Needs and Satisfiers: A Tool for Dealing with Perspectivity in Policy Analysis

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Abstract

The concept of basic human needs can be employed for avoiding a danger that arises from the perspectivity of development knowledge, namely, the use of overly narrowing cognitive and evaluative frameworks that obscure relevant contextual realities. Drawing on existing literatures, the paper proposes to use three features of needs satisfiers as a tool for discovering such narrowing effects: (a) satisfiers for the same needs vary across groups and over time; (b) a candidate satisfier can enable or hamper the fulfillment of a need, depending on which other potential satisfiers it connects with; (c) a satisfier can simultaneously fulfill some needs and fail to fulfill other needs, and this holds both for the needs of one person and of different groups. In order to illustrate, the paper analyses three development reports, addressing needs for food and physical security as well as identity and recognition, and taking African land-tenure regimes as empirical example.

Keywords Basic needs · Empowerment · Human Development · Human Security · Identity · Policy analysis · Positionality · Recognition

Résumé

Le concept de besoins humains fondamentaux peut permettre d'éviter un danger qui découle de la mise en perspective des connaissances sur le développement, à savoir l'utilisation de cadres cognitifs et d'évaluation trop étroits qui obscurcissent les réalités contextuelles pertinentes. En s'appuyant sur la littérature existante, l'article propose d'utiliser trois caractéristiques des combleurs de besoins comme un moyen de découvrir ces effets de rétrécissement: a) les combleurs d'un même besoin varient d'un groupe à l'autre et évoluent dans le temps; (b) un combleur potentiel peut permettre la satisfaction d'un besoin, ou l'entraver, en fonction des autres combleurs potentiels avec lesquels il est relié ; (c) un combleur peut simultanément satisfaire certains besoins et ne pas en combler d'autres, et cela vaut à la fois pour les besoins d'une personne et de groupes différents. À titre d'illustration, l'article analyse trois

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rapports de développement, en abordant les besoins de sécurité alimentaire et physique ainsi que les besoins d'identité et de reconnaissance, et prend les régimes fonciers africains comme exemple empirique.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences has added a new theme to development research. Instead of asking how development can be achieved, social scientists turned existing development knowledge into an object of inquiry (Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 1995). While differently positioned, these constructivist approaches agree that development theories, measurement tools, and data impart a certain perspectivity: Created in specific historical contexts, they draw attention to certain aspects while invisibilizing others, and they frame problems and solutions in specific, contingent ways. This perspectivity shapes policies and outcomes.

This paper deals with one concept that has been influential in the development field: the concept of basic needs. However, my aim is not to explore the perspectivity that has been woven into basic needs approaches. Rather, I argue that the basic needs concept can be used for dealing with a danger that arises from perspectivity, namely, the use of overly narrowing cognitive and evaluative frameworks that obscure relevant contextual realities, thus negatively affecting policy results.

The notion of basic needs has been influential in global development discourses throughout the 1980s and probably is re-gaining importance as a reference point for reconciling the goals of (human) development and ecological sustainability (Gough 2017; Guillen-Royo 2016). This paper builds on approaches to 'basic human needs' as distinguished from 'basic material needs' (Hettne 1995). The latter approach has been adopted by several agencies during the 1970s and early 1980s, including the World Bank, and demands the provision of quantified amounts of food, water, clothing, shelter, health, and education. In contrast, basic human needs approaches 'treat persons in terms of assets and capacities and not only of lacks and deficiencies' (Gasper 2009, p. 11). A widely shared assumption among these literatures says that there is a finite, identifiable, and universal set of elementary preconditions for avoiding harm and thus for human flourishing.¹ These basic human needs should be prioritized in policy making. At the same time, the specific means for fulfilling basic needs—the satisfiers—are considered to be innumerable and to vary across contexts.

In order to tackle the intricate analytical 'problems flowing from this duality of universality and particularity' (Doyal and Gough 1991, p. 151), several scholars have developed the simple distinction between needs and satisfiers into more complex analytical frameworks that allow to explore manifold instrumental linkages between means and goals. Doyal and Gough (1991) offer a four-level theoretical framework from which they distill global indicators for needs satisfaction and proposals for a human-centered 'third way forward' beyond market individualism

¹ Doyal and Gough (1991) and Max-Neef (1991) explicitly address interpretation of the universality of human needs.

and state socialism. Max-Neef (1991) developed an analytical framework that people and groups can use for exploring what enables or hampers their needs fulfillment in the present and which satisfiers might be created in order to improve needs fulfillment in the future. This framework is widely used by organizations and community development initiatives (Guillen-Royo 2016). Burton (1990, 1996) considered institutions and norms that inhibit the satisfaction of inherent human needs to be a prevalent root cause of aggression and conflict. He developed a methodology for conflict resolution that aims to transform contextual institutions in the direction of more inclusive needs satisfaction for all involved groups, including in particular needs for personal recognition and identity. More recently, ‘human security’ evolved as a sister paradigm to basic needs thinking, seeking to extend security analysis and policies so as to address all threats to priority values that could be experienced in contexts, including not only physical security but food, health, and environmental security, among others (Jolly 2014; UNDP 1994). This literature develops the needs-satisfiers distinction to a fuller taxonomy that guides context-specific analyses of securities and threats (including their perception) as well as providers and means (Gómez et al. 2013, 2016; Jolly and Basu Ray 2006).

