Approximations to World Development:  
Economic and Human Rights from a Capabilities Perspective

Javier María Iguíñiz Echeverría*

Presentation

The economic inequality and poverty found in the world today make up a widely discussed and statistically measured problem. Different definitions of this inequality give place to different interpretations and debates about its evolution1, but regardless of which point of view we may follow, as Sen points out, the differences in economic conditions between people, regions and countries are unacceptably large: “This debate does not have to be settled as a precondition for getting on with the central issue. The basic concern relates to the massive levels of inequality and poverty – not whether they are also increasing and decreasing at the margin.” 2 But is economics the only or best way of looking at poverty and inequality in the world?

Definitions and measurements of inequality which are not exclusively economic have been uncommon, but are quickly gaining ground among those who are concerned with human rights as well as those who work with a human development and capabilities approach. For example, UNDP reports have moved closer to that conceptual approach and have taken new steps in the same direction.3 In any case, the difficulties that human capabilities encounter so that people may subsist as human beings are enormous and persistent.

Why take into account the human development and the human rights approach when dealing with the issue of poverty? The most important reason is that both approaches combined can be more useful than when separate, especially when it comes to the definition of and the fight against poverty.4 As we will show, both adopt a reformulation of the meaning of poverty that plays down and reduces the exaggerated

* Professor of the Economics Department at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Electrical Engineer, and PhD in Economics by the The New School for Social Research, New York. President of The International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (ICMICA-Pax Romana)


4 It is not obvious that both approaches are seen as compatible. For example, Osmani reminds us that: “In some Asian countries whose leaders have invoked the idea of ‘Asian values’ to argue in effect that excessive deference to civil and political rights may be inimical to economic prosperity in general and poverty reduction in particular.” OSMANI, Siddiqur R.. The Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction. In: Andreassen, Bard A., Stephen P. Marks and Arjun Sengupta (eds.), Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right. Vol. 3. Paris: UNESCO Publishing 2009, p. 50.
importance of the economic dimension and **makes allows** moving towards the securing of rights and the reduction of deprivations in important aspects of life without expecting great prior achievements in the field of economic poverty. In this essay we will restrict ourselves to dealing with three points that do not exhaust in any way the issues which we are dealing with, but that do allow an introductory yet substantial debate. The first is rather general and it is linked to the conceptual connection between the capabilities and human rights approaches. The proposal is to look at rights as rights to certain freedoms rather than rights to, for example, resources. In that way, one can elaborate a vision of the world that incorporates multiple dimensions and not only that relative to the economic aspect. In the second point we go over different attempts of operatively specifying the vision of poverty that both approaches offer. We also look at the multidimensionality present in both approaches and through this the possibility of evaluating in different ways the actual state and evolution of development in the world from the perspective of human rights and human development. In the third point, we present various charts that illustrate the diverse ways of observing development in the world, and in different regions. For example, using data from Latin America and the United States, we hope to show that the evolution of the gap between rich and poor countries radically depends on the indicators used. Also that, with data from around the world, severe poverty in some countries, both massive and persistent, if duly redefined by the already mentioned approaches, can be faced with certain margins of autonomy with respect to the existing economic conditions. This contributes, for example, towards justifying the existence of poverty indicators that do not have income as one of their components. But most importantly, we hope to show that if indeed the validity of civil and political rights does not require an economic development equal to those of rich countries, then the same conclusion can be applied to some basic economic and social rights.  

This work is part of a personal research project to suggest that we have to move in two directions when dealing with the relationship between economic and human development at the global and local levels. On the one hand we have to ask to the economy for a much greater efficiency reducing poverty, but on the other we have to look for ways of attacking it that do not depend on the economy. If by the first we have to criticize the current economic system and transform it radically in several respects, by the second we have to be able to dispense with the economy, and to look more carefully to other dimensions of life for support. Only in this manner we will become less dependent on the economy to design and practice a good life. The most profound criticism to the dominant current economic institutional arrangements is not to implement another one but to relocate the economic sphere within a more general view of the real world and of human life.

