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Evaluating Family as an Instrument for Policy in Human Capabilities: A South Africa Perspective

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Abstract

The capabilities' approach has overtime offers instructive insights into the improvement of human capabilities in various fields such as behavioural change, social inequalities, poverty, unemployment, and education. To this end, the capability approach may influence the achievement of social cohesion in the family. The family is an important unit that may be used to inform social policies and aid social cohesion. This article evaluates the use family as an instrument of policy in drawing out human capabilities. First, it defines and unpacks a family in South Africa's context. Secondly the value addition that a family adds as an instrument for policy is done. Thirdly, the concept of human capabilities with the aid of the capabilities approach is done. The final step is a qualification of the capabilities approach in South Africa's context. A conclusion and recommendations follow. The article utilised secondary data to evaluate how policies on family impact human capabilities in South Africa by aid of capability approach.

Keywords: Family, human capabilities, South Africa

1. Introduction: The Family in South Africa's Context

The definition accorded to a family has evolved over time and a chronological engagement of the same is important in appreciating its significant consequences to the lives of individuals. According to Amoateng and Ritcher (2004), the family is a minute structure in the context of a household. As such, as a basic social, consumption and production unit where most people spend a majority of their lives, a household aids the understanding of a family (Amoateng & Ritcher, 2004). The composition of a household, reveals that social challenges such as migrant labour lead to the disintegration of the family, while at the same time leading to households that are headed by other persons other than the fathers. An example of this is families that are headed by women or children. Amoateng and Ritcher's definition indicate that a family is a social construct whose existence is informed by external factors like migration.

Over time, families have also been defined by virtue of the benefits that they can receive from the State. According to Rabe and Kammila (2015), governments often put in place policies and programmes that determine the beneficiaries. While the introduction of such programmes and policies are to correct the past ills in society, the subsequent contextualisation of the benefits redefines and determines the meaning of a family, the understanding of a family is tilted to the conceptualisation of a family as a result of the framework that requires to fall within particular perquisites, like for instance, zoning and housing regulations, provision of public health services, social grants, educational, and recreational services.

Other socio-economic characteristics such as the level of education, the racial connotations have also informed the understanding of families. According to Leonard, Hughes and Pruitt (2017), the structure of a family in terms of couples, single parents, adoptive, foster, and nuclear or extended families inform the understanding. Wagner, Ritt-Olson, Chou, Pokhrel, Duan, Baezconde-Garbanati and Unger (2010), refer to family cycles from toddlers, children, to adolescents to give an understanding to the family. Other historical undertones such as ethnicity, racial, cultural, religious, informal social networks or rural/urban families. Platt, (2010) and Dobson (2018) also add context to the family depending on what a given group in society alludes to as the normal, acceptable on one hand, or the deviant or socially sanctioned on the other hand.

In addition to the social constructions, there is recent evidence which indicates that society has the ability to have inconsistent perceptions of a family. Siqwana-Ndulo (2019) reiterates identifies a parallel between an African American family as “disorganized,” “deviant,” and “pathological” in the context of American society, a position that Africa still cherishes as the existence of the extended family as a great concept of a family, that collectivity and interdependence.

A review of the foregoing definitions reveals that programmes or policy that governments put in place determines the understanding of a family. This, without a doubt points to the irresistible conclusion that a family, as such may be a tool for policy engagement. The point of departure lies in the ability of a family to stick to a definition that it perceives as most

favourable, and the government to offer policies or alternatives that are best suited for the family. The question this study has attempted to answer is: how does family serve as an instrument for policy in relation to human capabilities in South Africa?

This paper used existing or secondary data from sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations to carry out the research (Bidandi & Roman, 2020). Secondary data according to Johnston (2017) contributes to knowledge development considering important questions without some of the limitations of the original investigations. It is an empirical exercise and a systematic method with procedural and evaluative steps, just as in collecting and evaluating primary data. For Koziol and Arthur (2011), secondary data produces new assumptions for which a researcher finds answers to questions that are different from the original work. The motivation of using secondary data in this study was to outline factors associated with the family as an instrument for policy in human capabilities in South Africa, as well as to generate specific testable conventions for future studies. Using secondary data provided a broader understanding of the concept of ‘family as an instrument’ for policy in human capabilities, a South African perspective.

