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Abstract

Sociocultural and economic limitations often deprive individuals of the freedoms to make decisions regarding their lives, hindering development. This article presents the Framework for Enabling Empowerment (FrEE), a model that emphasizes the importance of psychosocial factors and the individual in accessing freedoms and promoting health, productivity, and sustainable human development. FrEE is theoretically based in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Explaining the synergy between the context, the person, and psychosocial factors, FrEE provides a strategy to achieve the expansion of individual choice and freedoms. The authors present FrEE and its relationship to Sen's theories and explain how FrEE makes the Capability Approach operative. Finally the authors draw on empirical program evaluations in Mexico to discuss FrEE's potential impact on the field of human development.

KEYWORDS: Mexico, FrEE, development, psychology, capabilities, choice, personal agency, empowerment

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Introduction

Sociocultural and economic limitations often deprive individuals of the freedoms and capabilities to make decisions regarding their lives. Poverty, limited resources, political repression, and/or social marginalization limit the opportunities and freedoms that people enjoy. Amartya Sen¹ broke from traditional economics' view of development as GDP growth by reorienting the goal of development towards the expansion of opportunities and freedoms. In doing so, he created a new lens through which to view poverty and the theoretical basis for the Framework for Enabling Empowerment (FrEE) model for development presented in this article.

Economic factors are not the only factors relevant to poverty reduction and measurement: environmental,² social,³ political,⁴ and psychological⁵ factors are indicators of poverty, contributing factors and consequences thereof. FrEE highlights the particular importance of psychosocial factors, which we define as factors relating to individual characteristics and their relationship with interpersonal interactions and the cultural context, in combating poverty and achieving human development goals.⁶ It serves as a theoretical explanation of how to empower individuals to take control of their lives and reduce barriers that exist for people to combat poverty and improve the conditions in which they live. It has been linked to a step-by-step strategy named Programming for Choice through which it has been and can be put into practice.⁷ This article will present the theoretical basis of Programming for Choice and explain its utility in the field of human development. The work serves not only to summarize concepts laid out in Pick and Sirkin's *Breaking the Poverty Cycle: The Human Basis for Sustainable Development*, but also to present new data from recently implemented

¹Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor, 1999).

²Flavio Comim, "Poverty and Environment Indicators," *UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative* (Cambridge: St. Edmund's College, 2008).

³Robert Barro, *Determinants of Economic Growth: Across-country Empirical Study* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Robert Barro and Xavier Sala-i-Martin, *Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

⁴Sen, *Development*.

⁵Cigdem Kagitcibasi, "Psychology and Human Competence Development," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 51 (1) (2002): 5-22; Rocío Fernández-Ballesteros, "Determinants and Structural Relation of Personal Efficacy to Collective Efficacy," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 51 (1) (2002): 107-125.

⁶Susan Pick and Jenna Sirkin, *Breaking the Poverty Cycle: The Human Basis for Sustainable Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

Programming for Choice initiatives in Mexico that demonstrates the applicability and contributions of the FrEE to the development field.

Giving aid or improving structural resources is not enough to combat poverty. Often, individuals who live in poverty do not possess the psychosocial skills necessary to feel they have control over their situation or to access existing resources such as schools or clinics. Psychosocial skills, also referred to as life skills, are defined as the personal qualities necessary to deal with everyday challenges and demands, and to develop positive behaviors.⁸ Structural resources may be available but underutilized because of psychosocial barriers that prevent individuals from taking advantage of such advances in development. The testimony of a young woman in Panajachel, Guatemala shows how psychological factors can affect the success or failure of development initiatives:

The clinic is very close, but I don't like going there. It is for people that know how to ask things. I am ashamed of going there. Anyway, if I get sick that is fate, there is nothing I can do. It is much better to let fate decide than to feel ashamed of going there.⁹

Without the necessary psychosocial skills, opportunities for improved healthcare or progress in education, employment, or comprehensive development often go to waste. Effective and sustainable development programs require individual change at the psychosocial level. By focusing on the person and behavior change, the FrEE approach fosters responsible citizens, students who participate in class, people who demand and exercise their rights, and those who utilize available social services.

Sen's Capability Approach addresses part of the problem by focusing on individuals' choices and freedoms and thereby expanding the traditional view of poverty beyond the lack of material resources.¹⁰ Poverty is also a lack of freedoms (of choice), and the Capability Approach conceptualizes it by considering the contextual factors, whether economic, social, cultural, or political, that limit the freedoms that individuals enjoy. The Capability Approach views the acquisition of human capabilities, or the substantive freedoms that one possesses, to be central to the ultimate goal of development: expanding freedoms.¹¹ It forms the basis for the FrEE model and comprises three main concepts: entitlements, functionings, and capabilities. Entitlements are the things that a person has ownership over, and could be political, economic, or otherwise. They are a means

⁸World Health Organization. *Partners in Life Skills Education: Conclusions from a United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1999).

⁹Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 3.