From these literatures, this paper draws three features of satisfiers that can help dealing with three potential fallacies arising from perspectivity, including (a) unduly narrowing down the range of conceivable means for achieving a goal; (b) depicting something as beneficial in itself by ignoring the potential variability of its context-specific effects; (c) evaluating in dichotomic ways, i.e., seeing something in a rosy light only while regarding something else as exclusively deficient. The features of satisfiers can be summarized as follows: (a) satisfiers for the same needs vary across groups and over time; (b) a candidate satisfier can enable or hamper the fulfillment of a given need, depending on which other potential satisfiers it connects with; (c) a satisfier can simultaneously fulfill some needs and fail to fulfill other needs, and this holds both for the needs of one person and of different groups. This analytical tool is purposely simple by design. It does not provide a full-fledged framework for context-sensitive policy analysis. Rather, the three features of satisfiers can be used as an additional device in ongoing human-centered policy analysis, helping analysts discover self-defeating narrowing effects that may arise from their perspectivity. The three features of satisfiers provide a ‘global’ analytical tool in the sense of being applicable in any context and on any policy level from local to global.

Notwithstanding this universal applicability, this paper takes the perspectivity of global policy analysts as an example, for these are powerful actors in the development field and at the same time face specific challenges in dealing with perspectivity. In order to illustrate the relevance of the proposed tool, I analyze three development reports, drawing on the three features of satisfiers and focusing on needs for food and physical security as well as identity and recognition. African land-tenure regimes are taken as example of a candidate satisfier that is highly relevant for these three needs across a large number of contexts. The next section introduces the notion of perspectivity and describes the perspectivity of global development analysts (2). Next, the three features of satisfiers are introduced (3), followed by the reports analysis in Sects. 4–7.

Perspectivity: A Challenge for Global Policy Analysis

The visual metaphor of perspectivity resonates with the increasingly popular spatial metaphor of positionality but is broader. It grasps two closely related aspects that have been prominently addressed, among others, by sociologist Karl Mannheim in his seminal work on the sociology of knowledge (Mannheim 1978, pp. 239ff.; cf. Koselleck 2004): First, there is no direct access to reality. Rather, individual and collective perceptions are mediated by interpretative frameworks, consisting of interrelated cognitive and evaluative schemes, categories, classifications, etc. Second, these frameworks are shaped by their ‘social location’—the context in which they originate and are being used. A fieldworker will ‘look differently’ at a food insecure community than an analyst, and their ‘views’ will differ from those of a state secretary. Perspectivity, then, here is defined as the phenomenon of perceiving the empirical world through pre-established interpretative frameworks that are shaped by the social contexts in which they are employed and/or have been created and modified.

Interpretative frameworks make the perception of the world highly selective. Sorting people into gender categories implies to abstract from their singularity and difference with the sole exception of their gender. Abstraction is enabling and constraining psychologically and socially. Only through abstraction from singularity can people interpret experiences and build expectations, without which they would be unable to act and orient in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1967). On the social level, abstraction enables coordination. ‘Left yields to right,’ no matter who is the driver, whether he or she is in a hurry, what is the size of the car, etc., produces flow of traffic. The other side of the coin of abstraction, interpretative frameworks have blind spots, they can narrow world views and nourish stereotypes, thus undermining creativity and openness. Most importantly here, they might obscure relevant aspects of reality. Thus, people from disadvantaged social backgrounds are said to overlook existing chances for improving their condition because their inherited world view tells them that certain positions ‘are not for people like us’ (Bourdieu 1984).

For global policy analysts, perspectivity is a great challenge because its potentially ‘narrowing’ tendencies cut across the requirement to produce knowledge which is meaningful for an indefinite number of different contexts. A variegated literature (implicitly or explicitly) elucidates the perspectivity of global analysts, including, for example, approaches to international organizations as bureaucracies (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) and historical studies of global indicators (Speich 2011). The social location of global analysts, as addressed in these literatures, includes living in global society, participating in global development discourses, and having professional and organizational affiliations.

A longstanding *Euro-American hegemony in global development discourses* may encourage analysts to ‘see the world’ through Western eyes, taking Northern countries as a global role model (Escobar 1995; Hirschman 1968; Ziai 2016). Being embedded in *global society* might accredit this view with plausibility, given that essential life chances are (still) highly unequally distributed across

the North–South divide. These forces articulate with exigencies originating in professional and organizational memberships. Applying Scott’s famous ‘*Seeing Like a State*’ to the international sphere, Broome and Seabrooke (2012) argue that *analyst departments of international bureaucracies* must produce ‘actionable knowledge’ which enables the organization to implement policy reforms in a variety of different contexts. To this end, analysts create models of shared problems and generic solutions which have little regard for contextual particularity. The *hegemony of economics* in the development field reinforces these generalizing tendencies.²

As a combined effect of a Western world view and generalizing tendencies, global analysts might incorporate stylized characteristics of Western modernity into their ‘universal’ models, thus narrowing them down to ‘Western’ ways of achieving valued goals (Meyer 1997). This will be illustrated by concrete examples in the reports analysis below. Before, the next section introduces three features of satisfiers that can help discover those narrowing effects. Each feature addresses one common fallacy that often comes with perspectivity yet is not unavoidable. Ultimately, only these fallacies (and perhaps other fallacies as well) enable the pressures exerted by the social location of global analysts to translate into that Western-biased narrowing of their analytical frameworks.

