Contents

- What is behind the Human development approach: discovering the **Capability Approach** (CA)
- **Basic concepts**: capabilities, functionings, agency and conversion factors
- Several examples

Origins and Motivations

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*Born in India in 1933
Professor of Economics
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1979: «Equality of what?»

1980s: BNA (similar motivations but different role for individuals and focus on agency/freedom)

1980s: Focus on growth as end (instead of a means)

1984: Commodities and Capabilities

1990: First HDR

1992: «Inequality re-examined»

1993: «Quality of life» (with Nussbaum)

1998: Nobel Prize in Economics for his contribution to welfare economics, famine and poverty analysis

1999: «Development as freedom»

2009: «The idea of justice»

2013: «An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions» (with Dreze)

2017: "Collective choice and social welfare" (expanded edition of 1970 book

2021: Home in the world: a memory

 ➔ https://youtu.be/hZgsFd-huFw

The Capability Approach: 4 basics Concepts

#1 Capability

"A person's capability to achieve functionings that he or she has reason to value; provides a general approach to the evaluation of social arrangements and this yields a particular way of viewing the assessment of equality and inequality" *(Sen, 1992)*

"Various combinations of beings and doings a person can achieve"

Basically, they can be seen as "**opportunities**" and "**freedom to achieve**"

- **Examples**: the real freedom to achieve a **given level of education** or to aspire to a **certain job**, to take part in political life, to have an **own family**

The Capability Approach: 4 basics Concepts

#2 Functionings

"The various things a person may value doing or being"
(Sen, 1999:75)

⟶ essentially, they are «**achievements**»

- **Examples**: the acquired level of education, the job position and conditions, the active participation to social and political life but also having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being treated with dignity and without discrimination (from Nussbaum's list)

Freedom to achieve or achievement?

Ideally both:

- The capability set also includes achieved functionings
- At same achieved functioning can correspond to different freedom
- The opportunity to choose is important per sé

#An open issue: Is it possible to formulate a **universal list of valuable capabilities** for a good life? If so, how can we do this? Which capabilities are most/more valuable?

⟶ That's a 'philosophical' question with strong practical implications in terms of measurement and policy

The Capability Approach: 4 basics Concepts

#3 Agency

Is the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value.

An agent is *"someone who acts and brings about change"* (Sen, 1999:19)

Close to the concepts of **self-determination, empowerment, autonomy** etc.

The Capability Approach: 4 basics Concepts

#4 Conversion Factors

- **Personal (or internal):** age, gender, ethnicity, ability/inability
- **External:** socio-economical, natural, cultural, institutional environment, social norms

⟶ Important to pay attention to the interaction and combination of conversion factors (e.g. gender and social norms, disability and cultural and physical environment)

A graphical representation
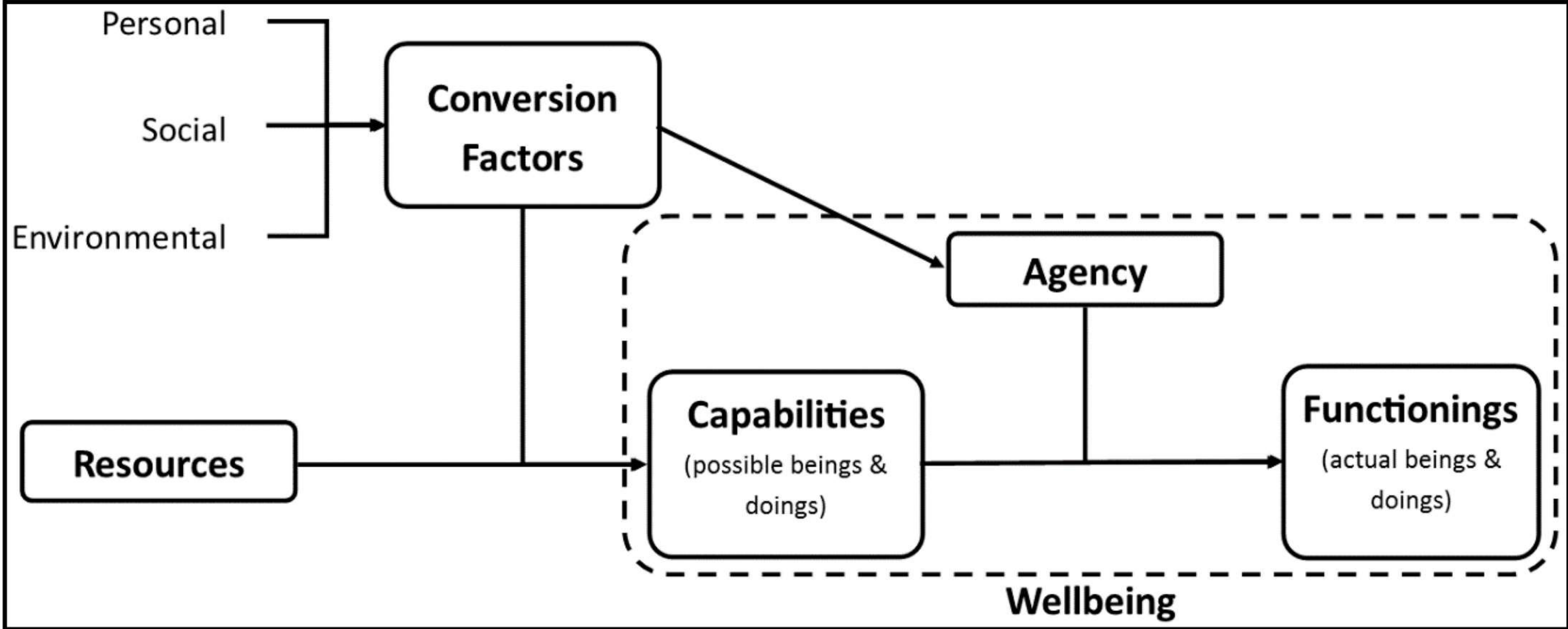
A graphical representation #2

