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Capabilities, Development, and Communitarianism in the African Context

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Abstract: This paper provides a critical reflection and exploration of African development with reference to enhancing human flourishing in Amartya Sen's capability theory. However, we identify some core limitations to Sen's theory of development due to its reliance on neoliberal principles. These principles can be discouraging for African self-directed emancipatory development projects. We argue that the notion of communitarianism in Africa can provide alternative perspectives that can counter the influence of neoliberalism. We first delve into the philosophical understanding of development and the unique elements associated with the African context for human flourishing. From this understanding of development, we look into the work of Amartya Sen, whose capability approach is widely regarded as the optimal development project for human flourishing. However, the enhancement of capabilities has had some significant critique. We discuss three critiques of Sen's development project, namely, Martha Nussbaum's critique, which focuses on the vagueness of basic capabilities; Patrica Northover's critique, which argues that Western ideals of development compromise Sen's development project; and Richard Sandbrook's critique, which refers to Sen's approach as a "pragmatic neoliberalism". Finally, building on these three critiques, we propose elements that enhance the unique characteristics of the African context for human flourishing.

Keywords: capabilities; development; flourishing and communitarianism



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1. Introduction

This article aims to accentuate essential elements of development in the African context that support human flourishing. These elements are based on a critical analysis of Amartya Sen's theory of development, which can be traced to Aristotle's ideas regarding human flourishing and incorporate contextual elements relating to the diverse views of African communitarianism. Ref. [1] (p. 173) describes communitarianism as a "commune-centric standpoint or a stance (which may contrast with individualism) that places emphasis on the community, communal values or the common good or communal welfare". Thus, communitarianism is a foundational concept within African communities that establishes a relational and positive sense of autonomy [2] (p. 1005). We argue that these values and principles can supplement Sen's theory of development in the African context.

It is important to note that this article will adopt a worldview view of Africa that focuses on the similarities and commonalities shared between many African ethnic groups concerning values, beliefs, and worldviews [3] (p. 15,147). From this view, we can identify a rudimentary mapping of Indigenous ethnic groups, cultures, and societies that share similar values, beliefs, and worldviews, namely, sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, this article focuses specifically on sub-Saharan Africa when referring to African development.

African countries are often labelled as "underdeveloped". The causes of so-called African "underdevelopment" are associated with a lack of inclusion, poverty, human development, and limited opportunities [4] (p. 124). However, these causes have been

widely debated, since many African countries have extensive mineral and natural resources that should provide ample economic development opportunities [4] (p. 124). Some scholars believe Africa's geography—its vastness, treacherous terrain, etc.—has contributed to its economic vulnerability [5] (p. 131). Another theory is that there have been numerous diseases, such as HIV and AIDS, malaria, cholera, etc. These diseases have limited the continent's capacity for economic growth [6] (p. 5). Others argue that the slave trade and colonial rule were the main contributors, since they robbed African countries of their resources and hampered their production capacity [7] (p. 3221).

Another reason—which goes hand in hand with the slave trade and colonial rule—is globalisation, since many countries benefitted from the exploitation of African resources and slave labour in the current globalised economy. In contrast, African countries are mainly left to “catch up” within the new market economy [8] (p. 35). Whatever the causes, it is essential that we first understand what we mean when we use the term “development” and what the factors are that determine development. The term “underdevelopment” becomes problematic, since it creates the impression of inferiority that promotes Western cultural imperialism and limits African self-emancipation [9] (p. 30). For this reason, we dedicate the first section of this paper to a genealogy of development in Africa. We explore the concept of development as human flourishing, which is mainly associated with Amartya Sen and his capability theory. It also points to some important cultural resources in Africa based on views of communitarianism.

Next, we critique Sen's development theory. Sen claims that enhancing capabilities would significantly contribute to human flourishing and, consequently, a country's social and economic development. Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom is renowned for providing a radical shift in the “crude reductionism of orthodox neoclassical analysis” [10] (p. 10771). In this book, Sen argues that economic development can only be achieved when three different forms of freedom exist: political freedom, freedom of opportunity, and protection from abject poverty (i.e., freedom from poverty). Sen's theories seemed to guide successful development and addressed issues related to development. His conceptualisation of development as enhancing capabilities has become the world standard for understanding and measuring development. This development standard is used by the United Nations Development Programme in their Human Development Index and the World Happiness Report (WHR, 2012) [11,12].

However, we highlight some concerns within Sen's capability theory that make implementing his theories problematic. In the second section of this paper, we explore three specific concerns: First, we will look at Martha Nussbaum's critique of Sen's capability theory, which focuses on the vagueness of his capabilities. Second, we explore Patricia Northover's critique of the intellectual heritage of Sen's development project. Thirdly, we discuss Richard Sandbrook's critique of Sen's theory as “practical neoliberalism” [10] (p. 1071).