¹⁰Sen, *Development*.

¹¹Sen, *Development*, 74.

to development, but not the end.¹² Functionings, or “valued things for doing or being,” and capabilities are the means by which freedoms are achieved.¹³ Thus, the “capability set” a person possesses is defined by the diverse functionings, whether “doing,” achieved through actions or behaviors, or “being,” referring to characteristics of the individual, that a person is able to achieve.¹⁴ The Capability Approach is an approach to development that uses capabilities, rather than economic indicators, as the means for measuring development. It helps explain the need to emphasize the person and her “capabilities” in development program implementation and evaluation

The Capability Approach, however, is simply a conceptualization rather than a framework for implementation. The creation of FrEE, “a psychosocial framework where investment in human capabilities and understanding individual needs is the point of departure,” resolves this dilemma by making Sen operational from a psychosocial perspective and incorporating means for the expansion of psychosocial capabilities.¹⁵ FrEE allows the Capability Approach to be put into practice to achieve concrete improvements in development.

The FrEE model shares several key concepts with Sen’s approach: the person, the agent, and the agency. The term “person” refers to a “dynamic being that is capable of change in attitudes, thoughts, identity, and behavior,” who as such is capable of benefiting from programs targeting behavior change.¹⁶ The term “agent” goes beyond the ability to change to refer to a person who in fact “acts and brings about change.”¹⁷ Sen defines agency as the ability to define goals and act on them¹⁸; however, for the purposes of FrEE, the term “personal” is added to emphasize the psychological aspects of agency that include “the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity.”¹⁹ These three terms are fundamental concepts to Sen’s Capability Approach and the FrEE model due to their focus on the individual. While a conception of freedom similar to that of Sen can also be seen from Brij Mohan, we have chosen to work from the thinking of Sen, whose more articulate thesis has led the way in economic development and been further developed by recent scholars.²⁰

¹²Sen, *Development*.

¹³Sen, *Development*, 74.

¹⁴Sen, *Inequality*, 40.

¹⁵Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 65.

¹⁶Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 68.

¹⁷Sen, *Development*, 19.

¹⁸Sen, *Development*.

¹⁹Naila Kaber, “Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment,” *Development and Change* 30 (3) (1999): 438.

²⁰Brij Mohan, ed., *Toward Comparative Social Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1985a); Brij Mohan, ed., *New Horizons of Social Welfare and Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1985b).

Framework for Enabling Empowerment (FrEE)

The development of the FrEE model came out of over 20 years of program implementation and evaluation by the Mexican Institute of Family and Population Research (IMIFAP—I want to, I can), a nonprofit organization founded in Mexico City in 1985. Evaluation of behavior change programming undertaken to improve reproductive health demonstrated that “the processes of behavior change and development of personal agency are intertwined.”²¹ In order to foster the development of personal agency, FrEE’s Programming for Choice strategy shows how strengthening life skills can be the basis for achieving sustainable behavior change.

FrEE provides a practical approach to development programming that focuses on the acquisition of life skills and the reduction of psychosocial barriers such as shame, guilt, and fear in individuals that cause a long-term impact on their lives, the lives of their families, and their communities through the development of personal agency and empowerment. By focusing on the importance of personal agency, intrinsic empowerment, and the real opportunities individuals enjoy, FrEE is a tool that can be used for the design and implementation of programs and policies for sustainable development. It argues and shows how behavior change that is intrinsic, in that it incorporates personal motivation and skills or tools for the individual to understand his or her entitlements and how to reach them, is more likely to be sustainable. The approach sees the individual as the principal agent for change, departing from a paternalistic development ideology that views the person as a passive beneficiary of the program, service, or knowledge rendered.

By focusing on the individual, FrEE incorporates psychological theories about control,²² autonomy,²³ and self-efficacy.²⁴ Autonomy, closely linked to agency, is defined by Kagiticibasi as developing out of agency and the state of being a “self-governing agent.”²⁵ Taylor and Brown emphasize the feeling of control as a key factor to mental health.²⁶ Mental health aside, control is an important concept to FrEE because individuals who feel they have control over their lives (have a high locus of control) are more likely to engage in positive

²¹ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 159.

²² Rotter, Julian B. “Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement,” *Psychological Monographs* 80 (1) (1966): 1-28.

²³ Cigdem Kagiticibasi, “Autonomy and Relatedness in Cultural Context: Implications for Self and Family,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 36 (4) (2005): 403-422.

²⁴ Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman & Co, 1997).

²⁵ Kagiticibasi, “Autonomy,” 404.

²⁶ Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathon D. Brown “Illusion and Well-being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health,” *Psychological Bulletin* 103 (1988): 193-210.

behaviors. Fostering this sense of control in people who live in marginalized conditions and feel that their lives depend on external forces rather than on themselves helps to develop personal agency as part of the FrEE model. Control, along with life skills and knowledge, affects individuals' capacity for behavior change.²⁷ Lastly, self-efficacy, or one's belief in his or her ability to succeed or degree of control over thoughts, feelings, and actions, also facilitates or inhibits behavior change.²⁸

FrEE is based in six principles:

“People need to understand the ways they can overcome psychological and social barriers. Through this awareness, they become contributors to their own growth process, as well as of the social, economic, and political development of their communities.

