



OPHI *updates*

Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford



What is OPHI?

OPHI is a research initiative within the University of Oxford's Department of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House, launched in May 2007. Our overall aim is to build and advance a more systematic multidimensional framework for reducing poverty grounded in Sen's capability approach and similar ideas. Advancing this approach requires fundamental, sustained, multidisciplinary research and its effective dissemination. For more details, please see www.ophi.org.uk.

Amartya Sen helps launch new initiative



Amartya Sen speaks in Sheldonian Theatre 30 May 2007

Introduced by the Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen delivered a lecture entitled "What Theory of Justice?" to a capacity crowd at the Sheldonian theatre. Building on his previous work, Professor Sen outlined a new framework for conceptualizing what is just. Sen argued in favour of a theory of justice that encompasses multiple principles, permits the incomplete ranking of states of affairs, and invokes the judgement of impartial spectators. A unique feature of this comparative approach to justice is that it could provide pairwise comparisons of imperfect actual states of affairs. Sen argued that such pairwise comparisons do not require an account of what is perfectly just. Abolishing slavery did not make the world perfectly just but it certainly was an advance. Following the lecture Professor Sen, alongside OPHI advisors Sir Tony Atkinson and Professor Sudhir Anand, and the Vice-Chancellor, addressed invitees at the formal launch of the centre in the Divinity School.

Workshops on missing dimensions and multidimensional comparisons

To mark its launch, OPHI held two workshops over a four day period on missing dimensions of poverty data, and on multidimensional comparisons, respectively. As an investment in OPHI's future research, the first workshop proposed a shortlist of indicators

pertaining to four dimensions that are often valuable to poor people and instrumentally important to poverty reduction but not reported internationally. The dimensions are employment, physical safety, empowerment and the ability to go about without shame. In addition, because of controversial interest in 'happiness' and related states, the workshop also proposed a set of indicators relating to psychological and subjective well-being.



Workshop participants discuss informal employment

The second workshop sought to address one theme of OPHI's initial research: the identification of elements of a well-developed theory for comparing capabilities theoretically and empirically.

The sessions included discussion of a new multidimensional poverty measure by Sabina Alkire and James Foster, a new impossibility theorem by Prasanta Pattanaik, and consideration of aggregation rules and of adaptation, change and error in empirical preferences.



Luis Quiroga & Diego Zavaleta (left); Grace Bediako & Maria Ana Lugo (rt)

The workshop closed with lively discussion of future research issues and concrete next steps.

Public seminars mark OPHI launch

In a public seminar designed to address “missing dimensions” of poverty data, five ‘shortlists’ of indicators were proposed alongside the research questions such data could address. François Bourguignon, Stephan Klasen and Grace Bediako gave insightful responses to these presentations, and the audience



Paper Authors from left: Ibrahim, Diprose, Lugo, Zavaleta, Samman

shared their views. In a second seminar, Nobel laureates Michael Spence and Amartya Sen held an informal discussion on the future of economic growth. Spence outlined the difficulties of sustaining high economic growth levels, while also taking into account history, culture and local socio-political conditions. Sen observed that the type of growth matters. The discussion focused extensively on China and India. Sen insisted that democracy and the free exchange of ideas was critical since people’s values and opinions could help to shape complementary policies and development strategies – such as primary health care. He compared China with the Indian state of Kerala, pointing out that while in China life expectancy grew from 68 in 1979 to 72 years in 2006 – despite 27 years of the fastest growth in the world – in Kerala over the same period, life expectancy climbed from 68 to 76. Members of the audience raised the importance of equity, the challenges faced by smaller economies (namely many African countries) and how economic goals could be tempered to slow global warming.



From left: Bourguignon, Stewart, and Atkinson

In a third seminar, Professor François Bourguignon and Sir Tony Atkinson outlined research issues in multi-dimensional welfare economics. Bourguignon presented a World Bank model MAMS used to assess the viability and tradeoffs involved in implementing several Millennium Development Goals simultaneously, while Professor Atkinson presented his recent work on determinants of giving which adapted a conventional model of giving to a range of motivations –

and identified a space in which multidimensional approaches could engage with standard theory. Again, members of the audience offered thought-provoking comments.

What’s Next for OPHI?

After the launch events, the OPHI team met to share insights from the workshop and discuss next steps in developing a long-term coordinated research agenda that will, over the next ten or more years, develop a multidimensional framework for poverty reduction.

To spark further debate and improvement, OPHI will develop further the proposed shortlists of indicators for swift publication, and also follow up concrete suggestions that emerged during the workshop. In addition, we are very interested in testing these indicators in multi-topic surveys of various kinds and depths, and critically analysing whether and how the indicators add value. We would warmly welcome hearing from colleagues working in similar areas.

OPHI will also follow up the proposed new multidimensional poverty index, exploring again what new information this index can bring and how it compares with others that have been proposed. The working paper setting out the index will be posted shortly on our website.

We will be developing a set of focused research questions to explore over the coming year. In addition, we are developing training and educational materials and activities, which will also be available online.

OPHI is just beginning. We welcome your insights and suggestions. Please do write to us and introduce yourself or your institution: ophi@qeh.ox.ac.uk.

Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI)
Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House (QEH), University of Oxford
3 Mansfield Road Oxford OX1 3TB, United Kingdom
ophi@qeh.ox.ac.uk www.ophi.org.uk
tel +44 1865 271915; fax +44 1865 281801

Director: Sabina Alkire

Advisors: Sudhir Anand, Tony Atkinson, Amartya Sen
Management Committee: Valpy FitzGerald, Ian Goldin,
John Hammock, Barbara Harriss-White

OPHI gratefully acknowledges support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, and private benefactors.