POVERTY AS CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION

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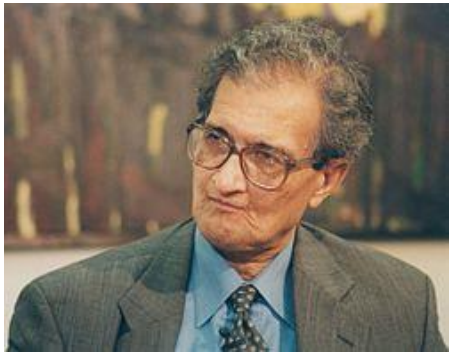
Overview

- Origins and motivations
- Key concepts
- Poverty as Capability Deprivation
- Applications – theoretical and empirical
- Confluences, possibilities and limitations
- Conclusions

Origins and motivations

- Early contributions to income-centric approaches to understand poverty
  - Introduction of ‘axiomatic’ tradition



- Later dis-satisfaction with this approach
- Concerns about ‘informational basis’ of social judgements
- Distinction between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* importance

Origins and motivations: What *is* the capability approach?

What it is

- A conceptual framework for making quality of life or wellbeing comparisons

- A ‘deliberately incomplete’ framework, which can be applied in a variety of contexts

What it is not

- It’s not a theory

- It’s not a measurement framework (and doesn’t demand or privilege any one measurement approach)

The informational base – ‘Equality of What’?

Income → Capabilities → Functionings → Utility

Definitions

- Capabilities: what a person can do or be
  - Or, real opportunities
- Functionings: what they do actually achieve
  - Or, outcomes

But why capabilities and functionings?

- Why not income? Conversion factors

- Why not utility? Adaptive preferences

- Functionings or capabilities
  - Fasting vs starving

The informational base (cont.)

- Unemployment → can be compensated by income support
- Attitudes in US and Europe (esp. France & Germany)
- BUT – non-income effects
  - Psychological; health; social; racial and gender disparities
- ‘If unemployment batters lives, then that must somehow be taken into account in the analysis of economic inequality’ (Sen, 1999).

The informational base (cont.)

- African-American men are poorer than US whites
  - But African-Americans (US) much richer than population of ‘third world countries’

- In terms of premature mortality, US African-American men less likely to reach advanced age than ‘the immensely poorer men of China, or the Indian state of Kerala … and also of Sri Lanka, Costa Rica and Jamaica and many other poor economies’ (Sen, 1999).

- Violence provides a partial but far from complete explanation.

Poverty as Capability Deprivation

- Participating in the life of society, the underpinning for *Poverty as Relative Deprivation*, viewed as one functioning amongst many in *Poverty as Capability Deprivation*.

- Analysis across multiple dimensions, though different approaches to how these are viewed
  - Alkire: 'Poverty is a condition in which people are exposed to multiple disadvantages' (Alkire *et al.*, 2005: 1)
  - My own preference is to employ two concepts of material poverty and multiple deprivation

- This reflects the distinct questions that Relative Deprivation & Capability Deprivation frameworks ask

Poverty as Capability Deprivation

How might dimensions be selected?

- Participatory approaches
- Theoretically derived
- Analyst-defined

- Comprehensive or partial
  - E.g. Tania Burchardt's work on time and income poverty
  - Or Angus Deaton's work on health and wealth

- Aggregated or disaggregated

Applications - Nussbaum

The Central Human Capabilities

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. Bodily Health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.

5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. Affiliation.