Building off these three critiques, we examine how they relate to the perception of Africa's so-called “underdevelopment”. Firstly, African countries struggle to implement policies and regulations despite establishing capabilities and stipulating them in policies and laws. Secondly, we argue that the Western understanding of freedom and autonomy conflicts with moderate communitarianism and the relational understanding of autonomy within African communities. Thirdly, we argue that African self-directed and emancipatory development projects have been undermined because non-African countries continue to benefit from a globalised economy and exploit African countries [13] (p. 75).

These three critiques and how they relate to African development showcase the flaws in Sen's development theory. Although his capability approach has become the world standard for understanding and measuring development, it is inadequate for determining African development. Finally, we explore communitarianism to supplement the traditional understanding of human flourishing, to counter the individualistic way of determining capabilities, the meaning of freedom and democracy, and the influence of neoliberalism in Africa.

2. Development and Africa

In this section, the philosophical meaning of development will be traced back to its Hellenistic roots to provide a perspective on Sen's understanding of development and human flourishing. Further, the contrast between African culture and, specifically, communitarianism is elucidated. From a linguistic perspective, it is important to understand the history of the word "development" to appreciate its significance and forms of use in contemporary society, specifically in Africa. Greek philosophy, most prominently associated with Plato and Aristotle's view of development, is closely related to ethics. Aristotle emphasised virtue, and, therefore, development is closely related to the moral development or *aretê* ("virtue", "excellence") of the person [14] (pp. 1–50). The goal of development is *eudaimonia* ("happiness", "flourishing"). For Plato, development is the process in which a pure form of personhood or the essence of a thing guides the unfolding process [15] (pp. 1–30).

Later, scholastics combined the universalising trend of Greek philosophy with theology to highlight general moral principles for the development of a person [16] (pp. 1–10). However, this trend was interrupted by rationalists such as Descartes, for whom development is closely related to the growing capacity to think and the nature of the mind. His understanding is reflected in the 17th-century French roots of the word translated to "developer" or "unfold" in English, with underdevelopment as its foil. The problem with the Greek view of development that Sen advocates is that its individualistic point of departure conflicts with communitarianism in Africa. At the same time, we must caution that a simplistic understanding of communitarianism as homogeneous is problematic. Etieyibo distinguishes between radical and moderate communitarianism, which moves beyond a narrow understanding of determining capabilities, the meaning of freedom, and the functioning of commerce, which will be discussed in more detail in the final section [1]. Ideas regarding freedom and equality developed during the Enlightenment and paved the way for modern economics and development theories.

Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume and Adam Smith focused on the role of human desire and instincts like self-interest and sympathy as the basis for development [17] (pp. 1–3). In the 19th century, utilitarianism informed the meaning and gave specific context to unfolding. In other words, the principle of the greatest good or happiness provides a particular goal towards which people or society unfolds. The benefit of utilitarianism is that it can be rationally calculated regarding that which provides the greatest happiness [18] (pp. 5–20). Consequently, this became problematic because ethics and people were reduced to utility. Conversely, the antonym of unfolding is to enclose, which from utilitarianism presupposes a process of stagnation. This can include utility, mind, value, and, ultimately, happiness for a person and society. The happiness of society is also related to the natural flow of development, which must not be frustrated by obstacles to deter an optimal level of happiness. This can be seen in economic development or growth, which is crucial for maximising utility. Bentham and Mills followed a utilitarian view of development that influenced modern economics. In practical terms, this meant that basic utilities like running water, electricity, healthcare, and so forth were the basic things required to develop more sophisticated utilities. If this does not happen, there will be a lag in the economy that may increase unemployment, poverty, and economic inequality. These basic utilities are not always available in Africa due to underdevelopment and corruption.

The unique situation in Africa and its history underscores that development also has a cultural and geographical variance [4] (p. 124). At face value, the difference between development in Africa and the West is economically determined. Most Western nations are considered developed, whereas African countries are often described as having developing economies. In the West, being excluded from the utility of development can be seen as a reference to the underdevelopment of a person or a minority group. In Africa, underdevelopment is the impossibility of arriving at an economic situation that provides utility for the majority. However, this generalisation does not consider Africa's cultural and other resources. Here, the influence of communitarianism can provide an alternative to individualistic views of flourishing. At the same time, communitarianism provides

a community focus on economics beyond the self-interest of the person but rather on communal interests that drive commerce and economic development.