Needs and Satisfiers

In the scholarly literature, like in everyday language and public discourses, the notion of needs has been used in widely differing ways, with different ontological underpinnings. Gasper (1996) identifies 35 meanings given to ‘needs’ as a noun. Following a widespread classificatory practice, he proposes to distinguish between wants and needs. ‘Wants,’ understood as felt or conscious desires, should be separated from ‘needs,’ ‘whether in the sense of deeper drives or of requirements’ for meeting a given end, such as, for example, survival or well-being (ibid., p. 74). Drawing this distinction allows to prioritize among wants, denying that ‘every want of the same intensity is equally normatively important’ (ibid., p. 74). Psychological approaches (e.g., Ryan and Deci 2000) and Burton (1990, 1996) understand basic needs both as drives (‘fundamental human motivations’) and as requirements for well-being (cf. Vansteenkiste et al. 2008). However, not all human motivations are directed towards behavior that supports well-being, and people might even act in self-endangering ways. Therefore, normative reference points are needed in policy analysis.³

Both ‘basic material’ and ‘basic human needs’ approaches serve for prioritization, i.e., focusing on what is ‘basic.’ But only the latter offer human-centered,

² Kuznets proposed to devise a specifically tailored statistical system for each tempo-spatial entity in order to adequately deal with cultural difference. While this proposal has been eradicated from the collective memory of development economics, the ‘universal’ Kuznets curve is widely discussed. This testifies the delegitimation of historicist approaches in favor of generalized ‘cliometric’ perspectives which has taken place in economics since the post-war period (Speich 2011).

³ See Gasper (2009) for a clear discussion of different modes of needs analysis.

context-sensitive perspectives on development and systematically seek to combine universality and particularity, or identity and variability. It is this combination that helps to deal with challenges arising from perspectivity in development analysis.

In a critique of cultural relativism, Doyal and Gough reveal that contemporary relativist approaches ‘all have attempted to denounce universal standards of evaluation with one hand only to employ them to endorse some favored view of the world with the other’ (Doyal and Gough 1991, p. 33; see also Nussbaum 2008, pp. 41ff.). In order to avoid such implicit evaluations, several ‘lists’ of universal human needs have been proposed.⁴ Significant overlaps between these lists (as between lists of well-being more generally) indicate that we do have some knowledge on universal human needs, however uncertain and preliminary. The reports analysis below will focus on needs for food and physical security as well as identity social recognition. The latter needs some explication, as it does not figure very prominently in international development debates. The behavioral relevance of ‘a need for personal identity and recognition in the context of meaningful groups’ has been stressed by Burton (1996, p. 31). Recognition corresponds to what Nussbaum (2008) calls the ‘social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation.’ The distinction between ‘social bases’ (social relations) and ‘self-respect’ (a psychological state) incorporated in Nussbaum’s formulation resonates with other theoretical work. Maslow (2013) regarded esteem as a source of trust in oneself. Not every form of esteem, however, could deliver genuine self-trust, which was ultimately important because it enabled autonomous, self-directed agency. In line with this, Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory, albeit not recognizing a basic need for esteem or recognition, highlights the role of good-quality feedbacks by others. Only these enable trust in oneself, which in turn is the psychological base of autonomous agency, considered by Deci and Ryan a basic human need. In light of these literatures, recognition and identity are highly relevant for agency, empowerment, participation, control, and ownership, which are now being centrally addressed in international development debates (cf. Schnyder von Wartensee et al. 2019). Agency-enabling self-respect and its social bases can be understood as need and satisfier.

Overall, taking universal human needs as reference points in policy analysis is important because it systematically orients the lens to those realities that are most central from the viewpoint of normative considerations. In order to be informational, however, needs analysis needs concreteness, and this is where variability comes in. The different manifestations of satisfier variability have been systematically addressed by Max-Neef (1991; cf. Guillen-Royo 2016). From his contribution, I draw three features of satisfiers that can help discover three potential fallacies arising from perspectivity.⁵

⁴ E.g., Doyal and Gough (1991); Max-Neef (1991); see also Nussbaum’s (2008) list of basic capabilities and an overview of lists of well-being more generally in Alkire (2002).

⁵ These features of satisfiers are important in human security thinking as well. Their empirical manifestation is demonstrated by reviews of national reports on human security presented by Jolly and Basu Ray (2006) as well as Gómez et al. (2013, 2016).

Satisfiers for the Same Needs Vary across Groups and over Time

Often, interpretative frameworks narrow down the range of conceivable means for achieving a goal. When adapting conventional parenting practices from their own parents without reflecting them, people will not have an open mind to alternative practices of other parents that might better support their children. Similarly, if frameworks for policy analysis incorporate only one means for a given goal (e.g., a ‘Western’ instrument), other means that already exist in contexts will not become visible through their lens. Max-Neef (1991, p. 24) stresses the immense diversity of satisfiers. Satisfiers can be very different, ranging from forms of organizations and social practices to subjective conditions. The same need can be fulfilled by different satisfiers, and which satisfier fulfills a given need varies across contexts and between groups. Having this in mind can help analysts discover whether a given framework excludes or obscures existing opportunities for improving needs fulfillment.

A Candidate Satisfier Can Enable or Hamper the Fulfillment of a Need, Depending on Which Other Potential Satisfiers It Connects with

Perspectivity might also stimulate us to depict something as beneficial in itself, abstracting from the potential variability of its context-specific effects. An everyday example from some Northern countries would be practices of equaling ‘good weather’ with sunshine, which now become revisited through climate change. In the developing field, this fallacy can have damaging effects when Northern institutions are transferred to ‘developing’ countries without considering how they articulate with the different contextual conditions there. Max-Neef stresses the interdependency between needs and satisfiers: In each concrete context, the different needs of people are interlinked with multiple satisfiers in manifold and dynamic ways. Satisfiers, as well, are mutually interconnected. Whether they fulfill or hamper needs then depends on the type of satisfiers they connect with. If a satisfier is ‘transplanted’ from one context into another it might interlink with different ‘local’ satisfiers and might hamper instead of fulfilling needs as a result. Therefore, this second feature of satisfiers can be a tool for discerning whether a policy framework reifies strategies as inherently beneficial, thereby drawing attention to its potential negative effects.

