

Mapping Systemic Approaches to Understanding Inequality and Their Potential for Designing and Implementing Interventions to Reduce Inequality

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1. Introduction

Inequality has become a pressing issue across the world and a growing focus of the work of many experts and organisations. Multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, government agencies, development agencies as well philanthropic organizations are among those who have developed, or are in the process of developing, programmes to understand and address inequalities. This focus has grown out of evidence that economic inequality is high or rising in many countries across the world (Salverda et al., 2014; UNDP, 2019) and that inequality is harmful for economic growth and has negative effects on individuals and society more broadly (OECD, 2015; Berg et al., 2018).

This is a very welcome development as not only will the evidence base become richer and deeper but because reducing inequalities within and between countries requires co-ordinated effort and successfully addressing a number of the key drivers of inequality (e.g. skewed structure of global trade, climate change, dominant narratives, etc.) requires international cooperation. However, it still remains the case that the majority of inequality research and related policy development has a narrow focus with inequalities typically considered within single dimensions (for example, income or education) or where a more multidimensional perspective is taken, the choice of dimensions is often arbitrary and tends to be driven more by data availability than theoretical consideration. This is despite a growing understanding of the intersection of key characteristics in shaping inequalities and the existence of inter-domain and inter-temporal drivers of inequality.

The aim of this research is to improve the knowledge base on systemic approaches to understanding and reducing inequality, where a systemic approach is understood as:

- a) a holistic view of inequality, taking into account the multi-dimensionality of inequality and the relationships and intersections between different forms of inequality and discrimination as well as other global challenges;
- b) a fundamental understanding of inequality as being linked to systemic/structural root causes.

Guided by these criteria, this research reviews key approaches used to conceptualise and address inequality from a systemic perspective. It considers seven such approaches: 1) Rights-based approaches; 2) Capability approach; 3) Sustainable development goals; 4) Opportunity- or luck-egalitarianism; 5) Global and historical approaches to economic inequality; 6) Power based approaches; 7) Social and relational equality approaches. The review also explores some of their notable applications, highlighting how these build on – but in some cases also distort – the key concepts and normative grounds of the different approaches they draw on. The selection of these applications does not mean to be exhaustive, but rather serves to

highlight the practical implications of the different approaches reviewed and explore their interconnections. This allows us to map the different dimensions of inequality covered by each approach and clarify how the understanding of different drivers of inequality is rooted in the conceptual and normative underpinnings and dimensions each approach covers.

2. Rights-based approaches

Rights-based approaches cover a range of different areas of human living, and include civil and political rights such as access to justice, free speech, association, as well as economic and social rights such as an adequate standard of living, education, or health. Codified in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in legally binding international treaties, human rights identify human entitlements based on international consensus (Vizard et al, 2011). The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights distinguishes three types of international human rights obligation: the obligation *to respect* human rights by refraining from depriving a person of his/her rights; the obligation *to protect human rights* by taking measures to prevent others from depriving people of their rights; and the obligation *to fulfil* human rights by actively putting in place social arrangements including social, economic and governance policies and organizations that ensure enjoyment of rights. A strength of appealing to human rights is the fact that through the notions of obligation and accountability there is a widely recognized urgency to act to respect, protect and fulfil non-negotiable entitlements in a range of dimensions of human life. From a systemic perspective, rights-based approaches recognize a central role to structural responsibility: the legitimacy of institutions is seen as dependent on their fairness and on their ability to respect moral rights, including welfare rights. These moral rights ground institutions, which are meant to protect them and translate them into legal rights.

From the standpoint of utilising a rights-based approach in relation to multidimensional inequality, however, there are the following challenges. Firstly, the approach outlined above (OHCHR, 2008) covers different areas of human living, encompassing both political and civil rights and economic and social rights (a distinction between what are often called ‘first-generation’ and ‘second-generation rights’, see Vasak, 1977). Mobilising political action both nationally and internationally requires recognizing the rights of all individuals, as ‘rights holders, and the corresponding obligations of ‘duty bearers’. It can be difficult to identify duty bearers in relation to welfare rights (Tasioulas, 2007) – as, for instance, the vast array of actors involved in relation to global poverty or health can create a problem of enforceability (Geuss, 2001), of assigning legal responsibility and of apportioning obligations at the national and international levels. Moreover, the philosophical literature has long debated the difficulties in defining the limits of the kind of obligation attached to these rights. Economic and social rights (such as the right to adequate food and shelter, and the human right to health) are based on a kind of positive obligation (as opposed to the negative obligation normally associated with political and civil rights). This can be defined as ‘imperfect obligation’ because it lacks the ‘specificity’ that is necessary to

establish counterparty human rights (O'Neill, 1996), for instance, because these rights do not automatically define a specific way to fulfil them. This raises an issue of claimability because it is difficult to definitely connect one right to one duty and the result is a weaker obligation.

Secondly, rights-based approaches often focus on 'subsistence rights' and on extreme and absolute poverty – such views do not in turn justify concerns with relative poverty or relative inequality (Gewirth, 1996; Shue, 1997). The work of Special Rapporteurs or documents such as the Comments of UN Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Committees set standards and principles for evaluating the fulfilment of international human rights obligations - such as the principle of the 'minimum core' and the principle of 'non-retrogression'. The 'minimum core' focuses on 'minimum essential levels' and strives to set a floor that must be immediately realized by the state as a matter of top priority. It guides the process of prioritizing compliance with human rights obligations in the context of resource limitations and applies to all states irrespective of differences among them. Resources such as the 'minimum core obligations' help addressing some of the issues mentioned above at least in practice, as they specify obligations associated with economic, social and cultural rights that all states must immediately comply with. While there is no consensus on whether the minimum core sets an invariant (or absolute) and a variable (or relative) standard (Tasioulas, 2017), it is conceptually akin to a 'sufficiency principle' (Bucelli, 2019; Frankfurt, 1987), which gives normative priority to reaching the central standards of a dignified life. From this standpoint, while inequalities can matter as *causes* of insufficiency, they do not have an independent moral significance. This is not to say that rights-based approaches are not concerned with inequalities (Saiz and Donald, 2017), rather that, predominantly, interest in tackling inequalities is connected to their 'many detrimental human rights effects' as well as to the fact that some determinants of inequality, such as the erosion of labour rights, may be framed as denials of internationally guaranteed human rights (CESR, 2016).

2.1 European Commission - European Pillar of Social Rights

The approach covers three main dimensions each containing a number of areas and headline and secondary indicators: 1) Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; 2) Dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions; 3) Public support / Social protection and inclusion. Jean-Claude Juncker set out his ambition for the EU to achieve what he called a 'Social Triple A' rating (European Commission, 2016). The Pillar of Social Rights emerged then as an attempt take into account the social dimension of Economic and Monetary Union whereas for several years the EU policy making agenda had focused on budgetary and monetary concerns and austere policies (Sabato and Vanhercke, 2017). It can also be seen as an opportunity to promote synergies among interrelated policy areas, for instance, strengthening the links between employment and social policy (Sabato and Vanhercke, 2017). While it may be too early to say whether it will fulfil these promises (Rasnača, 2017), there are

some reasons to doubt it can serve as a framework to tackle systematic multidimensional inequalities.

A first point to note is **that inequality is not the focus of the framework**: it is one of the areas subsumed under 1), paired up with upward mobility and fundamentally associated with an unidimensional, economic indicator. Moreover, while the EPSR focuses on what above have been referred to as ‘second-generation rights’, **it does not, notably and despite its name, speak of ‘rights’ but of ‘principles’**. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is mainly addressed towards the national level but it is **not legally binding**. It must be noted that, on the institutional side, the EU had no scope for action besides providing guidelines in most fields. In this sense, the approach struggles to connect its agenda with effective enforcement, clear obligations and accountability. The principles are also not sufficiently articulated when it comes to governance arrangements or identifying an implementation roadmap.

Some commentators have also noted how the EPSR conception of social policy ‘as a productive factor’ and of ‘fair labour markets and welfare systems’ as ‘key to Europe’s ability to boost productivity, compete globally, strengthen social cohesion and keep increasing the living standards of citizens’ (European Commission 2016a: 3-4) may suggest **a narrow understanding of ‘social rights’** (Sabato and Vanhercke, 2017). Moreover, in comparison to broad range of rights concerns outlined above, the EPSR misses some important dimensions and appears to focus mostly on employment rights and the function of social policies in increasing labour market integration.

3. Capability approach

The capability approach has been particularly influential when it comes to understanding multidimensional poverty and inequality. Its flexibility is also reflected in the plurality of frameworks that are built on its theoretical foundation. Before exploring some in detail, here is a brief overview of the main strengths and challenges.