2. How Family Serves as an Instrument for Policy

Before engaging a discussion on the ability of a family to augur for the most favourable initiatives, its central position as the most suitable societal unit that ought to have the effect of government policies requires attention. The government has an obligation to offer policies or alternatives that are best suited for the family (Mayer, Van Daalen, & Bots, 2018). As the smallest unit of the community, the family is a significant place to start with regard to changes that the government seeks to engage in a community (Popenoe, 2017). This is informed by the various research that speaks to the need to improve the family. For instance, it is acknowledged that family functioning requires good organisational attributes and interpersonal interactions of its members in the form of communication, problem solving skill, control of behaviour, affective involvement and responses (Berge, Wall, Larson, Loth, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013). This functionality is illuminated through crisis management (Ferro & Boyle, 2015), effective communication, (Davids, Ryan, Yassin, Hendrickse, & Roman, 2016) and the allocation of the requisite roles of each member.

In addition, central to this functional family is research on social issues (education, health, unemployment, crime, inequality, and poverty, extra) which speaks to the need to use the family as the focal point in ensuring a holistic development of the community. The exhaustive discussion of social challenges is beyond the scope of this paper. A few components that illuminate the need for an emphasis on the family deserve attention.

As widely observed, social cohesion policy calls for participation of individuals in a manner that ensures their optimum and basic level of involvement (Chidester et al., 2003). This is qualified by the involvement from the family level in all matters. The government then, is expected to offer a platform where the family plays a participatory role in its development. Other aspects that play out the societal recognition of the differences between persons leading to the embracing of diversity as a way of ensuring solidarity (Juil, 2010). As such, this collective construction presents an individualised approach to problems in society which

more often than not relates to a family.

Research from other jurisdictions indicates that there has been a shift in emphasis from social, public, economic to family policies in various aspects such as marriage, inheritance, schooling obligations, and working conditions (Thornton, Bowman, Mallett, & Cooney-O'Donoghue, 2018). This has subsequently led to a change in goals to the family environment or the various policies have alluded to the family context in their content. An example is a study across eight countries that illuminated the use of various policies that speak to the sanctity of a family, such as, poverty eradication, child care, health, education, and the role of fathers (UN, 2000).

3. Human Capabilities: A Contextual Analysis

The concept of capabilities runs across various disciplines from families, to firms, organisations, to corporate governance. It could be argued that corporate governance has nothing to do with human capabilities. It is important to note that there are various concepts that are instructive in offering guidance to how families may be used to improve the capabilities of the persons who reside therein. In this vein, it is important that as one unpacks the concept of capabilities, he or she is not curved into a box.

Saul and Gebauer (2018) agree with Teece, Pisano, and Sheun (1997) who state that dynamic capabilities refer to a firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure competencies so as to address rapidly changing social environments. In the context of a family, this can be qualified to refer to the family as a distinct entity that has its own goals, aspirations that speak to its internal and external survival (Teece et al., 1997). As a firm, the family may be looked at as a unit that is understood on account of quest for receipt of services from the government (Amoateng & Ritcher, 2004), or as an entity that is informed by the nature of parents or caregivers such as the biological, adoptive parents (WFIS (2015)). It may also be a 'firm' in light of its quest for social recognition in terms of education and career achievement (Leonard, Hughes, & Pruitt, 2017).

These various goals or aspirations that the family seeks to achieve to project is evident qualified as its goals, or aspirations that speak to its survival and identity (Teece et al., 1997). In addition, the family's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure competencies so as to address rapidly changing business environments, is qualified as its ability to arrive at its goals or aspirations in the changing social contexts such as the need to benefit under the democratic dispensation due to ills under the former apartheid dispensation. The point of departure is where the family only seeks to benefit from a system despite the disadvantages that the benefits add to the family. A cardinal example is the where a young father and mother continue having children because of the grants from the State, despite the fact that the amount of the grant per child is not sufficient to maintain the child through a month. As such while the firm in the opening paragraph is able to integrate, build and reconfigure its competencies, such a family that emphasises the use of limited advantages that offer accruing disadvantages, the ability of the family to improve both internally and externally is both an objective and subjective engagement. For instance, a family that seeks to improve the education status of its members is in a better position to take on the advantages that over time outweigh the

disadvantages.

It is thus imperative to use another definition of dynamic capabilities that requires that the 'firm' or 'organisation' or family for this context as a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organisation systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 340). This is an indication that the family has to go through a period of learning, which culminates into creative activity that aids its effectiveness. First, this kind of family requires support from a higher calling like the State. Secondly, the support helps the family to improve itself holistically, other than the taking on of advantages that possess more disadvantages. Thirdly, the ultimate goal that arises out of the engagement by the State and the family should be towards the effectiveness of a family.

Another key aspect of dynamic capabilities lies in the ability to provide solutions. The solution provider in the abstract example in our context is would be an entity that can develop multiple capabilities to create competences (Saul & Gebauer, 2018). In this context, the government takes this role and the development of dynamic capabilities has to be in the aspiration to lead to the holistic improvement of the family, other than one aspect of it. This calls for the need to develop programmes or policies that lead to the holistic improvement of the family as a whole (Hojman & Miranda, 2017).