A Satisfier Can Simultaneously Fulfill Some Needs and Fail to Fulfill Other Needs, and This Holds Both for the Needs of One Person and of Different Groups

A related fallacy is to see something in a rosy light only, while regarding something else as exclusively deficient in all respects. Anderson’s story of the Emperor’s New Clothes illustrates how idealizations can be blinding. Talking of the ‘developed North’ and ‘developing South’ can obscure problems of the former and achievements of the latter likewise. A key purpose of Max-Neef’s framework is to explore how existing arrangements can be transformed in the direction of creating synergic satisfiers—satisfiers that simultaneously fulfill different needs and do no harm. At

the same time, in our highly interdependent world, many satisfiers impinge on the different needs of different people and groups in both positive and negative ways. A much-discussed example from the development field would be large-scale infrastructural projects. These will have different effects on the needs of different groups. A dam construction, for example, might undermine identity needs of local communities that are being moved to other places while providing life-preserving energy to many other people. Another example, status hierarchies in formal organizations hamper the physical and psychological well-being of subordinates (Marmot 2004). At the same time, these hierarchies provide a basis for the high performance of modern formal organizations, and thus for the large-scale production of beneficial goods from foods to clothes to medicine. Searching for such ambivalences can support balanced evaluations of proposed measures as compared to existing arrangements. It can help assess whether inducing change will be beneficial below the line and effectively be creating more synergic satisfiers.⁶

Introduction of Reports

As said, the three features of satisfiers can be used as a complementary tool in ongoing policy analysis. They can be employed to discover whether the three common fallacies arising from perspectivity narrow this analysis in one or the other way, thus negatively affecting policy results. I have applied the features of satisfiers to three development reports, exploring whether the fallacies occur in these reports, how they become manifest, and which contextual realities they might obscure with what negative effects. To this end, I have compared the reports with Africa-related studies from comparative political science, sociology, and anthropology. In doing so, I have focused on needs for food, physical security and recognition, all of which are central to the reports.

The three reports are as follows: the first regional Human Development Report (HDR) for Africa, *'Towards a food secure future'* (UNDP 2012; hereafter *'Africa'*); *'Deepening democracy in a fragmented world'* (UNDP 2002; hereafter *'Democracy'*), a global HDR on democracy; *'Human Security Now'*, the final report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS 2003, hereafter *'Security'*), an authoritative document in human security discourses commissioned by the UN Secretary General.

Two criteria were guiding the selection of these reports. First, reports were chosen that resonate with this paper's concerns with basic needs and context-sensitivity. Within global development discourses, the three reports are 'socially located' in an international policy community surrounding the UN that seeks to promote a

⁶ The idea to offer a tool for avoiding unduly simplifying frameworks was originally inspired by sociological functionalism, which has developed tools for doing an open-minded institutional analysis that looks at unintended effects and stimulates counterintuitive evaluations. In this paper, the functionalist framework has been completely translated into the vocabulary of basic human needs for reasons of accessibility to a larger audience, and thus remains invisible. Moreover, this paper was centrally motivated by post- and decolonial critiques of development knowledge. In its core, it links these critiques to quite differently positioned approaches, i.e. approaches to basic human needs and sociological functionalism. These linkages, as well, are not spelt out.

human-centered and context-sensitive approach to development, thus offering an alternative to the more market-centered visions of influential actors such as the World Bank, many Northern states and private investors (cf. Gasper 2005). Each report draws extensively on the sister paradigms of human development and human rights; additionally, *'Security'* promotes the notion of human security, which is also implicitly relevant in *'Africa's'* broad understanding of food security (UNDP 2012, ch. 1). Moreover, the (semi-)independent research teams that prepared the reports extensively consulted different kinds of stakeholders with regional and national expertise. The report on food security was prepared for the UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa. Therefore, the three reports should be sensitive to context.

Second, the reports were chosen so as to complement each other in terms of the needs-satisfier distinction. The report on food security in Africa focuses on one important capability ('being food secure'), which can be understood as a basic need, and explores means—satisfiers—to enhance its fulfillment in Africa.⁷ *'Democracy'* depicts democratic participation as an end of human development, while arguing that democratic institutions can also act as what has been called a synergic satisfier by Max-Neef: Democratic institutions can fulfill multiple 'pressing needs' of people simultaneously (UNDP 2002, v), and the report seeks to demonstrate how they must be implemented in order to achieve this goal. Finally, *'Security'* addresses a plurality of basic needs (a 'vital core' of capabilities) and satisfiers.

Co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, the Commission on Human Security sought to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation (CHS 2003, p. 155; cf. Brookings Institution 2003). Its final report introduces the basic needs related notion of a 'vital core' of capabilities and recommends two kinds of complementary strategies for promoting human security: protecting and empowering people. Corresponding policies are spelt out for six areas (people in violent conflict, people on the move, the transition phase between war and peace, economic security, health, education).

Led by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, the team behind the democracy report aimed to underpin the importance of democracy at a time when the 'third wave of democratization' had come to a stall and many recent democracies had fallen into conflict. The report argues that if democratic principles of participation and accountability are implemented on all societal levels, this can trigger a 'virtuous circle' of human development. Measures for enhancing participation and accountability are recommended, with a special focus on control of the security sector and democracy on the global level.