The disregard for the cultural resources of Africa can be traced to colonialism, which has a double impact on African economies: Firstly, a patronising relationship between the West and Africa can lead to a prescriptive agenda for African development and analysis of underdevelopment that focuses on free market economics without addressing the disparity between wealthy and poor nations. Rodney notes that European nations contributed to Africa's underdevelopment due to the establishment of dependency between Europe and Africa, with the development of the former and the deprivation of the latter [19] (p. 75). The implication is that free market economics in an unequal economic system only privileges the wealthy because the wealthy determine demand and market dynamics.

Sen does provide a more contextual focus on the development and opportunities of people. Postcolonialism emphasises that colonialism can become entrenched in the minds of the previously colonised, with elites controlling the wealth of Africa and colluding with wealthy Western countries that perpetuate underdevelopment without consideration for communal interests [20] (pp. 24–58). This can be seen in the extraction economics in Africa, which follows a single sectoral development strategy. In other words, the limited resources are being extracted by Western nations and China (more recently) for the manufacturing industries of those countries. Nations that import these goods at inflated costs far exceed the exported resources' price at the expense of the common good. Large currency differences between Western and African nations further increase the cost of goods.

To avoid attention on these structural and psychological factors, Africa is marketed as developing with the increase in the middle class and opportunities for economic transformation [21] (pp. 1–5). However, the wealth created does not contribute to economic development because these economies depend mainly on exporting resources, although some wealth reaches a larger part of the population in certain countries.

As mentioned in many African contexts, the most basic development aspects are unavailable, making the utilitarian approach to development problematic because a general or universal measurement is used to calculate utility [21] (pp. 6,9). The unique challenges and potential of diverse African contexts require a more contextual and community-oriented approach [22] (pp. 171–190). Further, utilitarianism's rational approach to ethics departs from African moral theory that underscores community and communal identity. The person as part of a larger group is important; therefore, the well-being and flourishing of the collective take precedence above the individual, as proposed by Amartya Sen [23] (pp. 5–15).

This contextual approach is person- and context-specific and attempts to understand what is required to flourish and reach the subject's potential. It is not only a rational calculation of utility. In this case, a context's history and ideological structure and culture are essential to stimulate development. This encompassing perspective applies not only to a context's economic and utility but also includes secondary aspects and values. In this regard, poverty and underdevelopment impact health, education [24] (pp. 1–15), access to justice, and the failure of infrastructure and dignity, which is important for development [25] (pp. 1–30).

However, the problem with Sen's notion of capabilities and flourishing is that the role of Aristotle's idea of flourishing is combined with traces of neoliberal market forces. Although capabilities are more personal and context-specific, the market mechanisms are not, and they drive economic activity. From the African perspective, Sen's approach can be adapted to include communal identity as a function of capabilities that inform a person's life world. The implication is that in the African context, economic inequality between wealthy non-African nations and resource dependence results in the market dependence of African nations [4] (p. 124). This dependence is directly linked to the demand of wealthy nations, which impacts the prices of the resources mined in Africa. Market dependence also includes currency movement and dependence on foreign investment. Consequently, African economies cannot escape the barriers in the way of development because the wealth of countries is being exported, and, in many cases, only a few elites enjoy the benefits. From

this perspective, it seems that Hume's and Smith's focus on human instincts and desire for self-interest is another aspect of the recurring exploitation in Africa because it seems that the hope in the invisible hand to initiate a more equal distribution of utility is failing Africa. This confirms a limited understanding of the important role that Smith advocated for structures that affirm fairness and the liberty of people [17] (p. 782).

3. Enhancing Capabilities to Promote Human Flourishing

Sen's development concept focuses on enhancing capabilities—the proliferation of choice and freedom of choice—to encourage human flourishing [26] (p. 87). Sen's concept of capabilities thus extends beyond the fulfilment of basic needs to include the opportunities and freedom of a person to pursue a meaningful life [27] (p. 75). Therefore, we can see that Sen's development project centres on two important aspects, namely, an evaluative aspect and an agency aspect [28] (pp. vii). The evaluative element evaluates the factors contributing to improving a person's life. This evaluative aspect focuses on the factors that indicate progress and contribute to economic performance. The agency aspect focuses on freedom and autonomy, specifically proliferating the opportunities available to people to make decisions to enhance flourishing through policy and political changes.

From this description, we can see that anything that limits those opportunities, freedoms, or capabilities to enhance flourishing would be considered an obstacle to development. Sen states that freedom “is not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its primary means.” [27] (pp. 36–37). Consequently, any form of social, political or economic development would require the “removal of major sources of unfreedoms” [27] pp. 36–30).