The question that arises refers to the best suited approach that engages these capabilities and how the government does it in a manner that imbues holistic improvement of the family. Research indicates that human well-being and development has evolved from simple traditional consumption and material measures to a more fluid and notion that embraces an individual's well-being in terms of his freedoms and opportunities (Sen, 1999). These freedoms and opportunities may include the income, education level, and standard of health (Hojman & Miranda, 2017). This proposition ultimately disqualifies a family and individual's engagement of advantages that rather present more disadvantages (Saul & Gebauer, 2018). For instance, a family decision to have more children as a way of increasing its share of the grants is a not encouraged as far as it leads to challenges in ensuring a good education for these children, adequate income for their survival as well as their opportune health and nutrition.

In answer to the questions posed in this paragraph, there is research that points to dimensions that are instructive in improving a family's quality of life (Hojman & Miranda, 2017). It has to be noted from the onset that these dimensions include a subjective measure of an individual's well-being in terms of the extent to which an individual is satisfied with life (Alkire, 2007). In addition, there has to be a measure of agency that requires that the ability to manage one's life to his or her satisfaction is in his or her hands (Samman & Santos, 2009). The third dimension speaks to the extent to which a person's human dignity is upheld (Zavaleta, 2009). The final dimension is the need to have descriptive statistics that relate to improved lifestyle, such as the level of education, household income. These four dimensions speak to a result oriented approach that the government has to use and inculcate it into families such that there is a holistic improvement across the board. This qualifies the need to

have an objective approach that improves the capabilities of the families other than a subjective approach that leads more disadvantages than advantages.

The conversation towards a working framework requires an introspection into the need to have a pro-family policy which concerns itself with the family as a general unit (Mayer et al., 2018). This is instructive in ensuring the nature of the parents or caregivers is not a bar or an impediment to the improvement of the smallest social unit of the society. This is an indication that a family that is fundamentally concerned with its position in the social structure informs its category. The categories may include families that provide individuals with personal and social identity, those that provide economic support to meet their dependent's needs, those that nurture the young population as those that offer protection and care to the persons with disabilities. However, any policy formulation still needs to interrogate which approach would be used to develop the capabilities of individuals in society.

4. The Capabilities Approach in the South African Perspective

The capabilities' approach is a theoretical framework informed by two major connotations. First, that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and secondly, this freedom is best understood in the context of the capabilities of an individual to use opportunities to add value to their lives (Sen, 1993). In the context of this study, the questions that require answers lie in whether the moral importance of engaging an individual's capability should be from the family as a critical unit in society. If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, then a second question should be whether the family offers a bottom up approach in improving capabilities in society.

The general understanding of Sen's capability approach is in the fact that freedom to achieve anything lies in what people are able to do and to be in the context of a flexible and multi-purpose framework (Martha, 2011). As such the capabilities of an individual can greatly be harnessed through policy formulation and implementation (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009). It is argued that the capabilities approach can be engaged in a narrow perspective that requires that the focus on the capabilities is solely dependent on the individual's functioning levels (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009). It is argued that to advance this perspective, one has to contextualise the functioning, on one hand and the capabilities on the other hand, of individuals.

This study takes a cautious approach to use capabilities. Capabilities, as such, aid the need to inform an individual's decisions to improve his or her capability or competency (Claassen, 2014). This approach ensures that there is a focus on the means to an end approach that attaches value to the capabilities of an individual to do and to be what results into the desired end (Sen, 1993). This is a direct departure from Dworkinian's resourcism, or the Rawlsian social primary goods approach that advance alternative approaches as a means to well-being of an individual (Sen, 1992). In addition, a capability's approach would aid the contextualisation of policy approaches to deal with social ills like poverty, unemployment, and inequality to mention but three. As a consequence, the capabilities approach would foster development of particular social groups in a bid to address social issues.

It suffices to note, however, that categories such as resourcism, utilitarianism and happiness

cannot be used as a predictor of capabilities' development as far as they are subjective categories or material means to well-being that may not be adequately enhanced where an individual has not developed the requisite capabilities. In contrast, the capabilities approach advocates for an assessment of individual well-being; an evaluation and assessment of social arrangements; and need to design of policies that bring about social change in the community. As such, the capability approach emphasises that the doings and beings of individuals can only be realised where there are genuine objectives to be realised such as achieving education and being in supportive social relationships.