I. The capabilities approach towards human rights

---

5 That seems to be the way constitutional efforts are pointing to, such as the case of Colombia. “…the censorship to which recent Latin American constitutions expose themselves in which one gathers, together with the varied institutions of participative democracy, a wide range of individual and social rights and guarantees – first, second and third generations ones-, precisely goes towards denouncing its content as and unauthorized aggregate by an authentic constitutionalism, which does not see itself as detached from the concrete capacities of realization of its dictates. It will do well for this criticism an austere constitutionalism, limited to the regulation of the organic framework of the public power and, at most, expository of the rights that are realized only through the abstention of the State. Everything else may be judged as exuberant and rhetorical.” Available in: [www.bibliojuridica.org/libros/1138.pdf](www.bibliojuridica.org/libros/1138.pdf). Accessed October 9 2010
In the most synthetic terms, the capabilities approach towards human development, is understood “as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy”\(^6\). Given the empirical and the specific interest of this work we shall not dwell into the several elements that are implicitly present in that definition. We may just complement what has been said by indicating that, given the heated debates of the past three decades and after the assimilation of valuable aspects from other perspectives, the concept of development, always centered on the human being, begins to acquire new elements that complement the original ones some three decades ago.

For example, an influential work which has been used as a reference for the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report points out that “Human Development aims to expand people’s freedoms – the worthwhile capabilities people value – and to empower people to engage actively in development processes, on a share planet. And it seeks to do so in ways that appropriately advance equity, efficiency, sustainability and other key principles.”\(^7\) In yet shorter terms, it is about “development by the people of the people and for the people.”\(^8\)

Despite that it deals with an approach and not properly speaking a theory, a general theoretical hypothesis of the capabilities approach is that the grave deprivations in peoples lives generally include important limitations when it comes to freedom and, in an even more theoretical vein, it affirms that they are often due to a lack of freedom, including that which comes from the oppressive situations under which people live.\(^9\) As Sen points out: “Many of the terrible deprivations in the world have arisen from a lack of freedom to escape destitution. Even though indolence and inactivity have been classic themes in the old literature on poverty, people have starved and suffered because of a lack of alternative possibilities.”\(^10\) This is immediately followed by Sen’s adherence to a classic approach: “It is the connection of poverty with unfreedom that led Marx to argue passionately for the need to replace ‘the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals ever chance and circumstances’.”\(^11\)

It is in this emphasis on the liberation of oppressions that Sen’s proposal of conceptually linking development and human rights finds its substance. Human rights fit perfectly in the perspective of development as an expansion of human capabilities, that is, as a “process of removing unfreedoms and of extending the substantive freedoms of different types that people have reason to value.”\(^12\) The proposal consists

---

\(^8\) ALKIRE, ibid.
\(^9\) We have dealt with this relation between the stress on liberty and that of the Liberation Theology in IGUÍNIZ ECHEVERRIA, Javier M. Desarrollo, libertad y liberación en Amartya Sen y Gustavo Gutiérrez. Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica, Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones e Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 2003. Also, “Freedom in Amartya Sen and Gustavo Gutiérrez. Religious and Secular Common Grounds”. In: WHITE, James B. How Should We Talk About Religion? Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006, pp. 194-210. A warning must be made in that some of the limitations to freedom come from non social factors such as the case of congenital handicaps, although even in these personal circumstances the lives of people can more or less widely unfold according to the type of family and society in which they live in.
\(^10\) SEN, Amartya. Human Rights and Capabilities. Journal of Human Development. Vol. 6, Number 2, July 2005, p. 155. Actually, this way of looking at things is more common than it seems. It has already been said that in order to break with the situation of poverty and dependence in the coca growing zones of Peru “the most effective approach for reducing coca farming is the promotion of alternative life means.” YOUNGERS, Coletta A. Un nuevo enfoque para la coca en el Perú. El comercio, Lima, 5 July 2010, p. a5.
therefore of seeing human rights as rights to certain liberties. “It is possible to argue that human rights are best seen as rights to certain specific freedoms, and that the correlate obligation to consider the associated duties must also be centred around what others can do to safeguard and expand these freedoms. Since capabilities can be seen broadly, as freedoms of particular kinds, this would seem to establish a basic connection between the two categories of ideas.”

This approach to development therefore puts its emphasis on other areas rather than that of the lack of income and resources in general. A fundamental conceptual reason is that resources are means, while liberties are ends without ceasing to also be means. As Nussbaum does well to remind us “…instead of asking about the satisfaction of people or the resources that they can work with, what we ask is: what are people really capable of being or doing?” A practical reason for that distinction is that some equality in the field of resources can be compatible with an appreciable inequality in the field of human freedoms. “Thus, the relationship between resources and poverty is both variable and deeply contingent on the characteristics of the respective people and the environment in which they live – both natural and social.”