In what follows, we will explore three critiques of Sen's development project. First, we will explore the difficulty of determining which capabilities are the most essential to human development. Second, we will critique Sen's Western understanding of agency and how it relates to freedom and development. Finally, we will discuss the neoliberal principles in Sen's development project and how they mainly benefit Western countries.

3.1. The Importance of Determining Basic Capabilities

Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen are often considered the leading experts on capability theory. However, their understanding of capability theory diverges on the topic of basic or universal capabilities. Sen views capability theory as primarily concerned with the concept of freedom, whereas Nussbaum views capability theory as “a basis for fundamental political principles” [29] (pp. xiii). Sen's understanding of capability theory concerns pluralism or the multidimensionality of freedom [27] (p. 75). In other words, freedom can look and function differently within various contexts and for individuals based on their needs, wants, etc. Sen explains this pluralism or multidimensionality as “the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve” [27] (p. 75). Nussbaum argues that Sen's pluralist approach does not provide enough clarity to make important philosophical distinctions between freedoms, opportunities, or capabilities [29] (p. 14).

Nussbaum created a list of basic capabilities to clarify what capabilities she thinks would enhance flourishing and socioeconomic mobility. She understands capability theory as making “people able to live and act in certain ways” and for people to be “capable of choosing to act in these ways” [30] (p. 153). She goes on to state that “certain functions are particularly central in human life” [29] (p. 71). Furthermore, she argues that basic capabilities would form the necessary basis for developing “more advanced capabilities” and establish it as a “ground for moral concern” [29] (p. 84). Establishing basic capabilities as a goal can be extremely important for holistic development. Sen stated that he “has nothing against the listing of capabilities” and that Nussbaum's list of basic capabilities is beneficial to prevent the deprivation of minimal rights [31] (pp. 159–160). However, Sen is more interested in the role of freedom in evaluating well-being [27]. Therefore, capabilities must be “inescapably pluralist” to provide an accurate evaluation [27] (pp. 76–77).

Conversely, Nussbaum contends that her list of basic capabilities is “put forward in the Socratic fashion” [29] (p. 76). Her basic list of capabilities is “open-minded and

humble” and “can always be contested and remade” [29] (p. 17). She insists that her list be tested in institutions “as we attempt to arrive at a type of reflective equilibrium for political purposes” [29] (p. 77). Although Nussbaum argues that her list is not fixed or unchanging, she does strongly advocate for the continuous development and updating of a list of basic capabilities [32] (p. 35). This shows that Nussbaum’s list of capabilities is not just a philosophical reflection but something she hopes would reflect a global dialogue on life and human agency. Furthermore, Nussbaum argues that many different versions of her basic list of capabilities are reflected in constitutions and that this shows the success of her overall approach [33] (p. 155):

Indeed, it is by design that the capabilities list starts from an intuitive idea, that of human dignity, that is already basic to the constitutional framing in many nations of the world (prominently including India, Germany, and South Africa).

Nussbaum’s list of basic capabilities allows for a global standard for political policies encouraging socioeconomic mobility. Nussbaum’s list of capabilities provides the framework to support the development of freedom while allowing for a contextual and unique interpretation of those capabilities. Contrary to Nussbaum’s approach, Sen’s understanding of capabilities is pluralist and provides a broader interpretation with which to evaluate well-being. However, Sen’s approach has the consequence of vagueness regarding what capabilities would lead to social, political, and economic development and human flourishing. This can be avoided by engaging with African communitarianism, where people’s relevant capabilities can be distinguished and integrated into human flourishing through a positive and relational sense of autonomy.

3.2. *Freedom and Democracy*

In Patricia Northover’s critique of Sen’s Development as Freedom, Northover describes Sen’s approach to development as “fundamentally compromised by its complicity with an ideal of freedom” [34] (p. 66) ¹. Sen aims to reinvent the concepts of freedom and agency in his global development project. Northover refers to his global development project as a pragmatic process in research of an “ethical project of social justice” [30] (p. 75). The values of his project are broadened through an exercise of reason and rationality to support “liberal democratic processes, redeem its legacy of freedom, and ultimately... resolve its... unreasonable tendencies towards violence” [30] (p. 75). For Sen, the question of identity and violence is directly related to the deprivation of freedom. Sen is concerned with the freedom to think and the freedom of choice due to an affinity with a specific ethnic, religious, and cultural group. These restrictive views of identity are primarily the result of historical legacies and social policies.