The capability approach (Sen, 1980, 1999; Nussbaum, 1988, 2000) focuses on ‘substantive freedoms’, that is, on what people are able to do or be in their lives (for example, participate in decision making or be physically safe). Because of this, the capability approach to well-being is **inherently multidimensional**: it is concerned with the assessment of the quality of people’s lives and the capability to live a good quality of life; one they have reason to value and one they would choose for themselves. The capability approach rejects assessments of well-being that solely focus on economic outcomes (such as income) or subjective measures of well-being (such as happiness). This is because economic outcomes are seen as a ‘means to an end’ and are not sensitive to variation in needs and subjective measures can be affected by expectations and shaped by social and cultural norms.

The capability approach has been applied to the study of multidimensional poverty – such as the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire et al., 2015). However, while some prominent proponents, like Nussbaum, focus on deprivation and see the goal of

social policy as bringing each person to a threshold level of sufficiency in each capability (Nussbaum, 2006), **the capability approach in itself is not committed to a ‘sufficiency view’ and can be used to understand multidimensional inequality.** Concerns with both poverty and inequality originate from the same core reference to human dignity and integrity. Poverty and inequality are both barriers to people’s capabilities to function in ways that are elemental to human life within society. They are barriers to what people can be and do. In fact, the literature has recently explored how the capability approach is particularly well-suited to understand advantage as well as disadvantage (Burchardt and Hick, 2016). From a capability perspective advantage sees some individuals enjoy a greater range of possibilities that are open to them across life domains, for example freeing them from trade-offs between achieving valuable ends. The capability approach is also well-suited to analysis of inequality by characteristics of individuals (horizontal inequality) and has been used extensively for that purpose, especially with respect to sex and ethnicity (Burchardt, 2006).

The **capability approach can offer a systemic understanding of inequalities** (McKnight et al., 2019). This is despite criticism that the capability approach is inherently too individualistic, ignoring groups and communities as well as structures and institutions (Dean, 2009; Stewart, 2005). The capability approach is committed to a form of ethical individualism (Robeyns, 2005; Burchardt and Hick, 2016) that regards individuals as ‘the unit of moral concern’ (Robeyns, 2005), meaning that individuals are important in their own right and that in no case should the interests of a group itself override the interests of individuals. This position, however, should not be confused with ontological individualism (Robeyns, 2005), which conceives society as built up from individuals only, and hence amounting to nothing more than the sum of individuals and their properties. This position fails to recognise that individuals are members of an array of groups and both influence and are influenced by groups and larger social structures. Instead, while the capability approach sees individual characteristics playing a role in the conversion of resources to each person’s capability set, it also considers individuals as nested within a network comprising of family, communities, local infrastructures, national and global contexts. Substantive freedom may be, for instance, limited by a lack of personal resources, but also, crucially, by the context in which the individual is operating – the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental conditions. All of these can determine what he or she can achieve, given his or her endowments and entitlements. Recently scholars have started exploring how the capability approach can be combined with intersectionality theory (Balsera, 2015) and this could be used to further our understanding of conversion factors for individuals with multiple social identities.

Despite these strengths, the **capability approach also faces challenges.** For instance, in comparison to rights-based approaches discussed above, capabilities do not have a direct link with legally enforceable rights and they do not hold the same close relationship to obligation and accountability. However, it is possible to integrate capability and human rights approaches and the Equality Measurement Framework discussed below is an example of this.

Moreover, from a practical standpoint, the multidimensional nature of the capability approach makes it **informationally demanding**. This means that practical application is data intensive and requires access to data sources which collect information across the different dimensions.

Operationalising capabilities for measurement and assessment has also been considered a challenge, and Rawls famously considered the idea unworkable (Rawls, 1999). However, significant advancements have been made, as the approaches presented below show. In reality it is generally the case that measures of ‘functionings’ (what people actually achieve) rather than capabilities (the full set of functionings representing the real opportunities regarding the life they may lead) are included, due to the challenges associated with measuring capabilities. A related issue pertains the criteria for the selection of relevant capabilities, which remain often unspecified. It is well-known that Sen has explicitly refrained from committing himself to a fixed capability list. Those, like Nussbaum, who developed a universal general list (Nussbaum, 2000) have faced several challenges (Robeyns, 2005). Others have stressed that rather than a specific list, what is required is some systematic methodological reasoning on how such a selection could be done. This means that by virtue of being adaptable, each application of the capability approach will require its own, context dependent list. This the approach adopted by the frameworks presented below. Overall, this is why a substantial amount of work in the literature has been devoted to the development of specific frameworks of measurement and assessment.

3.1 UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Burchardt and Vizard (2011) and colleagues developed a measurement framework for the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The framework uses the *capability approach to integrate equality and the human rights approach*. The close relationship between capabilities and human rights is widely discussed in the literature – for example, Nussbaum is clear in considering capabilities to be one species of human rights approach (Nussbaum, 2011). The concept of capability supports the validity of a broad class of human rights concerns (Vizard et al, 2011), covering economic and social rights, such as the human right to an adequate standard of living, as well civil and political rights, such as freedom from arbitrary interference, freedom from torture and cruel and inhuman treatment, and the right to a fair trial. A capability-based understanding of human rights can also ground the notion of positive obligation, because it puts emphasis not on mere ‘negative liberty’ or the absence of state interference, but on the full ability of people to choose what to do and be in key aspects of their lives. Capabilities thus make clear that they require positive action. Some proponents also insist on the key role played by governments – because their very existence and legitimacy is grounded in their ability to give people ‘what they are entitled to have, in virtue of their humanity’ (Nussbaum, 2011, 27).

The development of the EHRC Equality Measurement Framework (EMF) identifies a capability by (1) deriving a “minimum core” capability list from the international human

rights framework; (2) supplementing and refining the minimum core capability list through a process of deliberative consultation with the general public and individuals and groups at risk of discrimination and disadvantage. The framework thus facilitates the evaluation of both the *equality* position of individuals and groups (focusing on the distribution of freedoms and real opportunities between individuals and groups) and their *human rights* position (focusing on the attainment of minimum threshold levels). It must be noted, however, that while the EMF is not committed to a sufficiency view, it focuses on capability-deprivation and generally considers whether or not individuals meet minimum thresholds. It uses disaggregation to measure horizontal inequality between groups.

3.2 UNICEF

Frances Stewart developed an ‘approach towards inequality and inequity’ for UNICEF (2013). Stewart’s focus is on horizontal inequality as especially relevant to UNICEF. This position is justified based on the fact that children and women each constitute groups¹, and that the greatest deprivation is to be found among women and children who are at the intersection of different disadvantaged groups (e.g. ethnicity, religion, gender). Horizontal inequalities emerge also as particularly unfair and hard to justify even from libertarian or utilitarian perspectives. Vertical inequalities are part of the approach, albeit secondarily, particularly as economic disparities are shown to hold negative empirical relationship with education outcomes and crime. However, vertical inequality is also not confined to a narrow approach provided by the distribution of income: Stewart suggests that considerations of vertical inequalities also apply to education, health, nutrition.

Stewart’s analysis thus identifies the need to focus not solely on economic aspects of disadvantage but also on social, political and cultural recognition dimensions. The choice of Sen’s capability approach as theoretical basis to understand inequalities is motivated by its ability to broaden distributional considerations and by it being suited to analyse inequality by characteristics of individuals, as already noted above. The use of the capability approach as theoretical basis also allows the approach to explore the links between incomes, nutrition, education and health, as poor outcomes in one make poor outcomes in the others more likely. The approach thus identifies vicious cycles where poverty breeds deprivation in health and education, which in turn keeps households or groups in poverty. Discrimination can also further prevent upward mobility.

As other frameworks discussed here, Stewart also addresses the issue of how to pick out the critical capabilities to form the basis for an assessments of distributional equity. Her approach is influenced by UNICEF’s goals and thus uses the focus on women and children to ground the particular selection. The approach is thus characterized by 1) recognizing that the relevant list may vary according to the level of development,

¹ Stewart defines groups as ‘ways of categorizing people in ways that represent common affiliations or identities’ (See Stewart, 2005).

with some capabilities more relevant in developed countries for instance. The list needs to be debated within UNICEF and in each country; 2) priority should be given to functionings particularly important for children's life chances (e.g. access to health services and health outcomes, education access and outcomes, nutrition). For women, Stewart stresses the importance of focusing on health services relevant to the needs of women; women's educational levels and their access to adult education; relative male/female rates of abuse (assault; homicide); female political power, relative to men, at all levels of government. For children, key factors are health care including immunisation, nutrition monitoring etc; rates of child abuse; rates of homelessness; 3) the situation of households also matters, as this can lead to identifying the worst off households within the worst off identity group(s); or the intra-household distribution of functionings within the most deprived households (12).

It must be noted that the approach proposes to assess functionings instead of capabilities: this is because, for measurement purposes, functionings can be much more readily observed than capabilities; and secondly because, for children especially, functionings are a good indicator of capabilities given their freedom to make choices is heavily constrained. The approach acknowledges that there can be a divergence between capabilities and functionings, as the distribution of functionings does not always represent the full set of capabilities. However, Stewart considers that systematic differences are less likely for groups than they are for individuals.