A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this

Applications - Nussbaum

capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

B. Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

8. Other Species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control Over One's Environment.

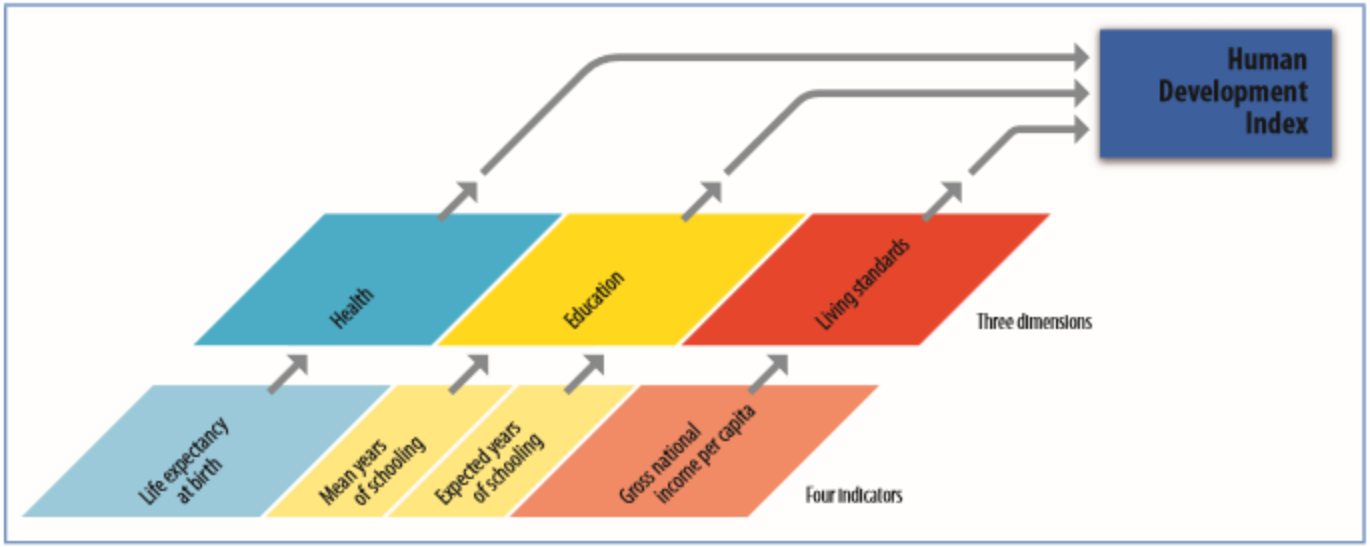
A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

Applications – UN Human Development Index

FIGURE 1.1 **Components of the Human Development Index**

The HDI—three dimensions and four indicators



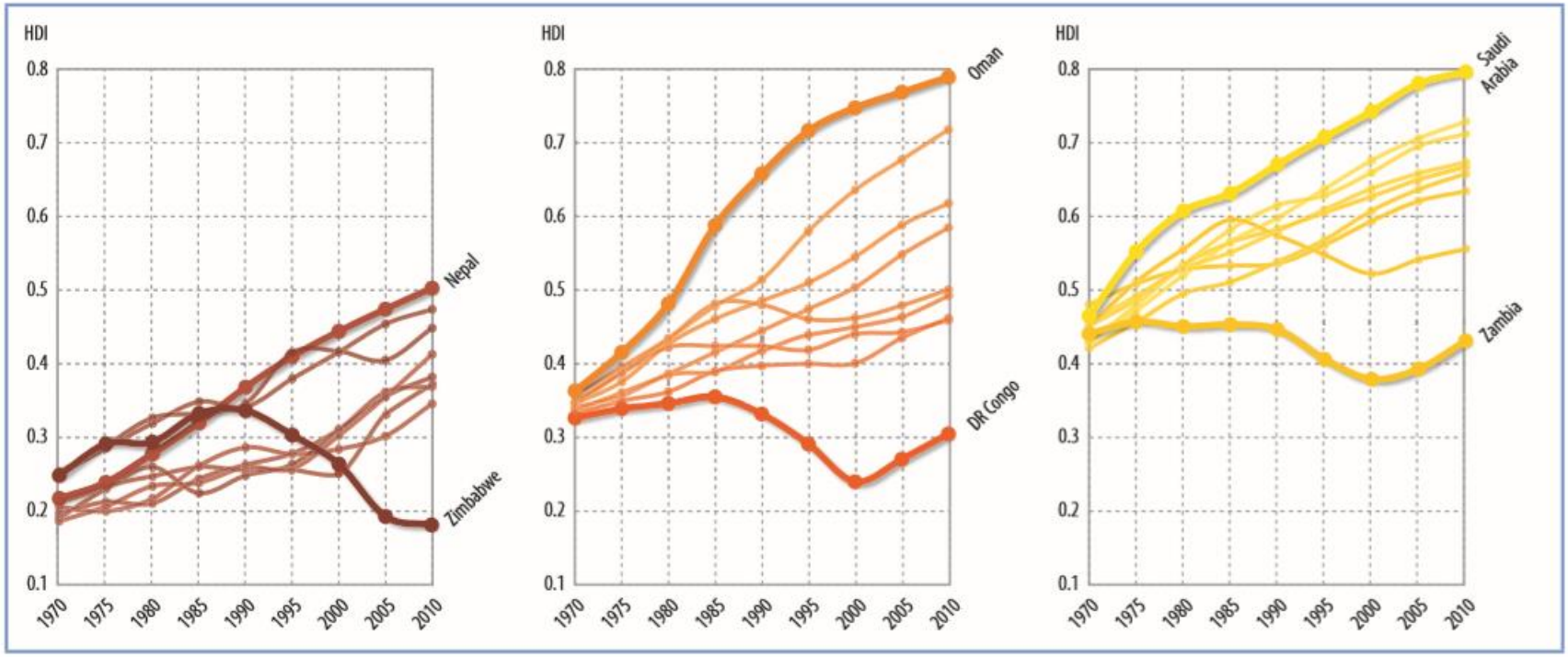
Note: The indicators presented in this figure follow the new methodology, as defined in box 1.2.