In addition, central to the capabilities approach is the acknowledgment of human diversity where the various capabilities imbedded in individuals can be harnessed as part of a larger engagement to improve the society at large (Martha, 2000). This is an indication that these capabilities need to be “the innate equipment of individuals that is necessary for developing the more advanced capabilities” (Martha, 2000, p. 84) or the freedom of an individual to have “the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functioning up to certain levels” (Sen, 1992, p. 19). It is thus argued at this point that the capabilities approach engagement with an individual portrays the involvement with a family as the crucial aspect in society. It also points to a deliberate ad guided effort through policy engagement and implementation.

South Africa's social policies are riddled with historical undertones of apartheid that entrenched the nuclear family of the heterosexual mother and father living together with their children as the ideal choice. This position has since been overtaken by the White Paper on Families that deviates from this construct and adopts various definitions of a family (DoSD, 2013). It defines a family as ‘a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation, and go beyond a particular physical residence’ (DoSD, 2013, p. 11). This definition extends from the notional nuclear family to an engagement of the socioeconomic characteristics, structure, context of a family; as well as the proposal of a life cycle strategy that responds to the family challenges.

In a general perspective, the South African family is a conglomerate of various forms on which a family is constructed along the lines of race and status (Amoateng & Ritcher, 2004). In this regard, a family is classified as either a nuclear family, or an extension that includes the parents, children and other relatives that form a closely knit form of family (DoSD, 2013). South African families still allude to the benefits that accrue thereto. This is exacerbated by the government's desire to use social grants as a tool of correcting social inequalities (Kidd, Wapling, Bailey-Athias, & Tran, 2018). The danger continues lurking in the fact that some family use social grants as a yardstick to have more children so as to benefit from the former (Surender, Noble, Wright, & Ntshongwana, 2010). These dangers are increasingly evident in research that points to abuses of the social grant (Loffell, Jackie, 2008; Potts, 2012; Goldblatt, 2005; September, 2007). Related to the above, the family still clandestinely use the benefits that are derived for the State. This is evident from the continued depiction of a family by the mother or a father as a needy and poor family that needs support from the State. As such, this approach that is benefit –oriented exacerbates the situation (Potts, 2012; Goldblatt, 2005).

The policies that the government has put in place are prone to abuse like the social security grants need to be re-aligned to speak to the other outputs that would be beneficial to families. A case in point is the use of funds from social security to other engagements that would improve the holistic well-being of a family such as improving the state of access to health care as well as education through the provision of health centres and education institutions in areas that are devoid of such services (Olivier, 2000). Statistics indicate that there is a nexus between poverty, unemployment and social grants as far as the provinces where families have the highest dependence on social security are poor and employed (Hall, 2010). First, for instance, in the Western Cape 36.6% of children (accounting for two hundred and seventy nine thousand are from families in poverty (GHS, 2003, 2018). A rather heightened trend is evident in the Eastern Cape where 79.6% of it children (accounting for two million and eighteen thousand children) are from families where there is abject poverty (GHS, 2003, 2018). Secondly, in relation to families where children stay with an unemployed adult stand at 9% (accounting for) in the Western Cape and 49.9% (accounting for) in the Eastern Cape (GHS, 2018). Thirdly, the dependence on social security of children per family stands at one million, six thousand one hundred and thirty six in the Western Cape and one million eighty hundred ninety seven thousand, eight hundred and eighty four in the Eastern Cape (GHS, 2018). This is an indication that an engagement that provides social grants without dealing with the unemployment and poverty in family is not an adequate engagement of the problem.

As indicated earlier, the obligation to create good policies lies with government to look at other alternatives that could enhance the position of the family (Mayer, Van Daalen, & Bots, 2018). This calls for an engagement of the families as a crucial unit in the community that has to benefit from the government (Popenoe, 2017).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has evaluated the use family as an instrument of policy in drawing out human capabilities. The definition and unpacking of a family in South Africa's context has revealed different kinds of families informed by race, benefits and other aspects. On the basis of the value addition that a family illuminates in policy implementation, has been the engagement of the use of Amartya Sen's capability approach in the need to use the family in the development of human capabilities. An engagement that pushes for the tri- approach that deal with policy implementation at the family level needs to speak to poverty, unemployment and proper use of social security grants.

A number or recommendations are proposed. An empirical study that at a national level that seeks to identify the nexus between poverty and unemployment need to be done so as to ensure that policies developments are deliberately targeted at dealing with enhancing capabilities that of individuals in families to place them in a better position to influence the others in their spaces.

The family policies should be drafted in a manner that calls for the improvement of the intellectual capacities of individuals in families, other than dependence on government through the current social grant system. Rather than trying to regulate families, the current state structures should support families to achieve their desired living arrangements and

childcare choices. It needs to address the structural constraints by providing services and infrastructure

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