3.3 UN Human Development Index

The capability approach is the theoretical basis for the 'Human Development Approach' (Fukuda-Parr, 2003), guiding its attempt to move beyond economic elements of development. As part of this approach, the creation of the HDI in 1990 tried to provide an alternative index to the GNP (or GDP) and income-based measures. The HDI is a multidimensional index that tries to portray a measure of capability achievements. Through the capability approach the Human Development approach redefines the concept of well-being and the HDI shifts focus on the ends of people's lives instead of on survival means. The HDI is an aggregate measure estimated at the level of a country or a population group, such as a gender group or province within a country. It summarises achievement in three dimensions of human development: health, education and standard of living. It does so through country- or group-level variables: life expectancy at birth, mean and expected years of schooling, and gross national income per capita.

Over the years a range of criticisms have been raised, ranging from problems posed by the significant and positive correlation between HDI components, wrong specifications, wrong measurements of dimensions and missing indicators, and redundancy (Kovacevic, 2011; McGillivray, 1991; Anand, 2018). A relevant one in relation to applying the capability approach through the HDI to understand multidimensional inequality is that the HDI only includes a very narrow selection of capabilities that might be of interest – this risks reinforcing a narrow interpretation of development centred around education, health and income, with the glaring exclusion

of political and social freedoms (Fukuda-Parr, 2000). Moreover, by producing an aggregate measure the HDI attempts both to make the information manageable, and to indicate priorities for policy intervention. Nevertheless, aggregation is challenging because multi-dimensionality reflects the plurality of human ends and any aggregation risks being somewhat arbitrary: it requires weighting indicators and trade-offs among the dimensions which are largely incommensurate. This can lead to prefer ‘partial rankings’ (Burchardt, 2006).

The HDI has been influential in moving beyond national income as a measure of well-being –it has helped focusing on what people can do and be, albeit across limited dimensions, by incorporating health and education into its informational bases. The focus on national income also missed variations in in people’s claim on that aggregate income – the HDI, based entirely on national averages, provides only limited information about distribution within countries. The distribution of access to key resources is an important determinant of the effect of health, education and income on both individual well-being and on the aggregate well-being of a population as a whole (Stanton, 2006). This led to the development of the Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) which measures the ‘loss’ in potential human development due to inequality” (UNDP, 2010; Hicks, 1997; Alkire and Foster, 2010). The IHDI adjusts for inequalities in HDI dimensions by “discounting” each dimension’s average value according to its level of inequality. The IHDI equals the HDI when there is no inequality across people but falls below the HDI as inequality rises. Issues with how the aggregate measure is constructed and justified remain, for example, an extra year of schooling for an individual will contribute less to IHDI than the level of income (Anand, 2018). Moreover, the IHDI is not association sensitive, so it does not capture overlapping inequalities (UNDP, 2010, 2019).

The Human Development Report 2010 also introduced the gender inequality index (GII), built on the framework of the IHDI, in order to “reflect women’s disadvantage in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market” (219-21) and the “loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions”. The GII has been the target of substantial critiques in terms of its construction and its ability to meaningfully capture gender inequalities (Anand, 2018; Permanyer, 2013).

3.4 Multidimensional Inequality Framework

The Multidimensional Inequality Framework (MIF) was developed through a collaboration between academics and practitioners to provide a systematic approach to understanding and addressing multidimensional inequality (McKnight et al., 2019).

The capability approach provides the theoretical basis for assessing differences in the quality of people’s lives. The MIF provides a comprehensive approach to measuring capability-inequality which does not rely exclusively or mainly on subjective measures of well-being (e.g. happiness or life satisfaction) and, unlike outcome-focused frameworks, it has a broader concern with inequalities in capabilities: this means that

the MIF considers how processes and choices lead to observed functionings. For instance, the MIF attempts to capture both the extent of individuals' choice and autonomy and the treatment people receive (e.g. the incidence of privilege or disadvantage when dealing with the judicial system; which groups are (not) treated with dignity within the health sector). Overall, the capability approach shapes the way in which the MIF approaches inequality by paying attention to functionings, process and treatment, and choice and autonomy.

The MIF is structured around seven key 'life domains': life and health; physical and legal security; education and learning; financial security and dignified work; comfortable, independent and secure living conditions; participation, influence and voice; individual, family and social life. What is distinctive about the MIF is the fact that it covers not just horizontal capability-inequality between groups but also vertical capability-inequality. It also seeks to operationalise the concept of 'too much' (e.g. too much power and influence) through including measures of concentration and acknowledging that the capabilities set can include those that harm others. This distinguishes it from frameworks such as the EHRC's Equality Measurement Framework which, as seen above, focuses on capability-deprivation and use disaggregation to measure horizontal inequality. The development of the MIF thus contributes to the emerging literature that looks specifically at how the capability approach can be applied to studying elites (Burchardt and Hick 2018) and how it is possible for some to have 'too much' while others do not have enough (Burchardt et al. 2020; Robeyns 2017a).

The MIF guides the identification of inequality drivers through operationalising what the capability literature defines as 'conversion factors' as *drivers* of multidimensional inequality, both within and between domains: these are factors that influence the conversion rate from individual resources to capabilities (real opportunities or positive freedoms) and functionings (outcomes or achievements). Three main categories of conversion factors are generally considered: personal conversion factors – such as physical and mental aspects, age and gender; social conversion factors – such as social institutions, social norms (gendered, religious, cultural, moral), traditions and the behaviour of others (sexism, homophobia, racism etc., potentially with intersectional dimensions); environmental conversion factors, including climate, pollution, deforestation and so on (Dang; 2014; Robeyns, 2017b). While inequalities in capabilities and functionings depend not just on these conversion factors but also on the distribution of entitlements and endowments (and choice, for functionings), these conversion factors are *key drivers* of capability-inequality. Conversion factors also bear on the extent to which (dis)advantage can be transferred across domains. The attention to both vertical and horizontal inequality, combined to this approach towards drivers of inequality allows the MIF to identify 'capabilities-polarisation traps' and explore the relationship between corrosive disadvantages (when deprivation in one dimension leads to deprivation in others), fertile functionings/capabilities (when achievement spreads across domains), or spawning privileges (when having too much

of a capability in one domain secures the same in others) (McKnight and Loureiro, mimeo).

4. Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit the international community to the reduction of inequality within and between countries and to the promotion of ‘the social, economic and political inclusion of all’ through SDG Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries. At the same time, they endorse a cross-cutting commitment to ‘leave no one behind’.

The SDGs are important in global governance because they re-conceptualized development as a universal aspiration for inclusive and sustainable progress. In doing so, they acknowledge that development is complex, multifaceted and non-linear (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which preceded the SDGs, were reductionist, articulating a very narrow agenda for development focused on poverty, and poverty interpreted as meeting basic needs. This narrow focus kept out critical but controversial issues such as climate change, migration, conflict, and democratic governance (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). Their focus on absolute poverty in particular also left out concern for relative dimensions of disadvantage and for the unequal social relationships, practices and institutions underpinning these. MDGs also framed a narrative of development as a top down approach, de-contextualized from local settings and emphasizing the North-South divide (Vandemoortele, 2009; Fukuda-Parr, 2016). The SDGs have been transformative, both in their understanding of the scope of global governance and the relationships supporting it. They are the result of innovative, intense consultations characterized by multi-stakeholder participation and it is through the inclusion of this range of voices that their ambition was framed as seeking ‘deep and structural changes to existing global systems of power, decision making and resource sharing’ (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). On the one hand, this means broad concern for incorporating many issues and sectors central to how societies are organized; on the other hand, this also requires a greater focus on the interrelation of these issues (e.g. poverty, climate, conflict, inequality). Making progress thus demands that these issues are considered and tackled in conjunction, and include an understanding of common causes and mechanisms linking them.

This normative shift characterizing the SDGs allows the adoption of a broad perspective on inequality which encompasses economic, social, and political dimensions, acknowledges that these overlap and reinforce one another, and invites an exploration of how they are rooted in structures of society (Doyle and Stiglitz, 2014; UNDG, 2013). The inclusion of inequality as a standalone issue and as a cross-cutting principle also expands the focus of development from absolute to relative deprivation (Freistein and Mahlert, 2016), and includes inequalities of outcome alongside inequalities of opportunities (e.g. target 10.3). Overall, this suggests an

approach which adopts a vision of development that aspires to move beyond 'basic capabilities towards enhanced capabilities' (UNDP 2019). While the former are necessary to meet basic needs, the latter reflect more advanced access to opportunities and can evolve and change from country to country. While meeting basic needs is an essential stepping stone 'to focus on them exclusively is to neglect inequalities in strategic aspects of life, those that change the distribution of power' (UNDP, 2019: 32).