'Africa' starts from the observation that growth has reduced poverty in Africa but food insecurity still persists. Against this background, it argues that 'Sub-Saharan Africa needs a new agenda for social justice that empowers the rural poor and especially women' (UNDP 2012, p. 115). From an analysis of food security built on Sen's notions of entitlements and capabilities, the report deduces four pivotal policy areas that should be addressed with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups (increasing agricultural productivity, strengthening nutrition, building resilience, and promoting empowerment).

⁷ While the notion of capability refers to all aspects or ways of human flourishing, what has been called 'fundamental freedoms' or 'basic capabilities' corresponds to basic needs.

In terms of key policy principles, the three reports significantly overlap. All stress empowerment, participation, accountability, transparency, and the achievement of more equitable economic and social outcomes.

Identifying Satisfiers

The first fallacy arising from perspectivity as mentioned above is to narrow down unduly the range of conceivable means for achieving a goal. In the three reports, this happens when the abstract policy principles are translated into more concrete means ('satisfiers'), including institutions.⁸ Sets of satisfier institutions identified by the reports reflect characteristics or ideals of Western modernity. In turn, radically different institutions that already exist in contexts and could also satisfy needs do not come into view. This narrowing can be avoided by paying attention to the first feature of satisfiers, namely, that satisfiers for the same needs vary across groups and over time.

When specifying how women and smallholder farmers can be empowered in order to be food secure, '*Africa*' identifies a number of key institutions, including producer and civil society organizations; public services and programs; formal, well-defined rights; media; courts; and markets, to which women should have improved access (UNDP 2012, p. 6, 115ff.). According to '*Security*,' a 'range of diverse institutions' can ensure that markets empower and protect people (CHS 2003, pp. 75ff.), including the rule of law; government programs for social protection; workers unions; microcredit schemes; grassroots organizations; social networks and informal care arrangements. '*Democracy*' identifies a set of institutions that can implement the principles of participation and accountability: A representative legislature; an independent judiciary; well-functioning political parties; professional and neutral security forces that serve the needs of people; independent media; and a 'vibrant' civil society (UNDP 2002, pp. 4, 54f.). While each reports thus addresses a range of different means, these means (except social networks and informal care arrangements) are taken from standard Westernized images of modernity, progress, and rationality.

When looking at relevant literatures, I came across an additional institution that is also an important potential satisfier in Africa: land-tenure regimes (LTRs), which are institutions that regulate access to land. In my discussion of LTRs, I refer to the contributions of Catherine Boone (2012, 2014, 2019) in order to highlight how African LTRs differ from Western arrangements, as well as to demonstrate the relevance of subnational variations in LTRs.

In liberal democracies, the state gives every citizen the *abstract* right to possess and buy land (Marshall 1950). The concrete allocation—who gets what—is not controlled by the state but takes place within markets and, through inheritance, families. In contrast, across large parts of Africa the state controls the allocation

⁸ Institutions are understood here in broad terms, including not only state structures but all well-established shared norms and understandings (formal and informal) that regulate social life (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

of land either directly or indirectly. Boone distinguishes two types of LTRs that are widespread all over the African continent and date back to the colonial period. In neo-customary LTRs, states authorize local chiefs to allocate and manage land rights within their ‘ethnic homelands.’ In statist LTRs, the state directly allocates and enforces rural land rights. In both types, this happens according to ethnic criteria that separate extended kinship groups. Who concretely gets access to land and in which way is then managed within these groups. Extended kinship groups are highly ramified, with nested hierarchies along lines of gender and age. As a result, state, economy, and kinship interlink or even merge in often informal ways that are opaque to outsiders and difficult to understand through ‘Western eyes.’

These LTRs are key candidate satisfiers for three essential basic needs central to the reports. By regulating access to land, LTRs can contribute to food security (of key importance to each report). By providing livelihoods and a social safety net, LTRs secured rural acquiescence throughout much of the post-colonial period, and thus physical security (extensively addressed in ‘*Security*’ and ‘*Democracy*’) (Azam 2001; Boone 2014, p. 316). Moreover, extended kinship groups do not only manage land rights but are important reference groups for African people as well, and thus key allocators of identity and recognition. As explained above, self-trust resulting from adequate recognition enables meaningful participation and empowerment in the first place, which are included in the reports as key policy principles.

While the reports implicitly or explicitly point to these LTRs, none elucidates their functioning and takes them seriously as a candidate satisfier. ‘*Africa*’ shortly indicates that most Africans ‘still live under informal, customary tenure, rooted in community and kinship’ (UNDP 2012, p. 124). Policy recommendations concerning these institutions remain general, for example, demanding that ‘whether through these traditional systems or legal means,’ access and control of land must be ‘secure’ (UNDP 2012, p. 124). The report does not explain how the ‘traditional’ institutions work and how the proposed policies can build on them. Nor does it indicate a need for such an understanding. ‘*Security*’ highlights extreme inequalities between men’s and women’s land access (CHS 2003, pp. 81f.). It mentions that land reforms for more equity have actually reinforced these inequalities. The report also points to lack of status and respect for women’s (rural) work that results from traditional and cultural factors. Still, the specific institutional arrangements that produce these inequalities—the concrete traditional and cultural factors—remain a black box. ‘*Democracy*,’ finally, does not centrally address land rights.