To exercise increased choice in various domains, people need to have, and feel they have the competencies and knowledge not only to serve but also to demand rights and services.

Through the development of core competencies and the opportunities for reducing psychological barriers individuals needs are connected to the newly acquired competencies and opportunities.

People first begin to change behaviors in a few concrete situations and can subsequently expand their learning into new domains. This expansion develops through success in specific situations and a growing sense of personal agency.

As people's competencies are enhanced, they are able to create new contexts where choices are more likely to be made, actualized, and sustained.

Maintenance of personal change is necessary for sustainability of development.”²⁹

²⁷James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, “Transtheoretical Therapy: Toward a More Integrative Model of Change,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice* 19 (3) (1982): 276-288; James O. Prochaska, Carlo C. DiClemente, and John C. Norcross, “In Search of How People Change,” *American Psychologist* 47 (9) (1992): 1102-1114.

²⁸Albert Bandura, “Self-efficacy and Health,” In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes, (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2001), 20.

²⁹Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 83.

Distinguishing between Different Types of Empowerment in FrEE

The United Nations Development Program’s 2005 Human Development Report notes that “empowerment of the poor is both an instrument to reduce poverty and...an aspect of poverty reduction.”³⁰ However, success and sustainability depend on the type of empowerment employed. Central to FrEE is the distinction between external and intrinsic empowerment and their relationship to contextual factors and personal agency. External empowerment refers to a type of empowerment, where behavior is motivated by external factors including those of a material kind and those related to the pressure to conform to sociocultural norms. Intrinsic empowerment, conceptualized in FrEE, on the other hand is derived from a sense of freedom to choose and from personal agency, present in the individual.³¹ Nevertheless, the different kinds of empowerment are complementary to each other and neither can subsist on its own.

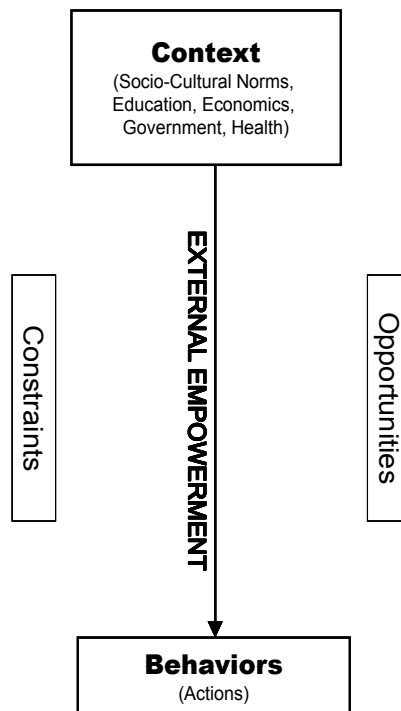


Figure 1. The Framework for Enabling Empowerment, External Empowerment³²

³⁰United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity* (New York: UNDP, 2006), 6.

³¹ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

³² Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

External empowerment (Figure 1) can be brought about through economic incentives or through more subtle changes in the “Context,” such as the influence of laws, traditions, or sociocultural norms on an individual’s behavior. Behavior can change due to opportunities created at the contextual level, such as changing the law, building a new clinic, or providing access to clean water. Individuals may take advantage of these opportunities, resulting in a change in their actions and ostensible improvements in development, but it is unlikely that change will be driven beyond the given opportunity.

External kinds of empowerment are not sustainable because in the absence of the external force, the behavior change obtained is likely to diminish. *Oportunidades* in Mexico, for example, is a government-implemented social welfare program aimed to reduce poverty and empower people by providing subsidies in return for fulfilling targeted behaviors.³³ *Oportunidades* utilizes extrinsic empowerment to affect changes in behavior that are motivated by external factors, in this case, receiving economic subsidies. However, remove the monetary incentive, and the behavior change that occurred during the program is less likely to persist.

Conversely, intrinsic empowerment is a formula for sustainable, internally motivated change.³⁴ It is based on the development of individual tools of which the person takes ownership and therefore through a voluntary and personal process leads to new behaviors. Figure 2 presents the components that lead to behavior change, personal agency, and intrinsic empowerment.

³³Michelle Adato, et al., *The Impact of Progresa on Women’s Status and Intra-household Relations* (final report) (Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2000).