Emphasis on sustainability reframes thinking about development: from assuming that possibilities are inexhaustible to seeing them as necessarily facing issues of limited resources, trade-offs and potentially negative externalities. This means, for instance, that the sustainability of growth depends on an array of environmental, social and political factors. In this sense, inequality emerges as bearing significant costs for societies. Moreover, this approach would make it possible to recognize that fostering development that benefits the most disadvantaged may require relative losses for others.

Whether these important conceptual transformations matched the approach SDGs effectively developed remains contested. In fact, while the SDGs provide an impressive normative framework to address inequalities and place them at the centre of an approach to development, it is important to point to several critiques to how this normative framework has been articulated, for instance through the choice of targets and indicators (Fukuda-Parr, 2019; Saiz and Donald, 2017; Sengupta, 2019). In some ways this mirrors critiques of the MDGs. On the one hand, the MDGs represented an important evolution towards making poverty an over-arching objective of the international policy agenda, including a broader conception of deprivation encompassing more dimensions than income (Fukuda-Parr, 2011; Sumner and Melamed, 2010). At the same time, their implementation through the selection of targets and indicators hardly represented a substantive normative shift away from 'Washington Consensus' strategies of macroeconomic stabilization and economic liberalization (Fukuda-Parr, 2011). The SDGs, as noted, set a more ambitious and transformative approach, but this is not matched by selected targets and indicators. Fukuda-Parr (2019) shows how, in relation to SDG10, the process of selecting targets and indicators was purportedly technical, but in reality, highly political: the inclusion of inequality as a standalone goal came at the cost of compromises in the way the goal is conceptualized and measured.

Indicators have real power, especially in this form of 'governance by numbers': they define norms, effectively shape priorities, leverage the authority of organizations that issue the measurement framework. In recent common jargon: "what gets measured gets managed" (WEF, 2018). The way in which the problem is framed and the instruments through which it can be assessed are particularly crucial for a goal that risks being neglected, because it does not have a dedicated home in a set of institutions at national or international levels with a mandate to drive action, monitor

progress and establish accountability. Neglect is particularly likely also because of the profound changes that are required to reverse current trends (Nicolai et al, 2015).

Targets and indicators do not generally embrace a comprehensive need to tackle vertical inequalities at the top as well as at the bottom. The lead target (10.1 '*By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average*') essentially focuses on the bottom end of the distribution and reinterprets tackling inequality as promoting inclusive growth. This is in line with the approach taken by influential actors such as the World Bank whose focus on Goal 1 and 10 also revolves around 'shared prosperity' (WB, 2016). Moreover, despite suggestions of including the Palma ratio or the GINI as indicators (Doyle and Stiglitz, 2014; Fukuda-Parr, 2019), Goal 10 effectively lacks instruments to capture important dimensions of inequality, and this can undermine the important inclusion within SDG10 of issues such as fiscal policy (e.g. Target 10.4 '*Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality*'). More generally, targets and indicators focus on exclusion from socio-economic and political opportunities to escape poverty, rather than on the concentration of wealth and income at the top of the distribution or on the role played, for instance, by inequities in global institutions in relation to inequalities between and within countries. This lack of attention for the top end and the consequences of privilege can be traced in other SDGs, for instance in relation to health or education.

5. Opportunity- or luck-egalitarianism

Luck- or opportunity-egalitarian views (Dworkin, 1981; Cohen 1989; Roemer, 1998) incorporate a notion of responsibility within a theory of equality and distinguish between inequalities in outcomes attributable to individual responsibility and those that are not. In doing so, they propose an understanding of fairness which is in line with prevailing intuitions in society (Wolff et al, 2015) and support the idea that we do not have duties of justice towards those who can be held rightfully responsible for their situation. The background intuition of this position, then, is that inequality is made of heterogeneous components, some much more unfair, undesirable, and unnecessary than others. Some forms of inequality may be deemed necessary to provide people with incentives and some inequalities may be tolerated, e.g. because they result from differences in effort and talent. Meanwhile, inequalities in the opportunities available to people – in their basic life chances -is objectionable and deemed particularly unfair.

5.1 'World Bank' - Inequality of opportunities

The World Bank developed an approach to measure inequality which included the development of the Human Opportunity Index (de Barros et al. 2009; Ferreira and Gignoux, 2011; Brunori et al. 2013; Fleurbaey and Peragine 2009; Bourguignon et al, 2009). The approach rests on a notion of fairness whose theoretical foundation can

be found in luck- or opportunity-egalitarian views. The shift of focus from outcomes to opportunities hopes to facilitate political and policy consensus (de Barros et al, 2009). In particular, the approach applies John Roemer's conceptual framework which defines the outcome of interest as an "advantage" and divides the determinants of advantage into two groups: "efforts," which are subject to individual choice, and "circumstances," which are factors that lie outside the individual's control and responsibility (such as ethnicity, location of birth, gender, or family background). Based upon this idea, inequality of opportunity 'can be estimated by decomposing outcome inequality into a portion resulting from circumstances that lie beyond the individual's control, and a residual component that rewards choices made, effort put forth, luck, and talent' (de Barros et al, 2009, 15).

De Barros et al (2009) measure the level of inequality of opportunity observed in Latin America by first developing a Human Opportunity Index (HOI) to measure differences in opportunity among children. This recognizes that inequality of opportunity will exist as long as some children in a country do not have access to specific basic services that are critical for future advancement in life and as long as that access is influenced by circumstances. Access defines "opportunity," because children cannot be expected to make the effort needed to access these basic goods by themselves. Secondly, the approach estimates the share of current outcome inequality (income inequality, consumption inequality, and inequality in educational achievement) that can be explained by circumstances that are beyond the control of the individual (as the share of inequality that can be related to inequality in opportunity). This leads to describing the characteristics of the most-disadvantaged groups but also to estimating the 'opportunity gap', ranking all types (or circumstance groups), from least to most advantaged and creating an opportunity profile of the population.

The HOI summarizes in a composite indicator two elements: (i) how many opportunities are available, that is, the coverage rate of a basic services; and (ii) how equitably those opportunities are distributed, that is, whether the distribution of that coverage is related to exogenous circumstances. It can be used to track a country's progress toward the goal of providing all children equal access to these basic opportunities, simultaneously tracking both the overall coverage and the equity of their distribution. Five indicators cover what the HOI considers as basic services, grouped as housing condition and education indices: completing sixth grade on time, school enrolment at ages 10–14, and access to water, sanitation, and electricity². As inequality in basic opportunities interact with other differences in opportunities that arise throughout life (e.g. access tertiary education) the approach also measures the share of current outcomes (e.g. income, consumption, educational achievement) that can be attributed to inequality of opportunity.

Luck- or opportunity-egalitarian views are not uncontested. In fact, they contrast sharply with Rawls's own dismissal of desert considerations, including those based on

² The unique requirements of each country, or their level of development, may call for considering a different set of basic opportunities.

effort: he holds that these could not have any role in distributive justice, since undeserved factors have a major influence on all would-be desert bases, for instance because the capacity for effort is itself the result of natural and social contingencies (Rawls, 1971, 74). This is part of a large debate surrounding the distinction between choices and unchosen factors, how meaningful the assumed notion of free choice is, and how difficult it is to ascribe responsibilities for choices made under complex circumstances. There are also critiques that contrast luck-egalitarian notions of fairness with conceptions of social, or democratic, equality (Anderson, 1999). Nevertheless, this approach to equality of opportunity has made considerable advances in investigating the relation between inequalities of outcome and opportunities. For instance, Brunori et al. (2013) suggest that an important portion of income inequality cannot be attributed to differences in individual effort or responsibility, and see inequalities in income and opportunities as both endogenously determined (13). De Barros et al (2009) find that, by conservative estimates, between one-half and one-quarter of current inequality of consumption reflects inequality of opportunity. However, data availability bears on the extent of inequality of opportunity: lack of data on circumstance variables in empirical research may lead to underestimating it (UNDESA, 2020). Many important circumstances are also often ignored in the empirical literature and including them in the measurement leads to a very different picture – e.g. Hufe et al (2017) show how this is the case in the US and the UK. These considerations have important policy implications, since this approach qualifies inequality that is not explained by measurable circumstances as “fair” or legitimate.

6. Global and historical approaches to economic inequality

The growing debate surrounding economic inequality has coincided with greater access to historical evidence which paints a stark picture of rising within-country inequality in the latter part of the 20th Century in many countries (Atkinson et al, 2011). This research has attracted widespread interest through the influential work of economists such as Piketty (2014; 2020), Bourguignon (2015), Milanovic (2016). These views do not constitute a unified theoretical approach, and unlike the other approaches discussed, the focus of this research is primarily economic inequality. Nevertheless, this literature has been particularly influential for current debates around inequality and, in particular, has contributed to understanding between- and within-country trends, their causes, consequences and policies to tackle them. This has produced a more systemic understanding of the relationship between different forms of inequalities.