Besides, when we arrive at the analysis of the numbers of the countries at the world level, we will show in the final section of this article that given similar incomes one can achieve very diverse results when it comes to the possibility of preventing illiteracy and other basic human deprivations. The importance of what we have just pointed out is that by stressing real freedoms, the way of understanding human rights proposed from the capabilities approach tends to subordinate certain rights to resources, in spite of its open acceptance of their enormous importance from a practical point of view.

This liberationist proposal is the subject of an interesting academic debate that also takes place in the world of international organizations. One way of looking at the terms of the debate is by asking which approach is more embracing and therefore includes the other. In a sense, there is at stake a debate over hegemony. Since our work is directed towards the problem of poverty we do not seek to tread over the terrain in which that discussion takes place. We may simply point out that in Sen’s judgment it is not possible to fully subsume one approach within the other. We find therefore some sort of a two-step movement: one, by subsuming the rights approach inside the more general freedom framework, and another recognizing that some components of the freedoms involved escape in a significant manner from the more strict aspects of the capabilities approach. One way of affirming these two steps is by distinguishing between the aspect of opportunity and of process that is present in his approach of freedom. We may look at this in greater detail.

Sen proposes that the analysis of the relation between human development and human rights can be refined by distinguishing two aspects of freedom: “First, freedom gives us the opportunity to achieve our objectives –things that we have reason to value. The opportunity aspect of freedom is, thus, concerned with our actual capability to achieve. It relates to the real opportunities we have of achieving things that we can do value (no matter what the process is through which that achievement comes about)”

16 As Urban Jonsson reminded us in his presentation at the HDCA 2010 congress in Amman expressions can be found in the sense that human rights are a “integral part of the development agenda” (Copenhagen) y and also that “development should be justly seen as an integral part of human rights” (Vienna).
“The process aspect, in its turn, world include several distinct features, in particular, (i) decisional autonomy of the choices to be made, and (ii) immunity from interference by others.”

With these distinctions Sen establishes that the relation between the capabilities approach and that of human rights is mainly a complementary one. The capabilities approach “...cannot possibly deal adequately with the process aspect of freedom, since capabilities are characteristics of individual advantages, and they fall short of telling us enough about the fairness or equity of the processes involved, or about the freedom of citizens to invoke and utilize procedures that are equitable.” He insists: “To conclude, the two concepts –human rights and capabilities- go well with each other, son long as we do not try to subsume either entirely within the other. There are many human rights for which the capability perspective has much to offer. However, human rights to important process freedoms cannot be adequately analysed within the capability approach”.

Hence, a dialogue is opened between non-excluding perspectives in the sense that at the same time that the field of freedoms is proposed as the adequate one for establishing human rights it is recognized that, even within it, the capabilities approach does not attempt to monopolize the meaning of such rights. How does that partial juxtaposition reflects when it comes to understanding and measuring poverty?

II. On the operative definition of poverty and extreme poverty

 Freedoms consist in the possibility of avoiding deprivations in life’s many spheres. That can be done for sets of deprivations together, that is in an integral manner, as well as in a separate manner, privation by privation; hence the practical importance of the perspective stressing the multidimensionality of the problem.

 In the analysis of development and poverty, an important conceptual separation is that which detaches the economic approach from the one that belongs to the human development perspective. For Sen, poverty can be “better seen in terms of capability failure than in terms of the failure to meet the ´ basic needs´ for specified commodities”

Osmani repeats that definition and then illustrates it in the following way by expressing the meaning of poverty through the approach and terminology of capabilities: the failure to achieve the minimally acceptable levels of some ´basic capabilities´ - for example, the capability to be free from hunger and malnutrition, the capability to avoid premature death and avoid morbidity, to be able to read and write at a very basic level s that one can acquire some minimal ability to interpret and deal with the world one lives in, to be able to protect oneself from the elements of nature, to be

---

21 In that sense, in seems to us that what is being proposed is that, for example, rights to posses resources or to having certain beliefs may enrich their meanings by interpreting them also a rights to choosing alternative resources or among diverse beliefs. Hence a field is opened for a greater density of known rights.
able to come out in public without shame, to be able to take part in the affairs of the community with dignity and confidence, and so on.”

In the practice of empirical research, those capabilities are hard to measure. It is not easy to exhaustively know what life options, that is, capabilities, people had by observing those that they did in fact choose and that are, because of it, more visible and evident. The activities that weren’t chosen are not easily recorded. Therefore, for practical purposes one assumes that, for example, the freedom that is effectively available for eating becomes food; that the freedom available for extending the duration of life is used and becomes in effect longevity. In general, and we may be simplifying, capabilities, that is available opportunities, become “functionings”, in other words, in effective ways of living. Hence, the non economic components of the HDI such as life expectancy at birth or literacy rates are approximations to people’s basic capabilities which suppose that they take great advantage of the freedom that they have of living longer or communicate by reading and writing.