Sen emphasises the concept of choice in his capability approach and links it to understanding personal freedom and human agency through his concepts of “well-being freedom” and “agency freedom”. Sen describes the aspect of human agency as “the sense of someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her values and objectives” [27] (p. 19). This is an active power that enables an individual to make choices and has a significant effect on the outcome of certain situations. This is especially apparent in Sen’s understanding of capability as a solution to the problem of evaluating interpersonal comparisons that promote individual human well-being through the freedom of choice [35] (290). Sen alludes to the relationship between freedom and capability and the importance of that relationship. He argues that the enhancements of capabilities would extend personal freedoms [36] (p. 178). Furthermore, he later starts using freedom and capabilities as synonyms for each other [37]. It becomes clear that Sen’s understanding of a “good life is, among other things, a life of freedom” [36] (p. 202). Northover states:

“Sen marries his project to the progressive liberalism of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, as well as to the political humanism of Kant, which places him in the company of the many diverse hopefuls seeking human advance through pluralistic, agonistic and even

global spaces of democratic freedoms, given respect for cultural difference and the place of responsible reason, propriety, or the proper conduct of human agency.” [30] (p. 69)

Northover argues that Sen’s intellectual heritage originates from a notion of freedom and human agency that is “rooted in Kantian moral philosophy” [30] (p. 66). She goes on to explain that Sen’s reliance on Kant’s theories encourages and sustains concepts of development that ignore the “uncanny silences concerning the foundational violence” intrinsic to the modern development project [30] (p. 66). Sen argues that this specific type of violence emerges from unreasonableness and the irrationality of “solitary identities and priorities” [23] (p. 99). He states that this violence stems from “the dialectics of the colonised mind” [23] (p. 88). Moreover, he contends that it tends to resolve itself as a resistance to Western imperialism for undermining “rights and liberties” in non-Western countries [23] (p. 88). Furthermore, Sen claims that liberation from this violence would mean developing a critical reason for the decolonised mind or escaping the dialectic of the colonised mind [23] (p. 88). Therefore, according to Sen, decolonisation would require freedom of agency as a fundamental part of the development project. However, Northover explains that by merely redefining our understanding of development while still relying on the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, Sen “is ineluctably drawn into a ‘certain legacy’ for addressing freedom” [30] (p. 69). Northover goes on to state that “Sen, I believe, still conducts the legacy of a complex Enlightenment tradition as he echoes and revisits the drama of freedom in the modern world” [30] (p. 69)

From this critique of Northover, we can see that Sen relies on the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment to define freedom and development. This fundamentally compromises the implementation of his development project in previously colonised countries and their people. Arguing that these deep-seated historical and psychological effects would be resolved through resistance and rational thinking is underwhelming. Instead, a fundamentally new understanding of freedom and development should be considered for previously colonised countries to develop a self-determined development project. We argue that this remains a challenge without considering the diverse views of communitarianism regarding African development.

3.3. Practical Neoliberalism

Sen’s understanding of Development as Freedom is not necessarily inherently neoliberal. However, the notion that development is intrinsically linked to economic development and freedom to participate in the global market economy could encourage neoliberal ideals. It employs Western development standards as a historical progression that reaches its apex in industrial, technological, or economic prowess.

Sandbrook notes that Sen’s theories encourage developing countries to adopt free markets and liberal democracy, which he argues are the pre-conditions for “harmonious and reasoned progress towards a more prosperous, just society” [10] (p. 1071). However, Sandbrook argues that Sen promotes a “pragmatic brand of neoliberalism”, which projects a “false promise to the poor and socially excluded” [10] (p. 171). Sandbrook’s critique of Sen’s Development as Freedom centres on promoting a democratic process dependent on individual actors. However, Sen’s understanding of the democratic process ignores the power relations between richer Western European countries and poorer Southern and Eastern countries [38] (p. 444). According to Sandbrook, democracy was a strategic response of Western countries to encourage economic or market freedom [39] (p. 182). This involved encouraging governments to “liberalise markets and open their economies to international trade and investment” [39] (p. 177). The combination of liberal democracy and neoliberal “free market economy” was projected as “the winning formula in poor countries” [39] (p. 177). However, this rarely seems to benefit poor countries. Sandbrook argues that Sen’s theory does not account for the severe limitations that global markets place on political freedoms and independent development [10]. Fourie describes this problem within the South African context:

“What, then, can be done to open up opportunities for those that Amartya Sen would classify as unfree? Policies mostly come in two kinds: those that are politically acceptable, but costly, and those that are cost-effective, but politically difficult to implement.” [19] (p. 68)

In other words, developing countries have the difficult choice of developing political freedom or market freedom but cannot sustain and develop both simultaneously. The development of political liberty becomes especially difficult in countries where an elite few enjoy wealth and power. Sen creates internal tension within his goal of global democracy by trying to accommodate both the notion of liberal egalitarianism and promoting individual freedom. Sandbrook argues that these power structures within political and economic policies within international politics intrinsically support the legitimisation of wealthy Western countries and continue the power and hegemony in poor countries [37] (p. 179) ².