Source: HDRO.

Applications – UN Human Development Index

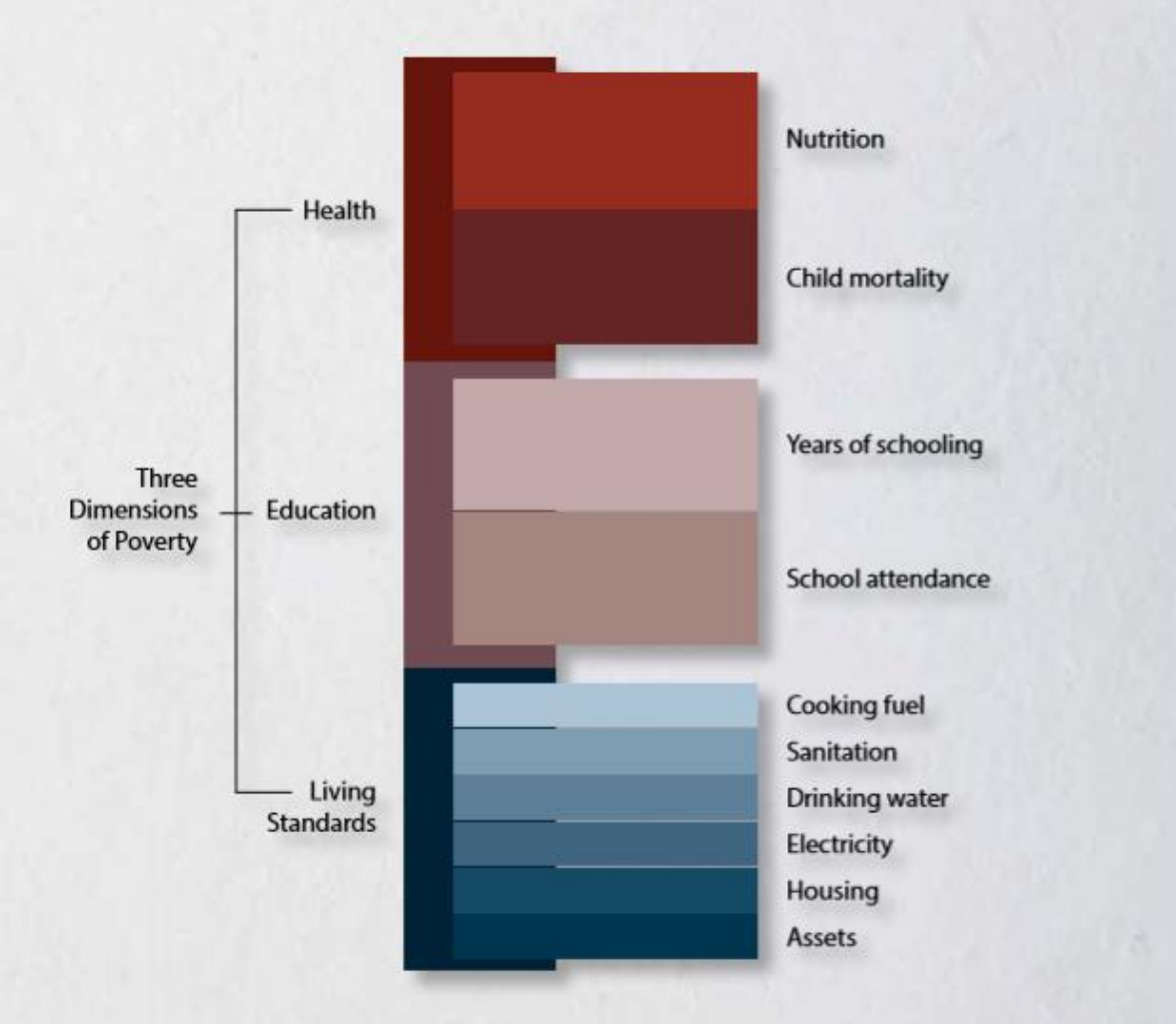
FIGURE 2.3 **Diversity of paths**

Evolution of the HDI from similar starting points in 1970



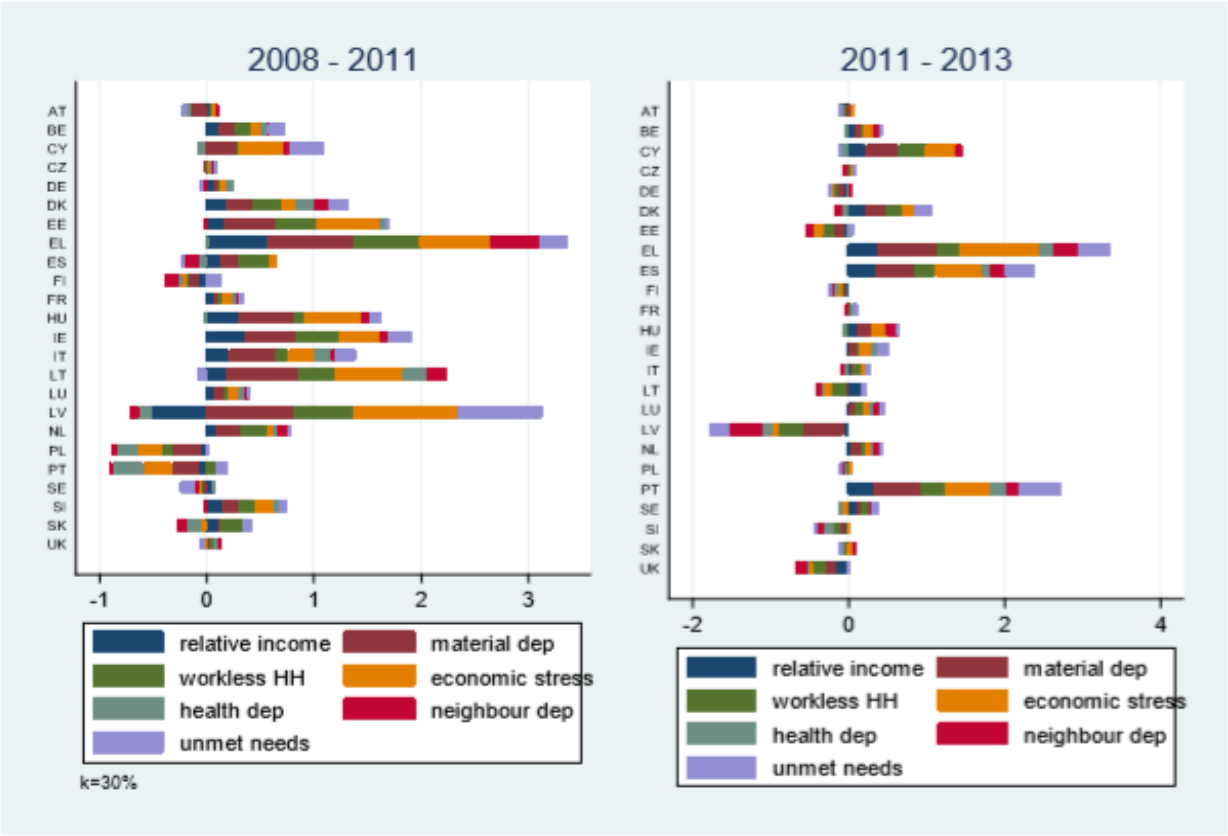
Source: HDRO calculations using data from the HDRO database.

Applications – the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)



Applications – Multidimensional Poverty Index

Figure 9. Disaggregation of M_0 by dimension during the two phases of the crisis



- Source: Hick (2016). 'The coupling of disadvantages'