This multidimensional way of understanding poverty is still subject to debate, especially when it comes to the economic perspective based on income or resources in general. In that debate, the definition of poverty moves from an almost exclusive emphasis on income to another in which that component is maintained but other elements are added. These other elements are considered as belonging to human development understood as the satisfaction of basic necessities or as the expression of human functioning. The UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) seems to follow this guideline. But, indeed, the “income” component in the Index is not strictly the economic one for it has been converted into an index of freedom by multiplying it by a changing coefficient that reflects the diminished effect of successive increases in income on freedom understood as an opening of opportunities for choosing the kind of life that is valued by the individual and that there are reasons to value it.

The World Bank has moved somewhat closer to this multidimensional view of poverty, defining it as a combination of real income and other “human components”, but its main data concerning poverty and extreme poverty in the world remains based on the famous “daily dollar per capita”.

In an even greater break with the approach of poverty based on economic resources, the UNDP, when designing indexes for the evaluation of extreme poverty, has completely eliminated income as a component. For instance, in the Human Poverty Index (HPI) it is no longer present. Hence, it is clearly moving away from the temptation of turning income into a constitutive element of poverty in the same scale as

23 OSMANI, Siddiqur R., 2009, op.cit., p. 51. It is therefore about the plain of possibilities of being and doing that are opened to people, of their power and empowering, more than, for example, the enjoyment of a minimum of good health, or a minimum for capacity for reading. These minimums are the result of having been able to access a healthy life and of deciding to enjoy and take care of it.
25 “Historically, poverty has been related to income, which remains at the core of the concept today.” TOWNSEND, Peter “Compendium of best practices in poverty measurement; expert group on poverty statistics. (IPEA, Rio de Janeiro 2006. 5) Quote provided to me by Leonardo Castilho.
26 Knowledge (education) is measured by the literacy rate for adults (2/3) and gross rate of school enrollment (1/3). A long and healthy life, expressed as the health expectancy at birth.
27 We find what might look as a paradox in this field. On the one hand, the lowest the level of income of the family the more important is its increase in terms of the opportunities it allows; on the other, the poorest the family the smaller the incidence of the level of income on such freedom. That is why in the HPI income is not present.
capabilities.\textsuperscript{28} This of course does not deny the recognition of the huge importance of income as a casual factor of poverty when more widely understood as a set of privations.\textsuperscript{29}

One will do well to remember that the notion of human rights is far older than that of human development. The concern for the issue of poverty is also quite old, considering that the freedom from want, the right to satisfy basic needs is present in foundational documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 25).

Even so, the need for a conceptual effort to establish the links between human development and human rights and, more specifically, between human rights and poverty in part derives from the reason that “Poverty, hunger and inanition have been excluded from important discourses on fundamental freedoms and human rights in the libertarian traditions (such as Hayek, Nozick) as well as liberal ones (Berlin, Rawls, O’Neill).”\textsuperscript{30} For, “there is no law against dying of hunger” as Drèze and Sen hold.\textsuperscript{31}

In A Theory of Justice, Rawls takes the following approach towards the problem: “The inability to take advantage of one’s rights and opportunities as a result of poverty and ignorance, and a lack of means generally, is sometimes counted among the constraints definitive of liberty. I shall not, however, say this, but rather I shall be thinking of these things as affecting the worth of liberty, the value to individuals of the rights that the first principle defines”.\textsuperscript{32}

When the UNESCO book on poverty and rights was presented, Pogge conceded that “the deeper question” is “whether there is a human right to freedom from severe poverty”\textsuperscript{33} Or that: “Despite the undisputed great importance of such basic necessities for human life, there is no agreement on whether human beings have a right, or human right, to such necessities.”\textsuperscript{34} Seen in such a way, just like the capabilities approach redefines the meaning of poverty in the sense that from such an approach it can deal rigorously with the problem, the human rights perspective is obliged to do the same if it wishes to incorporate it among violations to such rights.