Probably, the reports exclude African (and other) LTRs from their repertoire of satisfier institutions because these are so different from Western arrangements. The Western modern (ideal of) separation of political, economic, and other societal spheres manifests itself in the reports’ basic categories, including most importantly the threefold distinction between ‘state,’ ‘markets,’ and ‘civil society.’ Anthropologists and sociologists have argued that the latter concept obscures rather than elucidates practices and institutions in Africa (Daniel and Neubert 2019). Under these conditions, it could be necessary to turn to bottom-up style analysis when translating general policy principles (e.g. empowerment) into institutions. Doing this with an eye for the first feature of satisfiers might provide for openness to non-Western institutions.

Exploring Interlinkages

The second fallacy arising from perspectivity is to depict something as beneficial in itself, abstracting from the potential variability of its context-specific effects. In this respect, it is striking that the reports rarely address the process of change—how their goals can be achieved starting from the present as it is. More specifically, reports do not address how the institutions that they propose might interact with institutions already existing in contexts.⁹ See, for example, p. 33 in *'Security'*, where severe context-specific challenges in implementation are indicated without addressing how to manage them.

This is a problem if one accepts the second feature of satisfiers, namely, that a candidate satisfier can enable or hamper the fulfillment of a need, depending on which other potential satisfiers it connects with.

Report teams obviously have been aware that their proposed institutions can have damaging effects in certain contexts. Yet in the reports, this is played down. One example is the so-called 'civil society' or 'grassroots organizations' (NGOs) that are supported by donor countries or international agencies. *'Africa'* and *'Security'* discuss these organizations as a means for enhancing empowerment of marginalized groups. A longstanding criticism says that grassroots NGOs can be 'captured' by local elites, such as peasant leaders, thus bypassing the needs of poor peasants and reinforcing existing inequalities (Neubert 1995). *'Security'* points to these risks by demanding that small community-based associations 'must mature into' professional and accountable organizations, ensuring 'equitable delivery of services' as well as representation of excluded and marginalized groups (CHS 2003, p. 89f.). However, it remains unclear how this maturing process is to take place. This is not a minor challenge, since grassroots organizations are *structurally* interlinked with highly undemocratic and unrepresentative LTRs that are already 'captured' by local elites. *'Africa'* downplays adverse effects of grassroots organizations even more by just not considering them. The report does mention that 'several factors *constrain* civil society organizations in sub-Saharan Africa' (UNDP 2012, p. 122, emphasis mine). Yet, it does not consider that local NGOs could even do damage, making it even more difficult to achieve food security, the key normative priority of the report.

While *'Democracy'* again and again discusses potential detrimental effects of proposed institutions, it fails to do so when it comes to national elections, a basic and indispensable element of democracy according to the report. Boone (2014) suggests that electoral democracy can hamper needs for food and, as a consequence, for physical security if interlinking with statist LTRs (cf. Rubin 2009).¹⁰ In statist LTRs, where the state directly allocates land, elections become an existential threat to certain groups and, as a result, to whole constituencies. For example, in 1990, in

⁹ For recent research that addresses the interplay between donor-induced national interventions and local institutions see Rohregger et al. (2018). The authors identify four types of interplay (competition, accommodation, substitution, mutual reinforcement).

¹⁰ A large literature on electoral politics in agrarian societies holds that for 'democratic' rulers, LTRs are a lever for mobilizing and disciplining voters (e.g., Huntington 1968).

the then République Zaire, dictator Mobutu opened the national political system for multiparty competition (Boone 2014, p. 284ff.). Elections were prepared in 1991 by a conference in Kinshasa. As a consequence, smallholder farmers in the province of North Kivu anticipated that a new government might reallocate land rights. A process of mobilization of local and regional constituencies ensued that sparked an outburst of electoral- and land-related political violence, killing an estimated 7000 to 10,000 people and displacing 250,000 during 1991–1994.

'Democracy's approach is not conducive to discovering such effects. The report mentions that many countries that recently introduced electoral democracy have fallen into conflict (UNDP 2002, p. 15). But it does not explore why this happened in some places but not in others. Instead, we read that the transition to democracy is *generally* crisis-torn—Western countries, as well, have experienced civil wars on their path to democracy (UNDP 2002, p. 85). Democratic control of state security forces is then identified as most fundamental condition for a peaceful transition to democracy. The report outlines in detail what must come together in order to achieve such democratic control, ranging from fiscal oversight by parliament to a culture of professionalism within the security forces (UNDP 2002, p. 88ff.). While the importance of these elements is beyond doubt, the approach taken is somewhat self-referential. When demanding to establish elements for democratic control that do not exist in many countries, the report focuses only on the institutions that it has identified in advance. Its message is: The set of institutions that we propose must be implemented completely, not partially, for democracy to be secure. As a consequence, what does not come into view is the *interplay* between recommended and existing institutions, including the dynamics produced by this interplay.

Following Burton, the interplay between electoral democracy and statist LTRs appears to threaten needs for identity and recognition. These needs are not centrally discussed in the reports, even if violent conflict is a key issue in 'Democracy' and 'Security.' Thus, 'Security' does not depict identity or recognition as part of a vital core of capabilities. It does, however, address the relevance of identity needs in its chapter on education, calling for curricula that cultivate mutual respect and diversity. Without negating the key role of schools in fighting discrimination, addressing identity in the chapter on education exclusively exhibits an ideational, voluntaristic understanding of identity as a matter of choice and mindsets. In contrast, Burton emphasizes that identities emerge from, and are bound to, the institutions in which people are embedded. Therefore, in addition to being educated for mutual respect, people must be given a dignified position in the context of meaningful groups up to the overall society (cf. Boone 2014, p. 317).

