- Theory is used to guide the overall structure of the framework (the domains) as well as the choice of inequality indicators and inequality measures (including vertical capability-inequality). Without a theoretical basis, the choice of domains and measures are largely arbitrary
- The MIF covers not just inequality measures but also drivers of inequality and effective policies; all informed by the theory
- It operationalises ‘conversion factors’ as drivers of multidimensional inequality, in both a static and dynamic frame, recognising that inequalities in one domain may be key drivers of inequalities in another domain
- Considers ‘spawning privileges’ – top achievements in one domain likely to secure privilege in others – as well as ‘corrosive disadvantage’ and ‘fertile functionings’





## Physical and legal security: Inequality in the capability to live in physical safety and legal security

### Description

People need to be physically safe and enjoy legally security to live the life they have reason to value. This domain covers the key elements of physical security through indicators and measures that highlight absence of physical security (for example, the experience of violence) as well as subjective measures reporting individuals' sense of physical security and safety. People need to be protected and treated equally and fairly by the law in order avoid inequalities in legal security. This domain covers inequalities in treatment before the law and within criminal or administrative systems.

Click on the button to find out more.



### Measurement considerations

The identification of inequality indicators and the interpretation of measures of inequality in this domain is complicated by the fact that some of the measures relate to illegal, covert and concealed activities, for example, torture by the state and human trafficking. This increases the need to triangulate through the use of multiple sources (for example, in the context of torture, using NGO and human rights allegations data).

In terms of inequality in physical security and personal safety, most of the indicators provide measures on whether or not individuals have experienced a form of physical violence, maltreatment or intimidation (including bullying and identity-based violence). Inequality measures adopted typically quantify differences in the incidence of physical violence and maltreatment between population sub-groups covering the main areas of violent crime, sexual and domestic violence, hate crimes, cruelty, physical punishment and

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#### MIF Domains

- > Domain 1: Life and health
- > Domain 2: Physical and legal security
- > Domain 3: Education and learning
- > Domain 4: Financial security and dignified work
- > Domain 5: Comfortable, independent and secure living conditions
- > Domain 6: Participation, influence and voice
- > Domain 7: Individual, family and social life

#### The Toolkit

- > Home
- > Get prepared
- > Get started
- > The Framework (MIF)



## Education and learning: Inequality in the capability to be knowledgeable, to understand and reason, and to have the skills to participate in society

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Sub-domain



+ 3.D:

Develop critical thinking, active and global citizenship, knowledge and understanding of human rights

Indicator



+ 3.6:

**Indicator:**  
Critical thinking and awareness of rights

Measure



- 3.6.1

**Measures:**  
Percentage who have knowledge and understanding of human rights and consumer rights etc. (a) through inclusion on school curriculum; (b) through campaigns, literature and public events

UN SDG indicator



*Reference: UN SDG:*

4.7.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment

+ 3.E:

Be treated with dignity and respect in education and learning establishments

+ 3.7:

**Indicator:**  
Treatment in education and learning establishments

**Measures:**

3.7.1

Percentage of those attending who say they are: (a) treated with respect at school or college; (b) have experienced bullying or violence at an educational establishment

# Multidimensional Inequality Framework - purpose

- The MIF provides a systematic framework for measuring and analysing inequality
- It can be easily adapted to fit different context and country settings
- We developing a dedicated website (<http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/inequality/>) which provides free access to the MIF and a set of user guides, information on inequality drivers, candidate policies and how to take action on inequalities
- Oxfam are piloting the MIF in Spain, Guatemala, Burkina Faso and Vietnam with an aim to roll-out the MIF across country teams
- We have plans to raise funds to apply the MIF in various country settings and to help provide support for others wishing to use the MIF



# Resources

The Multidimensional Inequality Framework publication can be downloaded from <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/inequality/the-framework/media/mif-framework-0719.pdf>

The dedicated website can be accessed here <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/inequality/>

Blog: How divided are we?  
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