In the intellectual world near to human rights international organizations we understand that there is an ongoing search process when it comes to the meaning of poverty.\textsuperscript{35} Despite the fact that in the academic community there doesn’t seem to be a consensual definition of the term there is a great awareness of the need to do so. Pogge insists that “an exact and applicable definition of poverty is important”.\textsuperscript{36} In an interview

\textsuperscript{28} Sen himself polarizes the alternatives by writing that: “There are good reasons for seeing poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as low income.” SEN, Amartya, Development as Freedom. New York: Anchor, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{29} We have dealt with the process that goes from income in the World Bank to its absence in the HPI of the UNDP in: “La pobreza es multidimensional: un ensayo de clasificación”. Economía, Journal of the Economics Department of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, vol. XXVIII, Nos. 55-56, june. Lima, 2001, pp. 91-126.


\textsuperscript{34} He then goes on to say: “To address this disagreement, one must distinguish between the legal and the moral question.” POGGE, Thomas (2009b) “Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation” In: POGGE, Thomas editor, 2009, op.cit., p.13.

\textsuperscript{35} See: CASTILHO, Leonardo, op.cit.

he states that despite that what’s important from a moral point of view is a wide
definition, “I stick to a narrow definition of poverty as income poverty.”

Yet among human rights experts some variations are certainly present, especially
those that combine with the same conceptual importance income and other variables
nearer to approaches such as basic needs. For example, Sengupta, an Independent
Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty of the UUNN Human Rights
Commission, on the nexus between human rights and extreme poverty, does take into
account the capabilities approach but prefers to define poverty as “the combination
of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusión.” In general, he
distinguishes “income poverty” from “capability poverty” so that each may be receive
the same status and the first will not be seen as a mere factor of less evaluative
hierarchy as the second one. Something similar happens with Sepúlveda, Sengupta’s
successor in the post of Independent Expert: “Although the definition recognizes that
lack of income is a key characteristic of extreme poverty, it also acknowledges that
from a human rights perspective, poverty is not limited to economic deprivation but
also implies significant social, cultural and political intervention”.

One advantage of this inclusion of income is that it is easier to specifically place
economic organization, the world economic system, in the sight of human rights
defenders than in those that propose the capabilities approach. Perhaps because of that
reason, the powerful insistence from the rights approach of maintaining income as a
constitutive component of poverty and often with an importance equivalent to the other
typical components of human development (education, health, nutrition, etc.). From the
capability perspective, income has the status of mean while freedoms that of end.

To summarize, while in the capabilities approach there is a clear redefinition of
the meaning of poverty, in the human rights one what predominates until now is the
combination of indexes such as income with others that come from the basic needs
approach or attributed with diverse precision to the capabilities one. Our objective in the
third part is to empirically show some of the practical advantages of defining poverty in
a way that is independent of income. We will show that world reality is different
according to the perspective selected, that the evolution of non economic poverty can be
differentiated from the economic one and that there are margins of action against
extreme poverty without expecting to achieve first appreciable levels of economic
progress.

III. Autonomy of the non economic dimensions of poverty

We have suggested that the human rights approach does not have a definitive stand with
respect to the status of income in the definition of poverty and that there seems to
dominate a proposal in which income is placed at the same conceptual level as other

37 POGGE, Thomas. Interview with philosopher Thomas Pogge on the fight against poverty. SHS
UN Doc. A/HRC/7/15, para. 6.
p.339.
40 Actually, as we have suggested above, his approach combines income and basic necessities. For
example, “Eliminating poverty would then imply the adoption of policies to increase the level of income
of the poor above the poverty line and for making possible the realization of the rights to satisfaction of
the basic needs such as food, health, housing and education at the level that is considered necessary.”
SENGUPTA. Poverty eradiction …, op.cit., p. 339.
41 UN Doc. A/63/274 (n. 9) para 10. Quote provided by Leonardo SC CASTILHO.
indicators that some may call “social”. Despite this, an actually growing consensus is that any definition of poverty should be multidimensional. The most striking differences revolve around whether income is an unavoidable component of the definition or if it should considered outside of it, knowing still that it has great importance among the factors that cause deprivations that are denominated as poverty in the capabilities approach.  

Recent studies show that the statistical relation between human development and income is obviously greater when the latter is included in the definition of the former such as in the UNDP’s Human development Index (HDI). But when the HDI’s other components or other dimensions that are not included in it are evaluated separately, the relationships are diverse and the non economic indicators show a great deal of statistical autonomy in relation to the economic ones.

In this last part of the article we will show that the definition of poverty has much importance when it comes to quantifying both its level and its evolution. Our intention is to show with a few examples that, even though the economy still is a very important mean for human development, there are many possibilities of progress and, in that sense, of freedom that are not significantly dependent on a greater availability of economic resources and that even in times of crisis substantive advances are possible in such development.