Evaluating Satisfiers

A third fallacy arising from perspectivity is to see something in a rosy light only, while regarding something else as exclusively deficient. In the reports, this fallacy becomes manifest through highlighting the merits of the proposed institutions (e.g., equal citizenship rights, 'accountable authorities'), while pointing to weaknesses of 'traditional' institutions (e.g., differentiated citizenship rights, 'patrimonial power

structures'). Often, such dichotomic evaluations draw on abstract language and stereotypes. The third feature of satisfiers—a satisfier can simultaneously fulfill some needs and fail to fulfill other needs, and this holds both for the needs of one person and of different groups—can help avoid such black-and-white comparisons, thus enabling more realistic evaluations.

'Africa' presents accountability and participation in an idealized manner that is at the same time abstract: 'Competent, active and corruption-free local authorities can argue for fair representation of deprived areas and help redirect resources'; 'When accountable authorities answer to empowered communities, social justice is advanced' (UNDP 2012, pp. 121f.). These scenarios are contrasted with 'patrimonial power structures' of the past that 'absorbed the region's resources' (UNDP 2012, p. 7). Certainly, there is truth in these observations. But if used as lenses for understanding contextual realities, such abstract, stereotyped comparisons become a barrier to perceiving these realities, including the effective provision of livelihoods by many 'patrimonial' LTRs.

To give another example, the report says that many Africans 'report a strong interest in public affairs and participation in their community. (...) Galvanizing even broader support for public participation depends on strengthening channels for civic engagement—and on guarantees of citizen rights and institutional accountability' (UNDP 2012, p. 122). This latter statement could be part of any other report relating to any other region. At the same time, it obscures existing realities in Africa. While the report demands to introduce guarantees of citizen rights in order to strengthen participation, Africans are already leading highly participatory public debates on whether certain citizen rights should be introduced (Boone 2012, Boone 2014, p. 314). These debates reflect the ambivalent character of equal citizenship: While a transition to equal citizenship would address the security needs of some, it is threatening to other groups. This particularly concerns poor rural landholders who hold neo-customary entitlements to land use but do not have monetary resources to buy land should the Western liberal citizenship principle be introduced. By not referring to these debates, the report effectively excludes widely held opinions that contradict values and principles which it promotes.

'Security' is much more nuanced and open to ambivalence, but at a key point the same pattern can be found. The report emphasizes the importance of equal and inclusive citizenship as a preventive strategy against violent conflict (CHS 2003, pp. 31ff.). Without citizenship—the 'right to have rights'—, people often are excluded from schooling and employment, have no access to health care, can hardly own property and travel, and so on. While the report thus underlines that equal citizenship enhances multiple human securities, differentiated citizenship rights are depicted as 'ineffective,' 'creating inequalities that lead to grievances and possibly to conflict,' and resulting from a willful exclusion of communities from political, social, and economic power (CHS 2003, pp. 31f.). This black-and-white view effectively underlines the desirability of equal citizenship rights but it does not adequately reflect African realities. Both statist and neo-customary LTRs ascribe highly unequal rights to citizens, and this might indeed produce grievances and potentially conflict; but at the same time, they are inclusive in an important respect. However minor in comparison to others, every member of the ethnically defined community gets some

entitlement to use land in order to satisfy needs for food. Moreover, the stratified and overlapping rights effectively create social cohesion. Different groups hold different rights pertaining to one and the same plot. As a consequence, ‘communities as a whole gained a collective interest in protecting a land endowment in which each member, by the principles of customary tenure, could claim an entitlement’ (Boone 2014, p. 35). Moreover, in an equally complex way that can hardly be described as either good or bad, LTRs are sources of identity and (unequal) recognition, as discussed in the previous section. A more holistic perspective on differentiated citizenship rights that includes their relevance for identity could contribute insights to the report’s concerns with mutual respect and non-discrimination.

In a way, the third feature of satisfiers is the key theme of ‘*Democracy*.’ The report aims to demonstrate how democracy can be implemented so as to become what Max-Neef calls a synergic satisfier—a set of institutions that fulfill several needs of citizens. Again and again, ‘*Democracy*’ illustrates that if not adequately implemented, democratic institutions can hamper needs satisfaction of some groups. Still, there is significant idealization in the report—namely, of a society that is democratic on all levels and in all its parts. The report suggests that the more the two democratic principles of participation and accountability pervade society the better (e.g., UNDP 2002, p. 4). This is not only an unachievable ideal, as the report points out (ibid.). It also ignores that sometimes, preserving non-democratic institutions can be key to enabling satisfaction of basic human needs and might be preferred to democratizing further after carefully weighing all relevant factors. For example, LTRs can make communities resilient against transnational corporations’ land grabbing exactly because they are opaque to outsiders and ‘lack’ accountability. In this view, formalizing land rights weakens rural landholders in the face of large investors. For their only ‘weapon’ then becomes having recourse to the courts—an arena in which companies are much more resourceful, being able to recruit the best lawyers, while poor landholders lack time and knowledge of law (Boone 2019; Igoe 2006).

‘*Democracy*’ stresses that depending on history and circumstances, every nation will necessarily ‘democratize differently’ (UNDP 2002, p. 4). The third feature of satisfiers suggests that explorations of such national paths should also ask: Under which conditions, in a given time and place, would it be better not to democratize (further)? This is of course a very sensible issue. Yet, if a critical reflection on the net advantages of further democratization is clearly related to limited, well-defined parts of society while retaining democracy as an overall core value, an all too simple dichotomy between ‘democratic’ and ‘authoritarian’ societies could be avoided. Such a dichotomy partly informs ‘*Democracy*’s conceptual chapter (ibid.: 51ff.). In this way, discussions on the limits of democratization might even strengthen the overall cause for democracy.