The central story that emerges from this literature shows that, on average, economic inequality within countries has been rising in the last few decades, especially in some rich countries, and economic inequality between countries has fallen. This is a reversal of trends that had seen rising inequality between countries in large part of the 20th and 19th centuries, while average inequality within countries was stagnant or even falling,

particularly during the period known as the Great Levelling in the rich countries. This research incorporates perspectives from both macroeconomics (e.g. on sources of growth within countries) and microeconomics (e.g. exploring how some households are better able to benefit from that growth). The well-known 'Elephant Graph', it is argued, shows how the middle and bottom income groups in richer countries have been the losers of this process (Milanovic, 2016; Bourguignon, 2015).

While generally consistent, interpretations of the data offered by different authors differ: for instance, Milanovic postulates the existence of 'Kuznets waves', in which inequality rises then falls; Piketty (2014) sees the Great Levelling as a unique "inequality shock" in a rising upward trajectory of inequality under capitalism. Differences exist also in the normative underpinning of their concerns with inequality, in the causal explanations given and the proposed solutions. For instance, Bourguignon (2015) largely stresses instrumental reasons to care about inequality: for instance, because negative consequences of inequality relate to crime, social tensions and political instability which, besides being problems in themselves, also generate economic inefficiencies – e.g., in the allocation of labour through criminal activities rather than in the public and private production of goods and services or because political instability has a negative effect on investment and growth. Beyond instrumental considerations, Piketty (2020) explicitly frames the discussion of inequality in terms of justice. Milanovic (2016) shows how the focus on global inequality offers different lenses to understand inequality of opportunity, compared to approaches explored above – for instance because the concept of global equality of opportunity would hardly include elements such as 'effort', which have played a critical role at the individual level, but also because it puts into question the nation-state centric approach inherited largely from Rawlsian egalitarianism. Where the citizenship-premium that some people enjoy is seen as unjust, social justice can be reframed in global and transnational terms (see also Piketty, 2020, 1022-34).

Key explanations of the causes of inequality trends can be subsumed under what Milanovic (2016) defines as 'TOP' forces – technological change, globalization/openness and policy. Notably, these are highly interdependent. Their role is not uncontested – see Ravallion (2017) in relation to the treatment of globalization in Bourguignon and Milanovic's work. Differences in understanding the role of policy reflect on relevant solutions. Policy can be seen as either altering the distribution of market incomes (e.g. requiring a more equal distribution of endowments) or the distribution of disposable incomes (e.g. using taxes and transfers). In relation to endowments, there is wide agreement that equalizing opportunities through more equitable education policies is crucial. This is also an area in which this body of work has contributed to the growing attention to wealth inequalities, its accumulation and transmission. Moreover, differences across countries in the inequality of disposable incomes reflect in part the differences in the redistributive efforts of states. Piketty (2014) and Bourguignon (2015) give more attention than Milanovic to redistributive policies using taxes and transfers.

The focus on monetary inequalities (e.g. wealth, income, wages) does not overlook their interconnectedness with other forms of inequality. In particular the latest work of Thomas Piketty (2020) looks at the historical evolution of inequality across a range of dimensions and thus focuses on the relationship between economic inequality and social, political and educational dimensions when articulating its analysis and proposals to achieve ‘fiscal, social and environmental justice’. Moreover, this work can be seen as the springboard for investigating inequality across other domains – e.g. Hsu (2015) has explored the role played by legal institutions and differential legal treatment in relation to these trends.

At the same time, authors such as Bourguignon (2015) have stressed how the multidimensionality of concepts such as inequality of opportunity makes it hard to measure and trends hard to identify. Especially in a global perspective, substantial differences across countries do not invite for generalization or the identification of general trends pointing to common structural factors. This does not deny the fact that inequality of opportunity precedes and partially explains the monetary forms of inequality or that the focus on opportunity leads to considering driving mechanism (e.g. geographical disparities). In general, however, it means that this approach focuses on the causes and consequences of economic inequality while highlighting the relationship between economic inequalities and other forms of inequality – political and educational inequalities in particular. On the one hand, educational inequalities have been consistently correlated with income and wealth inequalities and some educational systems, like in the US, appear to entrench economic and educational disparities. This dynamic not only generates unequal opportunities but has also long-term effects on the intergenerational transmission of wealth. On the other hand, economic and political inequality are mutually reinforcing (Bonica et al, 2013; Gaventa and Runciman, 2016, Barth et al, 2015; Brady et al, 2016). Bourguignon (2015) points to how the circular relationship between economic and political inequality leads to greater elitism and policy bias in favour of the better off, which in turn further entrenches economic disparities. The systemic approach adopted by these approaches also connects political and economic inequalities with dominant narratives related to social mobility, meritocracy and norms justifying inequality which shape public opinion and lead to low support for redistribution even amongst those who would benefit from it.

7. Power-based approaches

There is a vast array of approaches that focus on ‘power’, exploring how it is defined, who has it and how it is acquired and how it functions within society. While power is a key topic in sociology and political anthropology, there is no unifying theory, and power is an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Lukes 1974, 2005; Gaventa, 2006). As it is impossible to give justice to this array of views – see Gaventa (2003) for an overview of the literature – the focus here is on how this literature relates to understandings of inequality that are multi-dimensional and systemic. From this standpoint, it is essential

to see that power-based approaches are not solely concerned with the political sphere but can instead explore how power shapes social, cultural, economic and political relationships more broadly, as well as how legal institutions formalize, but are themselves shaped by, these relationships.

Classic political anthropology, for instance, has contributed to thinking about power as diffused in society, problematising the very idea of what power is and where it resides (Gledhill, 2000). This literature points to different dimensions that are often overlooked by focusing to formal processes of political participation and established institutions. Instead, an analysis of power focuses on the relationships among different actors and their dynamics across levels, including at the micro-level – for instance considering local level processes and mechanisms through which power is grounded in everyday life. Influential theories such as Bourdieu's (1994) or Foucault's (1982; 1998) have focused on everyday practices and relations, putting accent on the more or less invisible, indirect and symbolic character of power. This leads to an approach to power that is necessarily connected to a broader understanding of society and of the relationships and mechanisms underpinning social arrangements, recognizing that these are never neutral (Navarro, 2006).

7.1 Power Cube

The 'power cube' (Gaventa, 2006; Gaventa and Martorano, 2016; Gaventa, 2016; Gaventa and Runciman, 2006) is an approach that allows to visually map how actors stand in relation to each other, the forces shaping a certain situation, and it thus allows to look at possibilities for movement, mobilization and change.

The power cube is structured around three dimensions: levels, spaces and forms of power.

- Firstly, the power cube considers levels of decision-making – e.g. local, national and global and their interrelations.
- Secondly, the power cube explores how spaces of power are created, by whom and through what terms of engagement. It recognizes 1) closed spaces – spaces within which decisions are taken 'behind closed doors', with no broader consultation or involvement. Many civil society efforts focus on opening up such spaces through greater public involvement, transparency or accountability. 2) Invited spaces – spaces created in the effort to open close spaces (at least to some degree). These can be one-off forms of consultations, but they can also be regularized and institutionalized. 3) Claimed spaces – spaces less powerful actors claim from power holders or create for themselves (including outside of the institutionalised policy arena), e.g. through social movements and community associations.
- Thirdly, forms of power include 1) visible manifestations – e.g. observable, formalized structures and institutions of decision-making. 2) Hidden forms of power – e.g. ways of controlling who gets to influence the political agenda which may result in exclusionary barriers devaluing the concerns and representation

of other less powerful groups. 3) Invisible forms of power which shape the very way in which people think certain relations as acceptable and which constrain perception and beliefs about alternatives – e.g. sense of powerlessness, lack of awareness; in general, processes of socialisation, culture and ideology which perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal.

The interplay of these factors can show how powerful actors control the agenda including through invisible and hidden forms of power, and by influencing which spaces remain ‘closed’. On the other hand, it also allows to understand the ability of less powerful actors to build their awareness and action for change, ‘claiming’ spaces and challenging existing boundaries to create a real shift in power. This can start at local levels but also result from ‘delinking power and territory’ (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006) – e.g. as is the case where local campaigners first go to global bodies in order to put pressure on their national or local government. The power cube can also explain why creating new institutional arrangements will not necessarily result in greater inclusion: this depends on whether these arrangements remain shaped by hidden and invisible power relations (thus simply legitimizing the status quo, under the appearance of *de jure* transformation).

