

Innovation, development and human capabilities*

The Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) was launched in 2004, to promote multidisciplinary research on key problems, including poverty, justice, well-being and economics. The annual conference of HDCA for the year 2011 was held at The Hague, The Netherlands, known as the international city of peace and justice. The theme of the conference was 'Innovation, development and human capabilities'.

There was an array of preconference events, such as the summer school on 'Capability and multidimensional poverty' conducted by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, and the public lecture by Martha Nussbaum (The University of Chicago, Illinois, USA) in which she talked about the differences between utilitarianism and the capability approach, and gave an overview of her version of the latter. This approach was founded by Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA). Sen, also the founding President of the HDCA, describes this approach as follows: 'the capability approach provides the intellectual foundation for human development. This approach considers human well-being, participation and freedom to be central economic and social objectives' (http://www.ethicsand-technology.eu/subsite/hdca_conference_2011).

The capability approach proposes that social arrangements should aim at expanding the capabilities of people, i.e. their freedom to aspire and achieve what they truly want to do (doings) and be (beings). This, in contrast to other approaches which suggest maximization of income, commodities or the happiness

of people (utility) as the outcome of development, gives a different perspective of looking at development, well-being and poverty.

During the conference, the first Amartya Sen Lecture was delivered by Tony Atkinson (University of Oxford, UK) on 'Public economics after *The Idea of Justice*'. Atkinson argued for reshaping of public economics in the light of *The Idea of Justice*, a book by Sen. This claim was made with reference to the proposed austerity programmes as answers to economic woes, without any public debate and without looking into other possible alternatives. According to Atkinson this is against the idea of freedom, which should be targeted towards healthy life, political freedom and supply of basic necessities rather than looking at the gross domestic product.

In the panel discussion by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the 'Human Development Report 2011: Sustainability and Equity', a UNDP representative reported key findings. Luis-Filipe Lopez-Calva (World Bank) elaborated on the impact of inequality on human development, and Ingrid Robeyns (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands) discussed the relationship between inequality and justice. The latest human development report can be downloaded from <http://hdr.undp.org>.

Nussbaum delivered the keynote speech on 'Women and the internet: objectification and human capabilities'. The effects of treating women as objects – for use and abuse by men (objectification) – on women's agency were discussed. She spoke of the power of anonymity offered by the internet to men who delve in such activities, and the related legal and ethical dimensions. Ineke Buskens (GRACE Network, South Africa) commented on the talk by Nussbaum, and also presented the positive aspects of the internet for women, as another dimension to this debate.

The keynote address by Melissa Leach (University of Sussex, UK) titled 'Innovation, sustainability, development: manifestos and movements', briefed the audience on the core points of the STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) manifesto and discussed its vision on the role of science, technology and innovation in helping the global poor sustainably, and the important role of manifestos in this regard.

Thomas Pogge (Yale University, Connecticut, USA) presented the biennial Mahbub-ul-Haq Memorial Lecture on 'The health impact fund as a justice-enhancing institutional innovation'. The need to invest on diseases linked to the majority of the population, largely the poor, which will result in incentives for the development and distribution of new medicines, was presented in the form of a novel concept – the health impact fund (HIF). Pogge discussed the implementation, funding and economic viability along with the moral justification of HIF.

In between the plenaries, many papers were presented in well-organized parallel sessions. Poster presentations aided discussions between the presenters and the audience, and thematic groups (formed on the basis of different dimensions linked to human development) talked about their future plans and activities.

The conference concluded after the announcement of the winner of the Kukulys Prize for the best conference paper of a graduate student – Nicolai Suppa for his paper 'Does capability deprivation hurt?' The next HDCA conference, with the theme 'Revisiting development; do we assess it correctly?' will be held in Jakarta during 4–10 September 2012.

Pramod Khadlikar, Centre for Sustainable Technologies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012, India.
e-mail: pramod.khadlikar@gmail.com

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