Applications – the OECD's Better Life Initiative

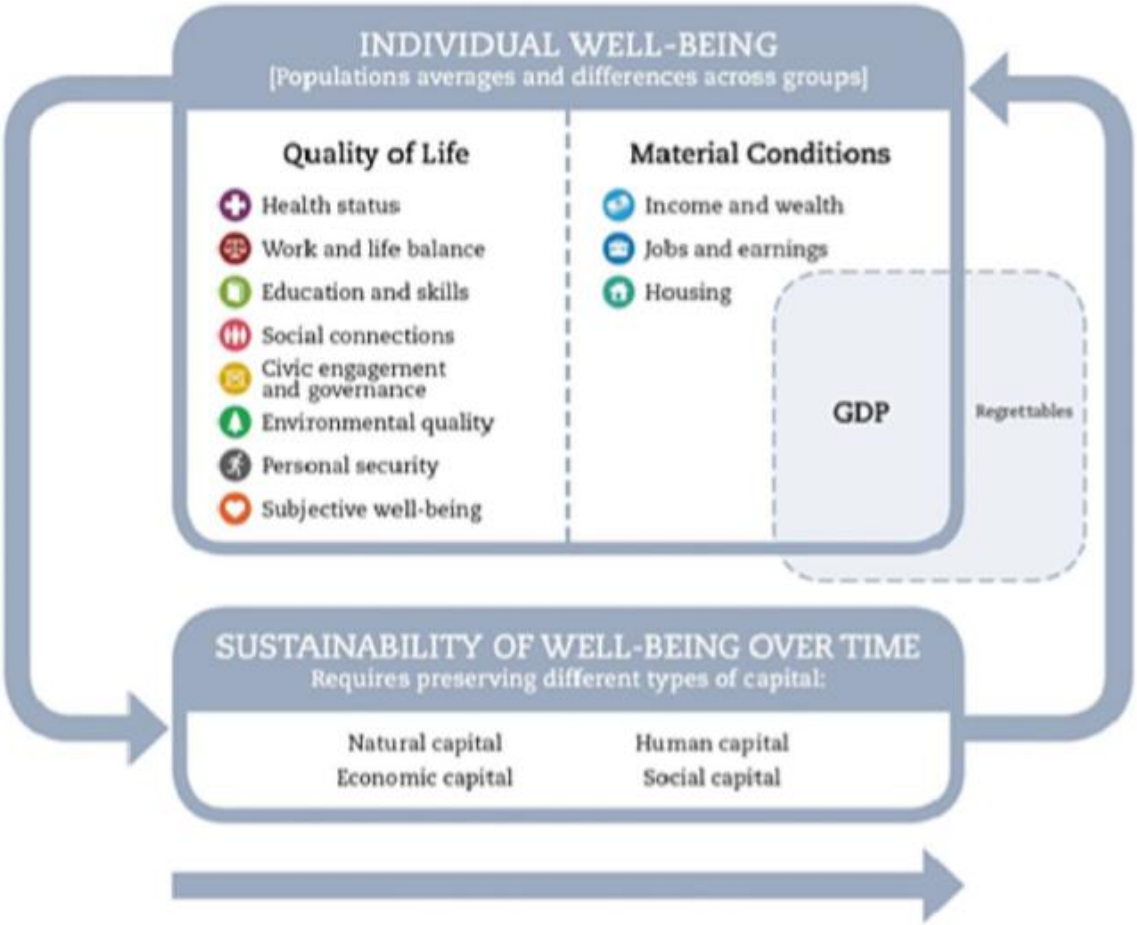


Figure 1. The OECD Well-Being Conceptual Framework

Confluences between PRD & PCD

- Both Sen's emphasis on capabilities & the tradition that has emerged in relation to deprivation indicators emphasise *constraints* (for a discussion, see Hick, 2012).

- Necessities surveys, of the kind favoured by the Townsendian approach, might be utilised as a way of selecting capabilities – or deciding how to measure them.

- **BUT** – Multidimensionality viewed in quite different ways
  - And Poverty as Capability Deprivation would view participating in the life of society as part of the normative focus only

Possibilities

- Provides conceptual framework to understand poverty and deprivation multidimensionally
- The capability approach as a conceptual toolbox
  - Vocabulary
- Improvements in data collection and measurement

Limitations

- It *is* less specified
  - Capability List?
  - Aggregation?
  - Functionings or capabilities?
- Inherent complexity of multidimensional analysis
  - Is multidimensional analysis sometimes empirically redundant? (Hick, 2016)
- Are we satisfied with Sen's division of specified and unspecified elements?

Conclusions

- The capability approach is a conceptual framework for analysing well-being
- It's core concepts are capabilities and functionings – but there are also others (which I have not had time to get into today)
- It is deliberately incomplete, requiring supplementation, and can thus take different forms depending on purpose and context
- What matters most in terms of people's well-being, and how much information do we need

Thank you for listening!

Some of my further writing on the subject

Hick, R. (2014), 'Poverty as Capability Deprivation: Conceptualising and measuring poverty in contemporary Europe', *European Journal of Sociology*, 55, 3, pp. 295 – 323.

Hick, R. (2016), 'Material poverty and multiple deprivation in Britain: The distinctiveness of multidimensional assessment', *Journal of Public Policy*, 36, 2, pp. 277-308.

Hick, R. (2016), 'The coupling of disadvantages: Material poverty and multiple deprivation in Europe before and after the Great Recession', European Journal of Social Security, 19, 1, pp2 – 29.

Hick, R. (2012), 'The capability approach: Insights for a new poverty focus', *Journal of Social Policy,* 41: 2, pp. 291-308.