Furthermore, Sandbrook suggests that Sen ignores the dramatic effects that global markets can have on vulnerable emerging markets. Sandbrook states that the “threat of transborder capital mobility dramatically shifts national power balances in favour of the owners of financial, equity, and human capital” [10] (p. 1071). Governments are put in a position where they often respond to the needs of the global marketplace instead of their poorer and more vulnerable citizens. Sandbrook argues that in developing countries, political parties campaign for radical change in wealth redistribution or economic policies. However, once elected, they are later forced to decide “whether to honour their campaign promises or adhere to the orthodox market policies pressed by their external creditors and international financial institutions” [10] (p. 1077).

Sandbrook’s critique of Sen showcases the difficulties in developing social, political, and economic freedoms when poorer countries enter the global market. His critique focuses explicitly on how concepts of democracy and a free global economy are enticing to poorer countries. However, global economic and political policies are geared toward enriching the already wealthy Western countries at the cost of poorer countries. For previously colonised countries to truly experience freedom, they must embrace freedom from development. By this, we specifically suggest a deeper reflection of the historical and intellectual roots of the development concept and how it translates to a complex understanding of Africa’s “underdevelopment”. Development in Africa that is based on self-interest, without engaging African communitarianism, can be detrimental, neglecting community and individual interests.

4. African Development and Communitarianism

Global attention has focused on alleviating poverty and hunger, but this must take context and culture as important points of departure to remain relevant and effective. Unfortunately, African countries experience abject poverty and hunger and are often labelled underdeveloped. This label of underdevelopment is given without recognising the cultural resources of Africa and the important part that communitarianism plays within African culture [40] (p. 11). Ukwandu outlines various policies—including African-initiated and internationally collaborated—that attempt to address poverty and the lack of economic development in Africa and that seek to enhance and further develop with a human-centric focus [40] (p. 11). However, Ukwandu notes that the development concept in first-world countries will look very different from that of sub-Saharan African countries [41] (p. 11).

In this section, we seek to explore African development by engaging communitarianism. We do this by supplementing African communitarianism to address the limitations of Sen’s theory. However, there are diverse views regarding communitarianism in Africa, and we must distinguish between radical and moderate communitarianism.

Radical communitarianism, which is “often contrasted with moderate communitarianism, takes the community to wholly or completely determine or form the individual” [1] (p. 173), which means that “the interests and good of the community are allowed to be valued and protected even if it sometimes means that the interests and good of the individual *qua* individual are set aside or ignored” [1] (p. 174). The distinction between moderate and radical communitarianism underscores that development in Africa cannot exclusively be viewed from

a radical communitarian perspective because moderate communitarianism also incorporates the flourishing of the individual in certain contexts. This means that the self-interest of the individual and community influences what is meant by flourishing. Gyekye's moderate communitarianism gives much insight into the relationship between the individual and society in African countries. He notes that "the individual inevitably requires succour and relationships with others" [42] (p. 155). Moreover, Gyekye's notion of moderate communitarianism has a strong focus on promoting human rights [42] (p. 155). Although some have argued that human rights would conflict with communal values, he argues that promoting human rights would collectively enhance the betterment of the whole community [43,44] (p. 52; p. 179), specifically focussing on moral action that is based on personhood that informs communal values [45] (pp. 109–110).

Gyekye's understanding of interdependence and the commonality between individuals and a larger community is crucial for any sustainable development project in Africa. According to Gyekye, moderate communitarianism promotes individual and collective flourishing, ensuring that individual autonomy and freedom remain intact while pursuing political, social, and economic development to promote the common good. Gyekye describes the common good as follows:

"A good that is common to individual human beings—at least those embraced within a community, a good that can be said to be commonly and universally, shared by all human individuals, a good the possession of which is essential for the ordinary or basic functioning of the individual in a human society." [43] (p. 45)

Gyekye's emphasis on the mutual responsibility of the greater community and the individual directly addresses concerns that political leaders are not held accountable for individual actions while suppressing the rights and development of their constituents. This challenges the notion that African countries structure the community so that the community of persons determines an individual's ability to legislate.

"[The] capacity for self-assertion that the individual can exercise presupposes, and in fact derives from, the autonomous nature of the person. By autonomy, I do not mean self-completeness, but having of a will, a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and to pursue them, and to control one's destiny" [43] (p. 54).