Contrary to what can be observed in Asia, in Graph 1 we show a divergent trend in the evolution of the Gross Domestic Product per capita of Latin America (LA) and of the United States of America (USA) throughout the XX century. A persistent widening of the absolute gap can be observed. If economic development consists in reaching the GDP levels of rich countries, the countries of Latin America would have suffered a persistent process of underdevelopment.

In Graph 2, we show the numbers that compare the evolution of life expectancy at birth in LA and the USA and it becomes all too evident that the gap between them diminishes.

Something similar happens with the data dealing with literacy rates in Graph 3. In that way, it becomes evident that the evolution of the differences between rich and poor countries economically depends on the selected indicators.

When seen from the human development approach, it is not simply about choosing a favorite indicator, but it is about trying to establish that, as we have pointed about, there is a matter of hierarchy. Indicators about human life are more important than those relating to resources, including family income, because some are ends and other means.

Another way of showing that partial but useful autonomy at the moment of establishing policy priorities is presented by the differentiated effect of crises on economic and non economic indicators. In graphs 4, 5, 6, and 7 we show the evolution of production and of the indexes of education and health in four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean during the “lost decade”, after the foreign debt crisis at the beginning of the 1980s.
Our intention is to demonstrate the unequal evolution of the economic and non economical variables during the worst moment of the foreign debt crisis. As can be seen, even in countries with severely negatively affected economies by the economic crisis, both education and health had different evolutions.

Finally, in the third set of graphs, 8, 9, and 10, we complement what has already been shown by showing the points which correspond to each country of the world in the indicated coordinates and showing that countries with similar product per capita or public spending have arrived at very different places when it comes to basic human development. This difference in the result is confirmed with many other indicators such as basic educations, health, etc., for the L shape that appears in the graphs comes up over and over again.
As we have pointed out, all that we have just mentioned has the goal of showing that the difference between poverty in terms of incomes and that expressed in deprivations of the kind already mentioned is important both statistically and in the effects it may have on public policy. The way of defining poverty, especially if we are
talking about extreme poverty, has an impact in the alternatives that are available for facing it. It is not the purpose of this article, but we may advance that, for example, the fact that education and health have a long history of being provided by the state is not irrelevant when it comes to specifying immediate responsibilities and ways of facing them. In other terms, it seems more possible to respond to the demands of the extreme poor by putting at their geographical reach the corresponding public services than by promoting policies that increase their family incomes by ways of change in the local economy. In the case that they can’t access because of the cost of opportunity that it may suppose one can recur to economic incentives, but that implies openly recognizing that the end is human development and that the income provided by the State conditioned transfer programs is a mean.43

IV. To summarize

In this introductory work concerning the relation between the capabilities approach and that of human rights and specially that of both with respect to poverty, we have first shown the proposal of defining human rights as rights to certain freedoms. The specific contributions of each one of the approaches would lead to not subsuming any of them into the other. In second place, we presented a way of understanding poverty that allows separating the economic and non economic aspects, be it by converting the economic one in means for human poverty or in component of a multidimensional definition. In third place we have shown, with the aid of graphs, some of the advantages of that separation both for analyzing reality and for thinking policies against extreme privations other than the increase of the acquisitive power of poor families. For example, a multidimensional look naturally leads to very different visions of the evolution of poverty and of the gaps between rich and poor countries. Plus, there are ways of facing this amply defined extreme poverty that do not depend so much on income, which means that there is a important margin of freedom for such a challenge.

Finally, multidimensionality is hence not only a way of not trivializing the productive role of the economy but of giving it a different status with respect to other more important ends. In this work, we do not pretend to hold that the level and type of economic growth is not important in reducing poverty; it would be absurd to do so. As we stressed above, it is crucial to fight for a new economy that allows human progress with less inhuman sacrifices. But what we can say is that when the economy improves not everything else improves and so when it worsens not everything worsens as well. It seems to us fundamental to demand from the economy more efficiency when it come reducing economic and non economic poverty, but also to learn to be as independent as possible from it. The greatest criticism to the economy is not that it does things wrong, or not well-enough but that it may not be so crucial and in some circumstance needed for achieving some of the most important things in life. Furthermore, this last remark seems to us a condition for increasing the power of negotiation of the poor with the great economic powers.

---

43 Proposals for some of “guaranteed minimum income” are an alternative to what we are pointing out.