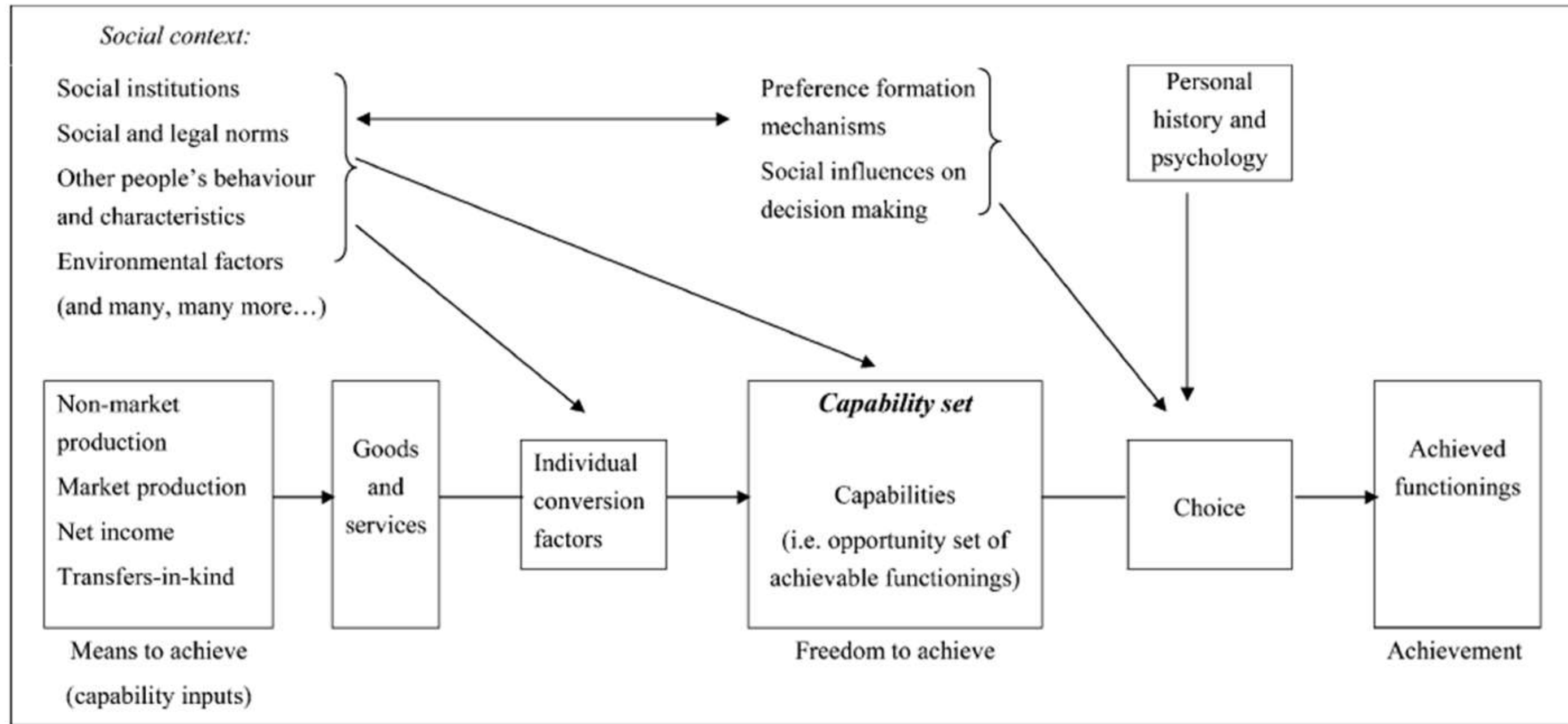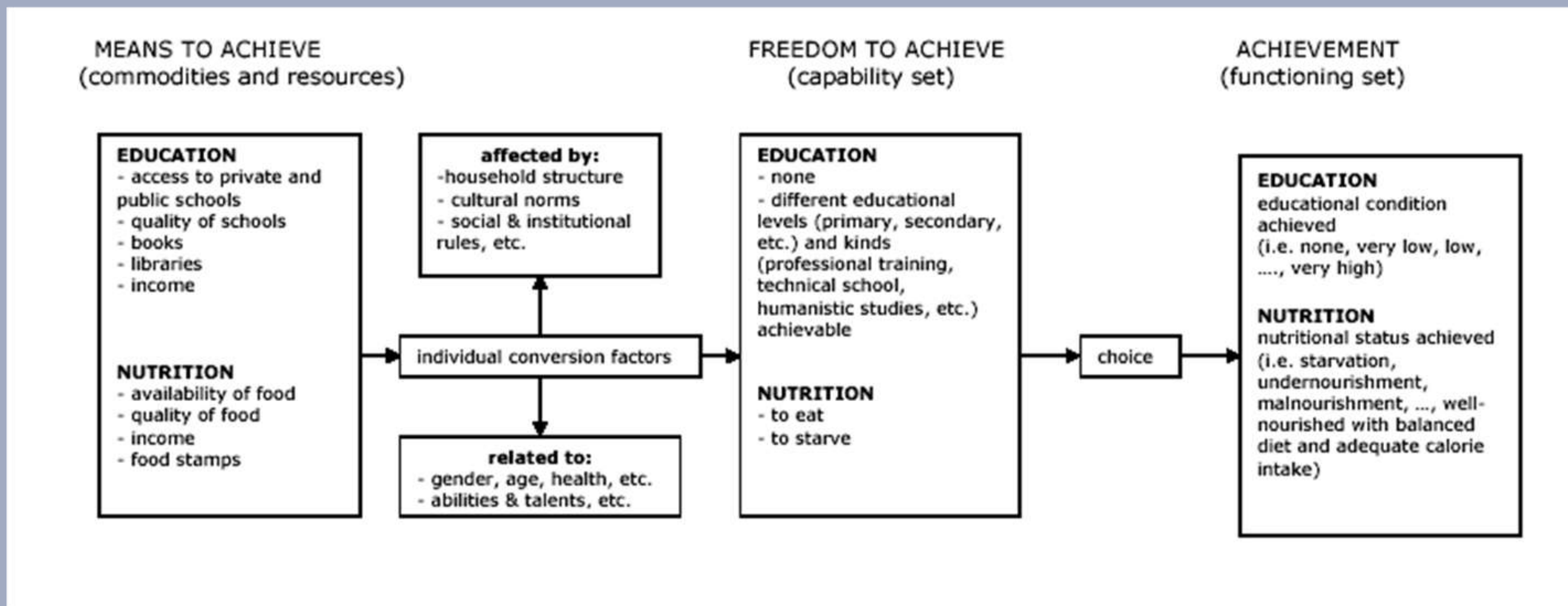

FIGURE 1. A stylised non-dynamic representation of a person's capability set and her social and personal context.

A graphical representation #3

HD vs CA

	Human Development Approach	Human Development Indexes	Capability Approach
Main Scope	Rethinking development and inspiring development policies	Measuring progresses	Theoretical framework for conceptualizing and measuring well-being, evaluating social assesment, etc…
Unit of Analysis	Individual, communities and countries	Countries	Individuals
Dimensions	Ideally, multiple	Mainly three	Multiple
Focus	Opportunities	Means (Income) and Achievements (Health and Education)	Means, Opportunities and Achievements