Through these dimensions, the power cube can illuminate the mutually reinforcing relationship between economic and political inequality already discussed above. Elites and businesses are bound to states through a myriad of social, professional and institutional relations which make policy bias more likely, while often remaining hidden: they can make resource allocation more likely to be guided by particular, as opposed to public, interests; at the global level, they can reinforce macroeconomic policies that stir countries’ development strategies and impose major limits on the scope for redistributive policy. At the local level, these groups may benefit from biased implementation and enforcement. Disadvantaged groups face economic, social and spatial barriers – e.g. by facing greater opportunity costs, or because of reduced capacity for collective action and mobilisation (Gaventa and Runciman, 2016; Gaventa and Martorano, 2016). At the same time, eroded public trust in government (e.g. due to the perception of regulatory capture, opaque political processes) and internalized acceptance of the status quo reduce subjective incentives to participation. Moreover, next to understanding why high economic inequality inhibits participation and entrenches political inequalities, the approach can also explain opposing forces: for instance, as new forms of collective action are created to challenge these inequalities (Gaventa, 2016) .

Overall, this view links political, economic, social, cultural and legal inequalities, as well as recognizing a key role played by knowledge inequalities. Knowledge here is not solely conceived as formal education, but more broadly as the forms of knowledge which are recognized and ultimately whose knowledge is valued, which influences social norms and policy priorities. The power cube approach to inequality is systemic because it is concerned with how these facets of inequality are shaped by power

relations at every level, from the global to the local and micro levels. It also invites to understand the dynamics between inequality, power and political action at different moments and in different settings to develop strategies across levels, forms and spaces of power – in order to challenge the *status quo* it is necessary to identify entry points and linkages across dimensions in specific contexts.

8. Social and relational equality approaches

Conceptions of social and relational equality (Anderson, 1999; 2010; Wolff, 2015; Scheffler, 2015; Fraser 1998; 2007) are at the forefront of current thinking around multidimensional inequalities. Their development can be seen as departing from the focus on resources that characterized egalitarian views inspired by Rawls. These views stress that we should be concerned with patterns of socialization, defining social relations, rather than merely patterns of distribution. Because these views conceive inequality as a fundamentally relational notion, they are concerned with economic inequalities because patterns of distributions are inextricably connected to relationships that fail to amount to those of a ‘society of equals’. They can result in, or be the result of, social inequalities, for example by being converted to social status and political power. Distributive inequalities reflect, reproduce and sometimes constitute social relations of domination and oppression. These views approach inequality multidimensionally because they espouse a broad conception of social justice akin to what Nancy Fraser (1998; 2007) defined as “parity of participation”: in order for this to be achieved, economic redistribution, social recognition and political representation should not be considered antithetical and mutually exclusive, but seen as rather defining different, entwined and reciprocally reinforcing dimensions of justice.

On the one hand, this means that inequalities of wealth and income are important determinants of social inequalities, but overcoming distributional inequalities is not sufficient to achieve social equality, because, for example, certain forms of exclusion are rooted in reasons other than the possession of material resources (e.g. gender, race or disability). These approaches are thus particularly well suited to understand what Anderson (2010) calls ‘categorical inequalities’, meaning systematic group inequalities. In this, Anderson in particular draws on Charles Tilly’s work on ‘durable inequalities’ (Tilly, 1998). Differences in social identity (race, gender, caste, class sexual orientation) arbitrarily mark some groups as superior to others in the opportunities they enjoy, the powers they command and the respect others owe them. Tilly’s work focused on how these categorical differences are institutionalized, resulting in durable inequalities. In his theory the mechanisms at work are those of exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Further, *emulation* (whereby certain arrangements are transplanted from one setting to another) and *adaptation* (whereby social organization develops in forms reflective of the dominant inequality structures) spread categorical inequalities to new domains, making them pervasive and systematic. Importantly, these need not to be intentional to generate persistent inequalities across a range of dimensions. From this, we can see that because some relational egalitarian approaches are interested in explaining the processes and

mechanisms underpinning social relations, they can produce a comprehensive theory of the causes shaping current relationships. For instance, Anderson (2010) proposes to expand on Tilly's theory by drawing on Iris Marion Young's typology of oppression.

By stressing the role of oppression, domination, in-group favouritism, exploitation or opportunity hoarding (among others), these approaches show that social relations do not just cause current economic or political disparities, but they are unjust in themselves. In turn, this means that, for instance, solely improving the distribution of resources may not be enough to achieve justice, if it still entails unequal social relationships. The notion of relational equality can thus be useful to explain the relationship of different dimensions of inequality but it can also provide the grounds, for instance, to apply the capability approach: it can guide the selection of capabilities a society has the obligation to equalize (Anderson, 1999). Namely, it allows one to say that people are entitled to whatever capabilities are necessary to enable them to avoid or escape oppressive social relationships, but also those necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state (316).

Finally, relational egalitarian lenses allow to appraise several aspects of policy. Satz (2007) and Anderson (2007) apply the notion of relational equality to education. This versatility can also be seen in the way Anderson (2010) discusses segregation and housing. Housing can be seen as a symbol, a physical indicator of the equality and quality (or lack) of citizenship in a society. Segregated neighbourhoods and associated disparities are thus a cause of social inequality, but they also reveal the systemic understanding of relationships and common life within a society. Democratic citizenship, based on relational equality, places value on integration because, within a diverse society, integration expands our networks, acting against the mechanisms of social closure that reinforce and reproduce inequalities. In turn this allows to identify with a larger, nationwide community and be a stepping stone for relations with people across the globe. Overall, social and relational equality approaches attempt to integrate, rather than dichotomise, demands for redistribution and recognition (a dichotomy which characterized the latter part of the 20th century – see Anderson, 1999; Fraser, 1997). They do so by showing the relationship between inequalities across domains, judging these unjust if they embody unjust social relations, are caused by unjust relations, or cause such unjust relations.

9. Dimensions, connections and applications

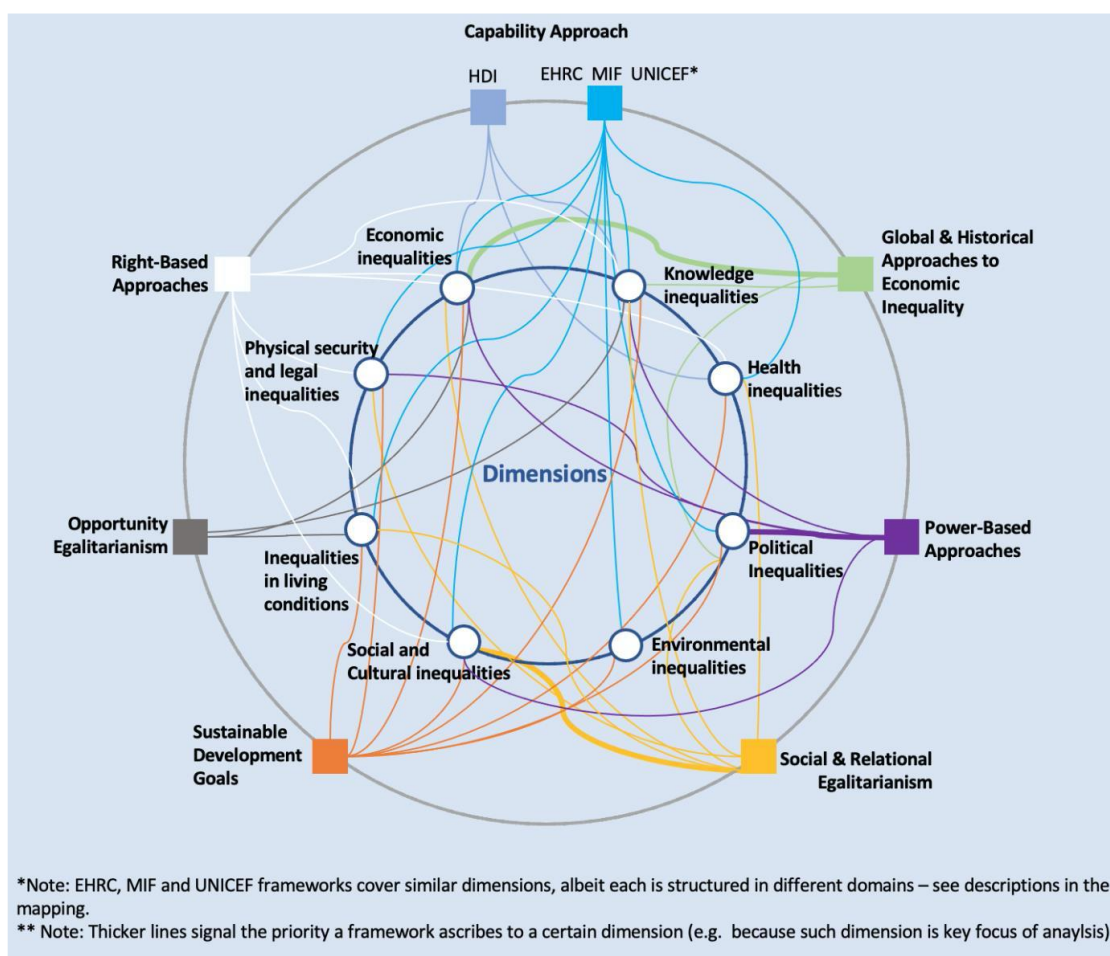
This section summarises briefly the dimensions the different approaches explored cover (Figure 1), highlighting their interconnections. It also points towards the way in which they have been applied, focusing on how this follows from the different forms of inequality each covers.