Therefore, moderate communitarianism does value community but argues for personhood to inform moral actions and the protection of human rights. Gyekye refers to this as a person's capacity of choice, which is informed by their capacity for virtue, which guides moral decision-making. Contrarily, radical communitarianism argues that the community wholly shapes the individual and that human rights are secondary to communal interests [43] (p. 53). Alternatively, Gyekye emphasises the importance of individual rights and individual agency [43] (p. 65). He states that by advocating for development and freedom on an individual level, these rights and freedoms would inform communal values and traditions and promote the common good.

In what follows, we supplement communitarianism to determine capabilities, legislative frameworks and operationalisation, notions of freedom and autonomy, and economics.

4.1. Poor Governance: A Barrier to Enhancing Capabilities

Sen's pluralist approach, which aims to evaluate well-being, already complicates the effectiveness of formulating capabilities into economic policies and laws to enhance inclusive and sustainable flourishing. However, many African countries that have adopted this approach to embrace the enhancement of capabilities still lack adequate and sustainable development. This lack of development is not just economic but does not create human flourishing at the promised capacity. When the lack of development becomes prominent, the international community and institutions quickly say it is due to poor governance. However, these international institutions are reluctant to accept responsibility for their role in establishing an environment for poor governance due to the history of colonialism.

Africa has developed various indigenous development programmes and policies by African intellectuals. These development programmes showcase the sincere effort of African countries to acknowledge and address Africa's development problems. Some of the African-led development projects include the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP, 2001), Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER, 1986–1990), the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP, 1989), the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development (1990), and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa (UN-NADAF, 1991) [46] (p. 385). Many of these policies prioritised enhancing capabilities that were crucial to ensure the flourishing of African Indigenous people. However, despite every effort to develop and foster indigenous African policies for development, they remain unimplemented.

Instead, many Western initiatives emphasise neoliberal principles to encourage socioeconomic development in Africa. However, these initiatives have proven unsuccessful. The neoliberal policies were especially prevalent within the Structural Adjustment Program (SAPs) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) [47] (p. 52). The recommendations within these initiatives included limits on debt service payments, selective subsidies, price controls, reduced defence expenditures, improved governance, and increased infrastructural investments [48] (p. 22).

The relentless pursuit of neoliberal principles exacerbated the already rampant poverty in Africa. The failure of these initiatives in Africa highlighted the unsuitability of neoliberal approaches in contexts where large segments of the population are grappling with abject poverty [49] (p. 330). International institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were reluctant to consider African-led initiatives, further exacerbating African dependency and relegating indigenous strategies to futile exercises [46] (p. 335). Furthermore, financial constraints brought on by these neoliberal initiatives often compelled African governments to abandon their indigenous initiatives in favour of externally imposed reforms that undermined efforts towards self-determination that would result in African independence [49] (p. 320).

It is the state's responsibility to develop policies that encourage human development, ensure political stability and social harmony, and protect the rights of its citizens [50] (pp. 33–34). Good governance is one of the most crucial aspects of a country's successful and continued development [50] (pp. 33–34). Ukwandu argues that African "underdevelopment" is attributed to poor governance [17] (p. 136). Resultingly, African countries remain dependent on the international community for support in addressing socioeconomic issues. Poor governance can be attributed to the lack of African-centred interest when developing and implementing development programmes. Instead, African political leaders were driven by their pursuit of power and control over state resources. This led to the concentration of power within the state, fostering corruption and hindering socioeconomic development [51] (p. 3).

Developing an African-centred understanding of what development and good governance means is crucial for the success of any African development project. A self-determined and self-defined development project would recognise African countries' unique sociopolitical values, economic potentials, and obstacles. Fayissa and Nsiah emphasise that good governance in developing countries like those in sub-Saharan Africa should not adopt a Western-derived understanding of governance but rather acknowledge and respect the diverse political-cultural dynamics inherent in these societies [52] (p. 97).

Huntington echoed these views, emphasising that many development policies and projects reflected a Western understanding of development in terms of modernisation theory [53] (p. 329). The intellectual roots of modernisation theory trace back to Enlightenment philosophers who attributed European societies' progress in the 19th century to modernity and cultural reform. From this Enlightenment perspective, underdevelopment was attributed to a lack of progress, resulting in poor governance. However, true development requires African-centred interests and values to be emphasised when developing and implementing development programmes. Poor governance results from ill-suited de-

velopment programmes. Collusive postcolonial relationships with Western nations drove African political leaders [54] (p. 45). The adoption of Western development initiatives created from an Enlightenment perspective was not tailored to African realities, disregarded the importance of African-centred initiatives in promoting development, and resulted in flawed governance structures [54] (p. 35).