³⁴Susan Pick and Ype H. Poortinga, “Theoretical Framework and Strategy for the Design and Implementation of Development Programs: A Scientific, Political and Psychosocial Vision,” *Latin American Journal of Psychology* 37 (3) (2005): 445-460; Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

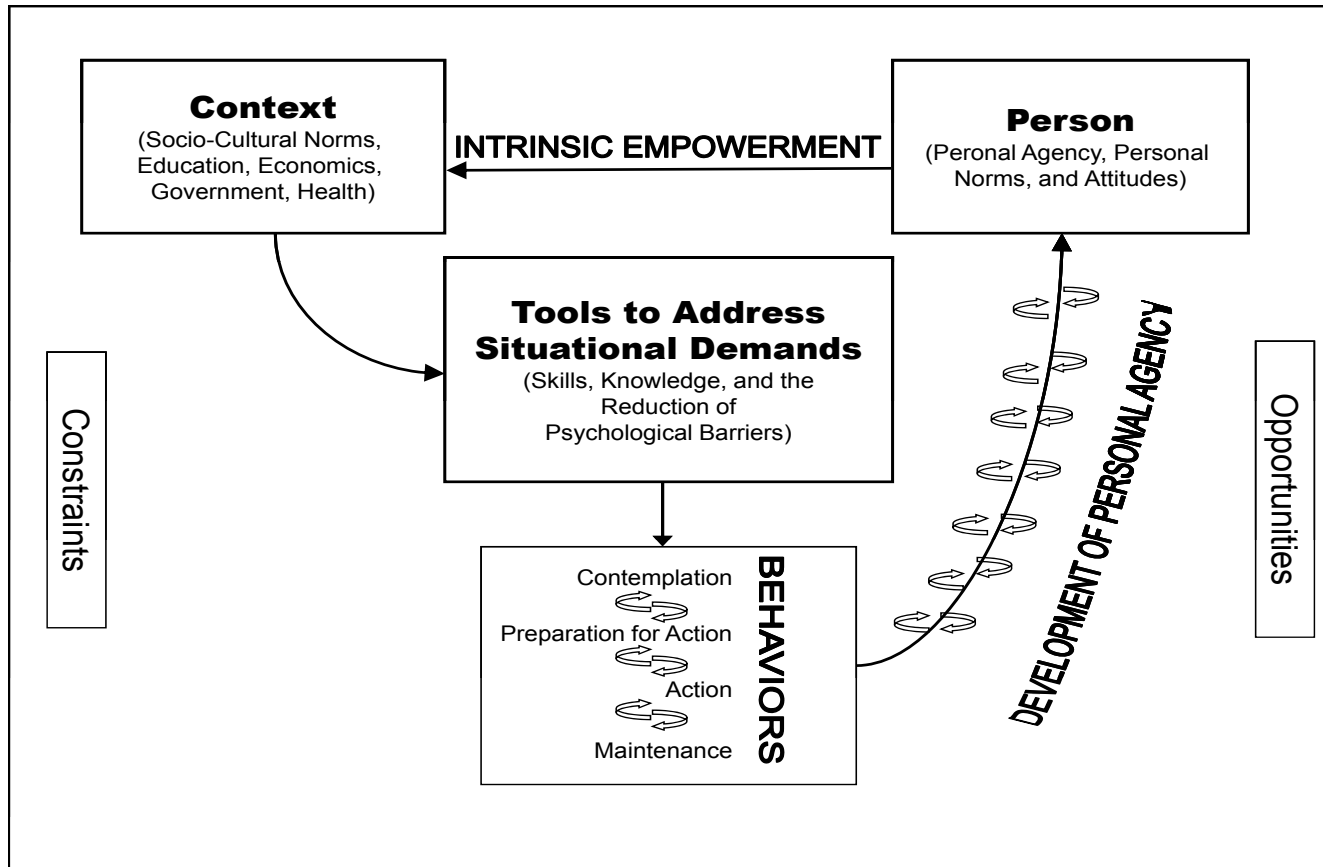


Figure 2. The Framework for Enabling Empowerment, Intrinsic Empowerment³⁵

³⁵ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

Context: The context refers to the conditions (economic, educational, environmental, health, sociocultural, and political) in which a person lives and should be the first aspect considered and analyzed when creating programs for development.³⁶ Context, shared by both Figures 1 and 2, is an influential factor in all of its conditions, whether it is the level of economic stability that a person enjoys, or sociocultural norms such as gender roles that have been inculcated in members of a society over the course of their lives. Context also refers to changes (that may arise through governmental or other initiatives) in political, sociocultural, health, educational, etc. conditions that create either constraints or opportunities for development.

Person: The person represents the “characteristics that provide stability to the traits of the individual.”³⁷ The person comprises personal agency, and personal norms and attitudes. Each of these concepts represents generally stable aspects of an individual that are changed only as a result of new experiences or actions.³⁸ Personal agency and later intrinsic empowerment are developed when changes in this component occur.

Tools to Address Situational Demands: This frame refers to an individual’s ability to react to the situations they confront. It is in this stage of the framework that psychosocial skills and knowledge are acquired, and the tools to reduce psychosocial barriers are developed, in this way enabling behavioral change and, later, personal agency. The life skills include decision making, assertive communication, expression of feelings, and empathy; the barriers include shame, guilt, fear, and feelings of pressure to conform to sociocultural norms. These tools link to the development of autonomy, feelings of control, and self-efficacy, necessary for behavior change.