Some of these connections are particularly profound: for instance, the capability approach has reshaped the way in which development is conceived and tackled. Current understandings of Human Development are conceptually founded on the

capability approach (Alkire, 2005) and the *Human Development Reports* and other empirical studies have operationalized certain aspects of it. The influence of the capability approach can also be seen in the multidimensionality addressed by the MDGs (Fukuda-Parr, 2011) – the problems with MDGs discussed above, however, also require to acknowledge that the process through which theory is put into practice is a selective one, unlikely to be neutral and often distorted as ideas are embraced by institutions. Nevertheless, it is possible to see the influence of the capability approach in the broader interpretation of development the SDGs embody. As noted above, this shift can also be interpreted as a focus on ‘enhanced’ rather than ‘basic’ capabilities. This also means that these ideas have broad resonance, due to the SDGs role in shaping current debates and priorities across a wide range of domains.

Meanwhile, the EHRC framework demonstrates how the capability and human rights discourse can be integrated. This affinity between human rights and capability approaches has been influential through the work of several international agencies (Stewart, 2013; WB and OECD, 2013; Sen, 2005). In these regards, then, it is important to see how the flexibility of the capability approach allows for different ways of operationalizing it, each also reflecting a different range of dimensions of inequality. Approaches such as Stewart’s (2013) revolve around capabilities salient for women and children and it is through these lenses that her work informs UNICEF’s ‘Equity Approach’, which guides UNICEF’s interaction with partners, from civil society actors to international organisations. On the other hand, EHRC and MIF do not *per se* prioritise a set of capabilities, but rather develop frameworks that can be applied to understand priorities in a given context. The EHRC framework is used by the Commission to monitor equality and human rights in Britain, for instance for their regular reporting to Parliament. The Commission promotes its usage as an ‘agenda-setting’ tool for parliamentary committees, government departments and statutory bodies as well as for third-sector organisations, NGOs, charities and campaigning groups, city mayors and local authorities. Meanwhile, the MIF is structured so to support analysis of the drivers and characteristics of inequalities in different contexts: it is through the recognition of these that relevant policies are selected and prioritised. The MIF has already been piloted by Oxfam in Spain, Guatemala and Burkina Faso and it is the basis for an Inequality Policy Mix Toolkit for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The MIF, EHRC and UNICEF’s approaches fully endorse the multidimensionality that characterises an understanding of inequality focused on capabilities, even if they structure their domains differently. This contrasts with the HDI, which has long been an essential tool of the UN Development Programme. The HDI only encompasses three dimensions – economic, health and education inequalities. Moreover, in its aggregation process, it interprets these narrowly focusing on life expectancy, years of schooling, GNI per capita.

Figure 1: Approaches and dimensions



The map above attempts to show the breadth of dimensions each approach considers. The dimensions chosen represent broad categories subsuming a range of aspects which differ for each framework. The list provided is not meant to be exhaustive and for a more in-depth understanding of how each framework understands relevant dimensions please refer to the descriptions in the mapping

Economic inequalities
 including wealth, income, wages, earnings

Knowledge inequalities
 including formal education, skills and lifelong learning, and disparities in recognised sources of knowledge (whose knowledge counts, which types of knowledge are considered important)

Inequality in living conditions
 including housing, water, sanitation, access to transport and care

Health inequalities
 including nutrition, physical and mental health, access to services

Social and cultural inequalities
 including differences in status and discrimination based on identity groups (self-determined, socially constructed or both).

Political inequalities
 including participation in decision-making, voice and influence, association in the workplace and civil movements

Physical security and legal inequalities
 including access to justice and legal advice, secure living.

Environmental inequalities
 including quality of the local environment, exposure to environmental risks, spatial disparities (e.g. urban/rural)

Source: Authors' own data

Other approaches explicitly prioritise one form of inequality as their main focus of analysis. As already discussed, global and historical approaches focused on economic inequality have addressed the relationship between economic inequality and political and educational inequalities in particular, but it is mostly through their focus on wealth that they have contributed to make the topic of inequality central to the global discourse, and a major concern for donors and international organisations. This research has also led to the creation of the World Inequality Database (WID.world). It is important to note that by virtue of not being committed to a specific normative framework, this research is compatible with many of the other approaches addressed in this review. It can enrich the understanding of the empirical connections between different forms of inequality, their drivers (more on this later) and highlight between/within-country dynamics.

Power-based approaches can be seen as focusing on political inequalities, but these are interpreted broadly, and not solely as formal representation and participation in decision-making. They also include hidden and invisible channels to exercise voice and influence, as well attention for forms of mobilisation such as association in the workplace and civil movements. Moreover, as explained above, the political cannot be isolated from legal institutions nor from social and cultural relations, while affording an important role to knowledge inequalities. These go beyond formal education, to include disparities in whose knowledge counts and is recognized, as well as which types of knowledge are considered important. The Power Cube is an analytical tool that is compatible with several other approaches reviewed because, for instance, it can function as a tool to analyse power relations at different levels (e.g. illuminating informal spaces and forms of power beyond legal and formal rights-based considerations). It can also serve as a tool to identify action routes: for instance, to operationalize empowerment strategies or promote forms of democratic accountability. In this it is particularly compatible with any approach that makes authentic participation central to its concern (e.g. capabilities approaches, relational egalitarianism, SDGs). In 2009 the web resource *powercube.net* was launched and a broad array of development actors, including international and local NGOs, social movements, think tanks, and donors have since used the approach (Gaventa, 2019).

Both relational egalitarianism and opportunity/luck-egalitarianism have been at the forefront of academic discussion, from philosophy to social policy. Luck-egalitarianism, as seen above, has a prominent application in the development of the HOI. The HOI is used by the World Bank and its partners and by the Latin America and Caribbean Equity Lab. It focuses predominantly on economic inequalities, educational inequalities and inequalities in living conditions. Importantly, though, it is conceptually flexible to be applied to different contexts in evaluating the relevant barriers to opportunity. Moreover, it illuminates the relationship between opportunities and outcomes, the empirical assessment of which can prove useful also for other approaches which have a broader concern with other dimensions of inequality.

Finally, views focusing on social and relational equality have seen academic applications proliferating in recent years, and there are emerging discussions around applications of relational egalitarian ideas in public policy (ESID, 2018). Their influence can be found, for instance, in the 'Redistribution and Recognition' framework adopted by the Pathfinders' Grand Challenge on Inequality and Exclusion. As already noted, this approach can cover a broad range of dimensions of inequality and speak to several areas of policy through the lenses of the unequal social relationships which characterize its focus. While the approach does not develop a unitary systematic framework, social and cultural inequalities can be seen as a cornerstone to understand the connections among political, economic, physical security and legal inequalities, health and knowledge inequality. In fact, the approach largely attempts to show how focusing on unequal social relations allows to reconcile concerns for 'Recognition, Redistribution, Representation' (Fraser, 2004). In practice, the approach is highly compatible with other approaches, and different theorists have made the connections explicit: e.g. Elizabeth Anderson (1999) in regards to capabilities and Debra Satz (2009) and Nancy Fraser (2004, 2007) in regards to human rights.

Box 1. Systemic approaches to inequality and intersectionality

This review has focused on systemic approaches to understand and address inequalities, with different views covering a range of possible dimensions. This short note outlines how they also provide a different understanding of ‘the mutual - and intersecting - nature of these inequalities that reinforces the persistence of social exclusion over time’ (Kabeer, 2010).

Some of the approaches explored, for instance drawing on the capability approach, are particularly suited to understand intersecting inequalities due to their broad multidimensionality and focus on individual quality of life. The focus on horizontal inequalities, such as in Stewart’s (2013) work for UNICEF, is especially connected to appraising the way in which some individuals experience multiple disadvantages. More generally, there is growing research in how the capability approach can be combined with intersectionality theory (Balsera, 2015). This means, for instance within the MIF, that intersectionality can be used as a tool to further our understanding of conversion factors for individuals with multiple social identities. Importantly, in the MIF this relates to both advantage and disadvantage. The SDGs also offer a broad multidimensional framework that, by stressing the interconnectedness of its goals, makes an intersectional understanding of inequalities particularly relevant. Whether in practice SDGs do succeed in addressing these overlapping and reinforcing relationships is, as we have seen, more problematic. Moreover, power-based approaches are particularly close to intersectional perspectives (Oosterom and Scott-Villiers, 2016), inasmuch as, for instance, they conceive invisible forms of power as concealing overlapping exclusionary norms which are not independent from one another and aggravate and reinforce unequal relationships. Meanwhile, intersectional lenses allow to unpack these power relationships, revealing overlaps and critical junctures, thus supporting the identification of priorities for action.