4.2. Individual Agency and Communitarianism

The distinction between radical and moderate communitarianism is helpful to understand the complexity in the African context. It accentuates that a balanced strategy must be followed, and it also highlights that Sen's theory can be integrated into a moderate communitarian view that leaves room for individual autonomy and community interests. Conversely, radical communitarianism provides a more critical contrast in which community interests trump individual interests, and flourishing becomes a part of communal identity and welfare. Northover's critique of Sen's development project focuses on concepts of freedom, autonomy, and agency. His intellectual heritage from which he understands these concepts is rooted in Enlightenment thinkers and perpetuates those problems of the Enlightenment when conceptualising his development project.

Lawrence Hamilton argues that current African political thoughts and inclinations do not adequately address the enhancement of individual capabilities. He specifically notes that strict communitarianism developed as a reaction to utilitarianism and neoliberalism [55] (p. 171).³ He adds that strict communitarianism allows for the enhancement of individual capabilities since it significantly limits individual autonomy and agency [55] (p. 171). Hamilton suggests an approach acknowledging the importance of individual agency, freedom, choice, and accountability within the larger sociopolitical context to successfully sustain human flourishing [55] (p. 177). Hamilton argues that the absence of individual autonomy and agency creates a lack of individual accountability of political leaders [55] (p. 170). An approach that balances individual and community interests and allows for individual accountability would be ideal. Although the emphasis on individual agency might seem Western-centric, moderate communitarianism provides a balanced view of collective and individual capabilities and freedoms.

Gyekye challenges the imposition of non-African values onto the individual and argues that it stifles individual flourishing [43] (p. 54). A crucial element of Gyekye's thesis centres on the concept of the common good, which delineates a mandate for individual and collective welfare. He defines the common good as a benefit shared among community members, essential for the ordinary functioning of individuals within society [43] (p. 45). All human beings would benefit from collective welfare, which would be indispensable to their basic societal functioning. In essence, Gyekye's notion of moderate communitarianism provides the framework for an indigenous African development project that allows for individual autonomy that is relational and promotes individual flourishing and the common good.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the concept of development, and consequently what is understood by underdevelopment, is continuously unfolding to include a broader understanding of social, historical, and human interactions. Sen's *Development as Freedom* is a revolutionary work that has expanded our understanding of development to include personhood. However, we have seen that Sen's vagueness in favour of plurality and his fundamental notion of freedom and agency carries with it certain underpinnings, such as a Kantian notion of freedom and agency that forms part of a historical tradition of colonialism, which perpetuates a "symbolic violence". Furthermore, Sandbrook discusses some of the consequences of Sen's "practical neoliberalism" that does not take into account global markets and local power relations that could limit his vision for equal and sustained social and economic development. Ultimately, Sen's idealised notion of a society with a free market economy,

social pluralism, and a liberal democracy did not account for power relations or rampant self-interest within the economic and political landscape.

We think that Sen's development theory can assist with the flourishing of individuals and communities in Africa. However, his capability approach has limitations. Sen's capability theories remain unsuccessful in the African context due to Africa's complex colonial history, diverse cultural views, policy challenges, and the influence of globalisation. We argue that Sen's approach in Africa is restricted by three factors: the process of determining capabilities in the African context, understanding development and freedom, and the influence of neoliberalism.

Alternatively, the diverse understanding of communitarianism in Africa provides a substitute that can supplement the identified restriction of Sen's theory. The distinction between radical and moderate communitarianism provides a more balanced use of Sen's theory that can integrate with a moderate view of community and individual autonomy or a more critical contrast with radical communitarianism that allows for community interests. The development of economic policies that would encourage flourishing in Africa must focus on indigenous people's values. These values of moderate communitarianism do not conflict with Sen's capability theory. Instead, they would enhance the effectiveness of the capability approach, since both moderate communitarianism and the capability approach focus on enhancing the freedom of choice on an individual level while promoting the flourishing of the greater community or society. These types of policies would limit the individualism and self-interest associated with neoliberalism while also addressing the lack of individual agency associated with radical communitarianism.

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- ¹ Northover's critiques of Sen have been discussed in the following article: Fourie & Sands, *Adversarial Democracy and the Flattening of Choice: A Marcusean analysis of Sen's capability theory's reliance upon universal democracy as a means for overcoming inequality*, 679–680 [56]
- ² For more see Fourie, D. The neoliberal influence on South Africa's early democracy and its shortfalls in addressing economic inequality. *Philos. Soc. Crit.* **2022**, *50*, 823–843. [59]
- ³ For more see Hamilton, L. *The Political Philosophy of Needs*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2003; and Hamilton, L. Human needs and political judgement. In *New Waves in Political Philosophy*; de Bruin, B.P., Zurn, C.F., Eds.; Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY, USA, 2009; pp. 40–62. [57,58]

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