Behaviors: Behaviors refer to the actions of an individual; however, the frames represent two different processes in Figures 1 and 2. Behavior in Figure 1 refers to actions produced by the context, thus enabling an external kind of empowerment, while behavior in Figure 2 describes a more complex process of behavior change and actions that result from using Tools to Address Situational Demands and reducing psychosocial barriers. As such, the behaviors achieved in this model are derived through a synergy of contextual factors and the internal processes in the individual, rather than promoted exclusively by an external contextual impetus.³⁹

³⁶John Berry et al., *Cross-cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Yhe H. Poortinga and Karel Soudijn, “Behavior-culture Relationships and Ontogenetic Development.” In *Between Biology and Culture: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, eds. H. Keller, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁷Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 85.

³⁸Pick and Poortinga, *Theoretical*.

³⁹Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 85.

The four frames of the FrEE model interact in a way that leads to the development of personal agency. Constraints (contextual and psychosocial) limit behavior change and function as what Sen terms Unfreedoms, while Opportunities represent what Sen calls Freedoms. Constraints and Opportunities alike may affect any level of the framework. For example, positive contextual developments would result in Opportunities, while negative contextual developments would result in Constraints. Similarly, Constraints could arise from the lack of skills and knowledge or Opportunities from the development of these. The positioning of Constraints and Opportunities on the outside of the figure indicates the role that the two can play throughout the process.

The individual is present in each frame and step of the process. The Context in which the individual lives influences the development of Tools to Address Situational Demands: contextual factors such as a nearby clinic or school, combined with a development program that targets psychosocial growth, result in increasing skills and knowledge and reducing psychosocial barriers to development. The arrow between Tools to Address Situational Demands and Behaviors describes how control, skills, knowledge, and means to reduce psychosocial barriers aid gradual behavior change.⁴⁰ The fourth arrow represents the Development of Personal Agency and shows how the repetition of behaviors leads to greater feelings of autonomy, control, and personal agency, and long-term changes in the person. The smaller circular arrows surrounding the Development of Personal Agency arrow depict how personal agency is deepened and new behaviors are achieved through repetition of this dynamic process.

Lastly, once the person has modified his or her personal norms and adopted personal agency as the lens through which he or she sees him or herself, a process of intrinsic empowerment that facilitates taking ownership of rights and converting them into entitlements takes place. This process explains how development programs based in FrEE achieve results beyond the program's targeted goals. Successful behavior change(s) and the development of personal agency encourage the individual to pursue other initiatives, and make positive changes in their lives and communities.

Making Sen Operational

FrEE turns Sen's Capabilities Approach into an operative framework for the implementation of sustainable development programs with a psychosocial, individual-centered approach. Figure 3 incorporates the Capability Approach into the FrEE model to explain the process of behavior change, personal agency, and intrinsic empowerment development.

⁴⁰Prochaska and DiClemente, "Transtheoretical Therapy"; Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross, "In Search of How People Change".