Conclusion

This paper dealt with a danger that arises from perspectivity in policy analysis: the use of overly narrowing cognitive and evaluative frameworks that obscure relevant contextual realities, thus negatively affecting policy results. I proposed to

use three features of satisfiers that have been discussed in the literature, including notably by Max-Neef, as a tool for dealing with this problem: (a) satisfiers for the same needs vary across groups and over time; (b) a candidate satisfier can enable or hamper the fulfillment of a need, depending on which other potential satisfiers it connects with; (c) a satisfier can simultaneously fulfill some needs and fail to fulfill other needs, and this holds both for the needs of one person and for the needs of different groups. These three features of satisfiers can help discover three common fallacies: (a) unduly narrowing down the range of conceivable means for achieving a goal; (b) depicting something as beneficial in itself by ignoring the potential variability of its context-specific effects; (c) evaluating in dichotomic ways, i.e., seeing something in a rosy light only, while regarding something else as exclusively deficient. The three features of satisfiers can be employed as an additional device in ongoing human-centered policy analysis. While this paper focused on the perspectivity of global analysts, this tool can be used on other levels of policy analysis as well.

Through employing the three features of satisfiers in an analysis of three development reports, several insights were generated on how, concretely, the three fallacies can become manifest. The first fallacy slipped in when it came to translating abstract policy principles such as empowerment and participation into more concrete means, for example, institutions. The satisfier institutions proposed by the reports grasp characteristics or ideals of Western modernity. Existing satisfier institutions that significantly deviate from these ideals, such as African-type land-tenure regimes, have been excluded or marginalized in the reports. Two aspects of global analysts' *social location* produce this particular type of analytical narrowing, namely, Euro-American hegemony in *global development discourses* and persistent inequalities along the North–South divide in *global society*. The Western bias is entrenched in the basic categories of the reports, most importantly the distinction between state, markets, and civil society. Under these conditions, it might be necessary to turn to bottom-up contextual analysis when translating general policy principles into specific institutions. This, however, is not current practice. Quite the contrary, when operationalizing policy principles for statistical measurement, categories that refer to Western institutions are often translated into 'global' benchmarks and indicators. These are then used by evaluators and policymakers across diverse contexts. However, this is a problem, since these indicators statistically invisibilize all 'non-Western' satisfier institutions that (potentially) contribute to the fulfillment of basic human needs (Mahlert 2018). Of course, global reports can offer contextual analyses only in a highly exemplary manner. However, they could make very explicit the need for contextual analysis at this particular stage of policy analysis. This could also help tackle one long-standing concern of postcolonial critiques, namely, the inferior status of receivers within the development system. For if development workers are required to rely on intimate local knowledge at a specific stage of policy analysis, they might automatically become aware that those who possess this knowledge have that inferior status, and they might better feel how humiliating and inappropriate this status is.

In all three reports, the second fallacy became manifest through marginalizing interlinkages between proposed and existing institutions. This happened in three

ways. First, by reflecting which contextual factors might constrain the proposed institutions (e.g., grassroots organizations) but not going one step further to address their potentially damaging effects. Second, by indicating how the proposed institutions must be shaped in order not to be detrimental (e.g., grassroots organizations ‘must mature’ into professional and accountable organizations) but not explaining how this can be achieved in contexts that structurally make this difficult. Third, by attributing detrimental effects of the proposed institutions to their incomplete implementation rather than to their interplay with already existing institutions. These three ways of marginalizing contextual interlinkages from the analysis have to do with a more general analytical choice: None of the reports systematically addresses the process of change – how its goals might be implemented starting from present as it is. However, when exploring processes, contexts automatically come into view. They will be involved in change, which will produce contingency of outcomes. In order to take this into account, reports could demand readers to carefully examine the global knowledge that they provide. Recent social science literatures would be relevant here that seek to complement historical institutionalism and its focus on path dependency by a more open-ended process perspective.

The third fallacy became manifest in the reports through highlighting the merits of the proposed institutions while pointing to weaknesses of ‘traditional’ institutions, which in turn was often based on the use of abstract language and stereotyping. Such generalizing, abstracting tendencies could be fostered, among others, by the *hegemony of economics in global policy analysis*. The second fallacy also became manifest through demanding that key policy principles like participation or accountability must be implemented everywhere, on all levels of society—not considering that sometimes, at certain points, basic needs can be better fulfilled by preserving institutions that are not (fully) participative or accountable.

This paper builds on the insights of different literatures. It addresses a problem that is in the focus of post- and decolonial critiques, namely, a Western bias in development knowledge. In order to help overcome this bias, the paper proposes to use the concept of basic human needs. Several lines of basic needs as well as related literature (e.g. the Human Development approach) are themselves part of the development knowledge that is being criticized for Western biases. In many universities, charges of racism and colonial mindset in the work of reputed colleagues have led to deeper cleavages. Yet, we might only succeed in overcoming Eurocentrism by drawing on diverse literatures. More specifically, we might need to combine the empirical, theoretical and methodological resources of those who criticize development knowledge and of its advocates. To this end, some bridging concepts would be needed. The basic needs vocabulary can provide such a bridge. Basic needs vocabulary centers on elementary bases of human well-being – a core value of development’s critiques and advocates alike. It also systematically considers socio-cultural relativity. Moreover, the concept of basic human needs can be linked with diverse disciplinary languages and approaches. At the same time, it can be used for discovering biases in these knowledges, both Western and other, thus helping us ground policy analysis in reality.

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