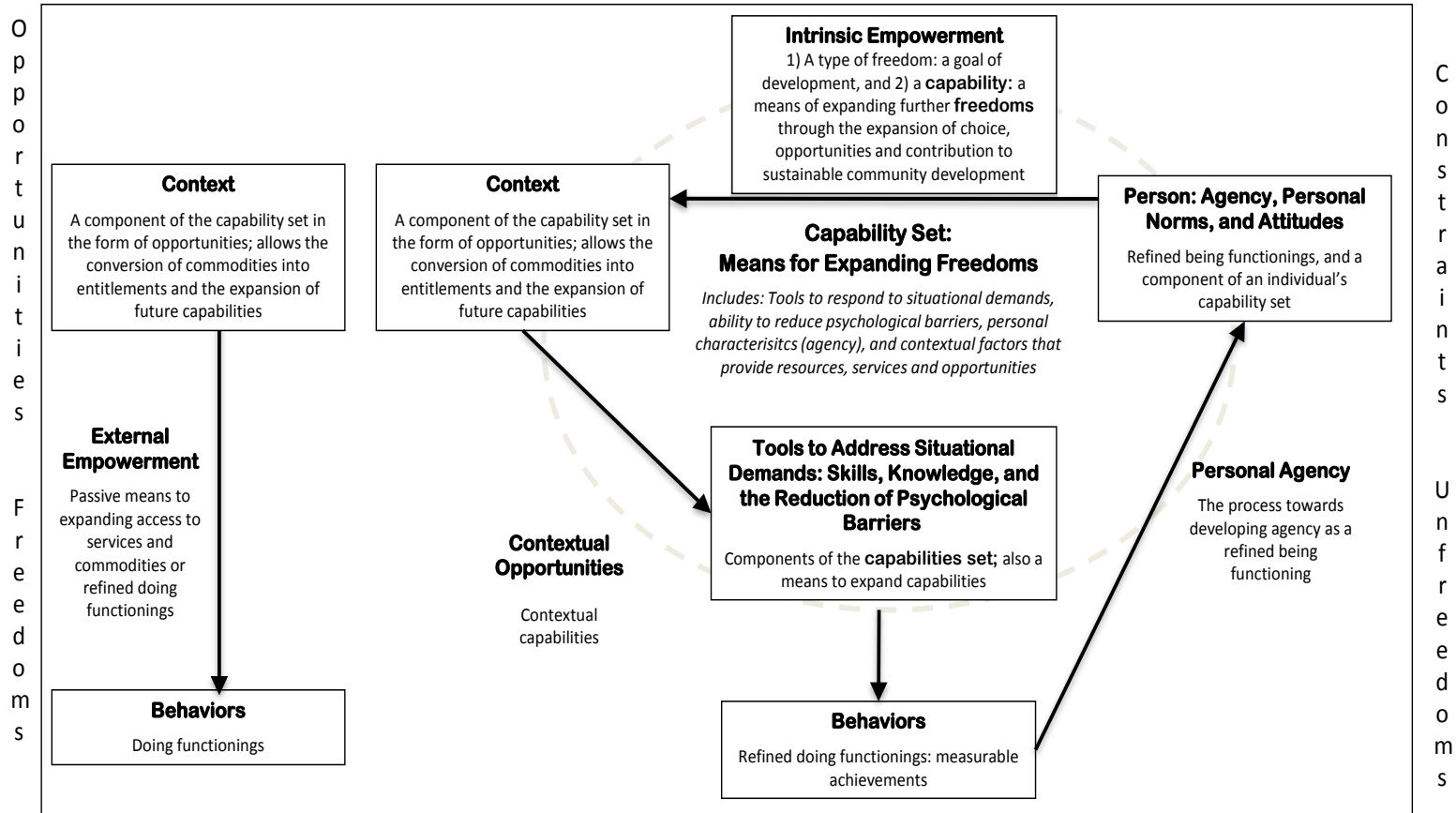


Figure 3. Making the Capability Approach Operative through FrEE⁴¹

⁴¹ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

FrEE makes Sen's Capabilities Approach operational from a psychosocial perspective. FrEE broadens Sen's concepts of freedoms and unfreedoms to include psychosocial factors in addition to the contextual factors emphasized by Sen. FrEE's Capability Set is comprised of the frames Context, Tools to Address Situational Demands, Person, and Intrinsic Empowerment. The Context refers to Sen's original Capability Set. The individual capabilities that lead to behavior changes (in Sen's terms, to doing functionings) are included in FrEE through the Tools to Address Situational Demands. Actual and perceived success in these doing functionings enhance personal agency (agency in Sen's terms), thus enabling sustained change at the person level (being functionings in Sen's approach). Programs based in the psychosocial and contextual factors of FrEE are designed to enhance opportunities, or freedoms, and reduce constraints, or unfreedoms. As in Figure 2, the location of "Opportunities—Freedoms" and "Constraints—Unfreedoms" on the outside of the diagram indicates their influence at all levels of the framework.

The Behavior frame is thus a result of the variables in the individual's Capability Set (an individual's ability to reduce psychosocial barriers, level of agency, ability to take advantage of contextual opportunities, etc.) and gives meaning to Sen's doing and being functionings. In turn, the Behavior frame affects the Person; the individual converts doing functionings, or actions or behaviors, into being functionings, stable characteristics of the person in the FrEE model. FrEE explains the transition from actions and behaviors to changes in the person through the process of personal agency development. Personal agency is also an added being functioning to the Capability Set due to its power to drive behavior change in other areas or, in Sen's terms, realize future functionings. Sen's "entitlements," or the things an individual feels he or she has ownership over, are expanded as the sense of personal agency leads to developing intrinsic empowerment, allowing one to impact and feel ownership over contextual opportunities. Therefore, the development of intrinsic empowerment can be understood as an individual's ability (relying on psychosocial capabilities) to convert contextual opportunities into entitlements.

FrEE's Impact on Development

Any progress in development, even large-scale progress, relies on the individual. FrEE's focus on the individual aims to bring about changes in specific, targeted behaviors as well as personal agency and intrinsic empowerment that contribute to development goals.⁴² Programming based in this approach, termed by IMIFAP as Programming for Choice, fosters development based in choice and "individuals

⁴² Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

having the capacity to decide and act on their decisions.”⁴³ Juana, a middle-aged participant in the “I want to, I can ... care for my health and exercise my rights” program in Lempira, Honduras, explains how Programming for Choice helped her develop a sense of personal agency:

I have more life options...there are always things that require me to think and work outside of the box, now I can confront many of those because I believe in myself and I can think by myself. When you count as a person you feel you count for everything else and you want to do more. When you do not count as a person like before when we only counted for the government because they wanted to use us for their politics or our husbands to use us to serve them or our children to care for them, I did not feel I counted. Now I do. Counting means you are important, you can believe in what you believe without having to ask others if it is okay ... you count simply because you count, not because you do something ... and that makes you feel important, free, and intelligent.⁴⁴

The testimony of Ximena, a middle-aged field worker who participated in the Programming for Choice program “I want to, I can...prevent cancer,” also demonstrates this individual-level change and its potential to impact others:

I used to feel *agachada*; I always kept my head down. I had no right to look up or to ask questions. I was an *agachada*. Now I can look straight up, and I can ask ... I am just as valuable as anyone else. And many others have learned from me. My daughters’ lives are very different from mine. I talked to them many times after the course and they talked to their friends. It was like a chain that helped change things.⁴⁵

Evaluations of IMIFAP programs quantify the success of programs based in FrEE in developing life skills, personal agency, and intrinsic empowerment in program participants. The following quantitative evaluation results of IMIFAP programs demonstrate the measured impact of Programming for Choice in achieving positive change at the individual level, and give new weight to the applicability of the FrEE model to achieve development goals.

In 2008, IMIFAP carried out an evaluation of a national project to measure changes in agency and empowerment. The program was carried out with an agency of the Mexican Ministry for Social Development (SEDESOL) whose mission is to improve nutrition of children under five and pregnant and breast-feeding women in Mexican families living in poverty. The government provides

⁴³ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 109.

⁴⁴ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 13.

⁴⁵ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 76.

food subsidies and health-education workshops to these families. To improve the quality of services rendered by SEDESOL personnel, the agency partnered with the University of Aguascalientes and IMIFAP to implement the program “Training Model for Social Orientation and Promotion” based on IMIFAP’s FrEE model.

Personnel in 31 cities in Mexico participated in the training “I want to, I can...care for my health and exercise my rights” on life skills, nutrition, and hygiene. In the following months, SEDESOL personnel replicated the training within the communities where they work. IMIFAP measured their personal agency, intrinsic empowerment, life skills, perceptions of gender equity, and health knowledge before they attended the training and after they replicated it within the communities.⁴⁶

Training of local facilitators and the replication of training with the target population are common to all Programming for Choice programs for two reasons. The training and replication module increases the development of personal agency and empowerment of participants through repetition, making them more likely to continue replicating the training beyond the program implementation period. Secondly, by training local facilitators, development programs are sustainable in the sense that participants gain skills and knowledge that allow them to be self-sufficient and the program continues long after the government or organization has concluded program activities.

The evaluation of the above program generated promising results regarding the use of Programming for Choice to engender agency and empowerment in individuals as a building block for development. Positive results were found with regard to health knowledge, life skills, and agency. The study demonstrated the following changes at a national level after just three months: 4% increase in general knowledge of hygiene, 5% increase in assertive communication, and 4% increase in problem solving in participants less than 40 years old. The study noted overall improvements in personal agency measured through assertiveness, internal locus of control, external locus of control, autonomy, and agency at work. The study demonstrated a 5% increase in assertiveness of participants and a 3% increase of internal locus of control or the feeling of control over participants’ lives. It also found a 3% improvement in diminishing participants’ perception of the control that external factors such as luck have over their lives.⁴⁷

⁴⁶University of Aguascalientes, “Implementation of a Model for Knowledge Transmission for the Development of Life Skills in Diconsa Personnel, Community Councils, and Rural Supply Committees” (report prepared by IMIFAP and presented to SEDESOL, Mexico City, 2009).

⁴⁷University of Aguascalientes, “Model for Knowledge.”

Table 1 depicts the percentage of correct answers in response to pre- and post-surveys with regard to each factor measured in the study.

Scale	Before the Training	After the Training
Hygiene	56%	↗ 60%
Nutrition	55%	↗ 65%
Gender equity	53%	→ 55%
Assertiveness	37%	↗ 42%
Problem solving	60%	→ 60%
Decision making	58%	→ 59%
Managing conflict	77%	→ 77%
Empowerment at work	49%	→ 50%
Intrinsic Empowerment	71%	↗ 74%
Agency—assertiveness	64%	↗ 67%
Agency—pro internal locus of control	81%	↗ 84%
Agency—versus external locus of control	54%	↗ 57%
Agency—pro autonomy	51%	→ 51%
Agency at work	71%	→ 71%

Note. → indicates no statistically significant change;
 ↗ indicates a statistically significant change.⁴⁸

Table 1. SEDESOL Program Evaluation Results⁴⁹

Generally, psychological and behavioral change occurs gradually and over a five-step process that includes accepting the need to change behavior, learning or adopting a new behavior, a period of time in which both the old and new behaviors are maintained, eliminating the old behavior, and, finally, maintaining the new behavior.⁵⁰ As a complex behavioral process, the acquisition of life skills, personal agency, and empowerment takes significantly longer to fully manifest than the acquisition of knowledge. As such, the 3% increase in intrinsic empowerment of the personnel measured directly after the replication phase of the project demonstrates the efficacy and success of Programming for Choice. With the continued replication of the program in communities, the psychosocial skills, sense of personal agency, and intrinsic empowerment obtained should improve with time as program contents are reinforced through repetition.

⁴⁸University of Aguascalientes, “Model for Knowledge.”

⁴⁹University of Aguascalientes, “Model for Knowledge.”

⁵⁰James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente “The Transtheoretical Approach,” in *Handbook of Eclectic Psychotherapy*, ed. John Norcross (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1986).

Evaluation of a similar comprehensive community development Programming for Choice implemented in the Mexican states of Hidalgo and Chiapas between 2002 and 2008 showed that female participants increased the perceived control over their lives and health by 5% more than the control group, and also increased knowledge and improved behaviors related to nutrition and reproductive health.⁵¹ Likewise, IMIFAP Programming for Choice implemented with primary school children in Chiapas, Mexico from 2008 to 2010 demonstrated that children improved their self-confidence by 11%, their grades and motivation, as well as their ability to solve problems, communicate effectively, and manage emotions compared to children in a control group. In an area with particularly high school drop-out rates, 87% of the participant group continued on to secondary school while only 68% of children in the control group did so.⁵²

The majority of IMIFAP's research and empirical findings have been conducted in Mexico, where a recent study showed that 70% of a sample representative of the national population has low levels of personal agency.⁵³ Nevertheless, FrEE is cross-culturally replicable in any area where low levels of personal agency prevail. Through its focus on individual change and reducing psychosocial barriers to development rather than simply providing information or services, FrEE is widely applicable across a range of development related topics, from health and education, to citizenship and productivity. FrEE reflects Sen's focus on the common need to expand choices, and provides a common means—a model for program development—through which this can be achieved.

Conclusions

The conceptual framework and the model for development programs presented in this article attempt to cover the gap that exists within development theory with regard to the human factors and the practical implementation of programs for sustainable development. They can serve as a guide for non-governmental organizations, governments, and international agencies alike in the design and implementation of development programs. By enhancing the human basis for

⁵¹United Nations Population Fund, *Integral Community Development in Mexico* (Mexico City: Investigación y Evaluación, A.C., 2008).

⁵²Angelica Romero et al., "Empiric Investigation of the Impact of the 'I want to, I can' Program on School Performance and Drop-Out Rates of 6th Grade Students in Rural and Indigenous Communities in the State of Chiapas: Quantitative Evaluation Report" (report prepared by IMIFAP, Mexico City, 2010).

⁵³Angelica Romero, Martha Givaudan, and Iwin Leenen, "Identifying Social Factors that Influence the Well-Being of Beneficiaries of Social Programs" (report prepared by IMIFAP and presented to SEDESOL, Mexico City, 2010).

development, FrEE, adopted and implemented at the large scale, has the potential to revolutionize human development.

FrEE and the functional model for human development programs based in FrEE, Programming for Choice, turn Sen's expansions of freedoms approach into a practical method of achieving sustainable human development. In Sen's approach, people are seen "as choosers rather than actors," and the approach places "too little emphasis on skills and functionings" and "too much on freedoms."⁵⁴ FrEE addresses this criticism of Sen by focusing on the power of choice and opportunities that individuals have as well as life skills and behavior change as factors for achieving personal agency. As such, "FrEE goes beyond Sen's abstract notion of freedoms to address concrete actions in economic, legal, educational and social contexts."⁵⁵

Individual change through FrEE affects development at the community and societal levels. At the individual level, personal change can be replicated with others and eventually leads to changes at the community level. By enhancing personal agency, people not only increase their personal achievements and improve personal characteristics, but also feel empowered to make contributions and engender change within their families, institutions, and communities. Programming for Choice has achieved these types of large-scale results that go beyond a given program's scope. Results include the organization of peer-support groups for domestic violence and substance abuse, meetings between local representatives and community members, and negotiations with local authorities to improve roads, access to water, and healthcare in the community. These are just a few examples of the progress that can be achieved by empowering individuals through the FrEE model.

FrEE programs also have the potential to be scaled up, making substantial improvements in human development achievable on a national and international scale. At the institutional level, FrEE can be scaled up in terms of program implementation because of the common base in life skills and reduction of psychosocial barriers regardless of the thematic focus of the development program. Implementing and scaling up programs based in FrEE within marginalized communities across the globe will significantly advance human, social, and economic development. The summation of the work submitted by Pick and Sirkin⁵⁶ along with new program evaluation results of the implementation of the FrEE model presented in this article serve to reiterate the potential of the FrEE model to make a significant contribution to development and poverty reduction on a grand scale.

⁵⁴ Des Gasper, "Development as Freedom: Taking Economics Beyond Commodities—the Cautious Boldness of Amartya Sen," *Journal of International Development* 12 (2002): 998.

⁵⁵ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*, 112.

⁵⁶ Pick and Sirkin, *Breaking*.

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