Other approaches have seen a growing focus on intersectional inequality. For instance, intersectional perspectives have shaped legal frameworks in relation to rights and re-conceptualised discrimination. While historically, legal cases were brought on the basis of discrimination in relation to a single protected characteristic (e.g. race), in some situations it is now possible to bring legal challenges on the basis of dual discrimination. In addition, a number of UN committees increasingly have an intersectional focus - e.g. the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) committee and the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (Buxton-Namisnyk, 2014/15). However, difficulties remain in terms of deciding under which convention violations should be tried when ‘multiple forms of human rights abuses occurring simultaneously’ (Bond, 2003).

Not all approaches bear this relationship to intersectionality. For instance, it is harder to square luck-egalitarian views with a focus on intersectionality. The normative underpinning of these views distinguishes differences resulting from choices/effort and from circumstances/luck – including factors outside people control such as ethnicity, gender etc. From an intersectional perspective this can be problematic because it does not provide a tool to explore how overlapping circumstances reinforce and affect the persistence of advantage or disadvantage. Moreover, the very categorization of ‘circumstances’ and ‘luck’ may overlook structural aspects which determined resulting inequalities. On the other hand, some of the views exploring historical and global economic inequalities have explicitly lamented that a growing exclusive focus on horizontal inequalities risks obscuring dramatic trends in extreme vertical inequality and their consequences, while also overlooking the causal role vertical inequalities play in relation to horizontal inequalities (Milanovic, 2016).

Ideas of relational and social equality can be seen as contrasting both of these positions. On the one hand, they try to overcome the redistribution/recognition dichotomy and stress how vertical inequalities can cause but are also caused by unequal social relationships. On the other hand, relational egalitarian views also attempt to show how the persistence of inequalities associated with certain categories is rooted in the historical forms of oppression and exploitation that underpin them. In these respects a focus on intersectionality can identify complex structures of inequality and unveil multiple categories of oppression that tend to be overlaid.

10. Drivers

This section briefly outlines the different drivers of inequalities as they are understood through the lenses of the approaches reviewed. Figure 2 provides a simple visual representation. It must be noted that the general categories used to describe drivers may encompass a number of components, and different approaches may result as both ascribing importance to a driver which in fact they may interpret rather differently. For instance, two approaches may both identify policy failures as a driver of inequalities, but one may be referring to lack of progressive taxation and the other to lack of adequate social protection targeted specifically to children. While unlikely to be exhaustive, this outline aims at providing a clarification and at showing how the understanding of drivers is rooted in the conceptual approaches, their normative underpinnings and dimensions covered.

First it must be noted that some approaches' broad concern for multidimensional inequalities is reflected in a wide range of relevant drivers. For instance, the SDGs far-reaching scope and understanding of the deep connections among goals ascribes an important role to global drivers such as global governance, climate change or migration which other approaches may not consider. This does not mean overlooking within-country drivers, because these mediate and sometimes aggravate global ones. Notably, the broad multidimensionality of the capability approach also allows to consider a wide range of drivers. The MIF is the approach, among those considered, in which an analysis of drivers plays a central role. The MIF identifies 10 global drivers of inequality including, financialization, globalization, and dominant narratives which are considered to be beyond the scope of individual countries to address. However, the main contribution of the MIF is in relation to the identification of drivers of multidimensional inequality at the country-level where a number of main driver categories are identified within each one of its seven domains. This means that, for instance, the MIF allows a more granular analysis of the driver categories included in Figure 2 – e.g. instead of generically talking about social norms or access to services, the MIF would identify relevant drivers within its Life and Health domain or its Education and Learning domain etc.

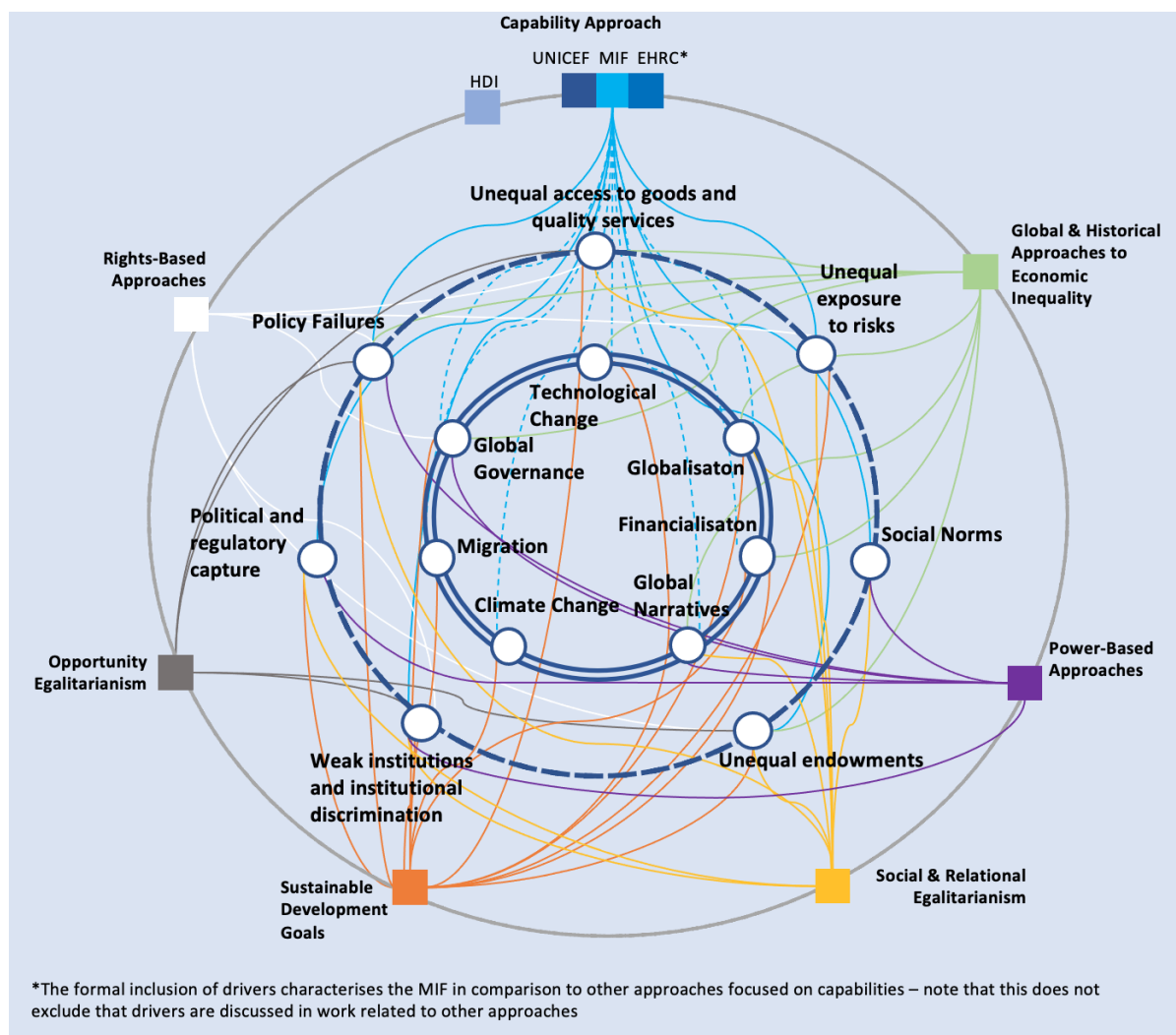
Other approaches focus on fewer drivers in line with their conceptual underpinnings. Power-based approaches, for instance, consider both global and within-country drivers through their attention for different levels, spaces and forms of power. Key drivers mirror power-based understandings of the dynamics between social relationships, legal and institutional arrangements and economic and political forces. Rights-based approaches, as discussed above, are characterized by relations of accountability between duty-holders and duty-bearers, and this entails a fundamentally structural understanding of the roots of inequality. In this sense, failures to fulfill these obligations are important drivers of inequality because, as the human rights literature has long argued in relation to poverty, the ways in which our economic and social interactions are structured determine these phenomena and their

persistence. In this perspective important drivers are weak or discriminatory institutions that fail to respect basic entitlements, failures related to unequal protection from risks, and failures in fulfilling obligation in the provision of goods and services. At the global level, this analysis further emphasizes failures of governance that hinder recognition and fulfilment of these basic rights. Nevertheless, it is also important to note the rich debates surrounding difficulties in ascribing causation and responsibilities for welfare rights, especially at the global level (Satz, 2005; Pogge, 2002).

As already noted above, global and historical approaches to economic inequality have contributed substantially to the empirical understanding of global drivers: e.g. by globalization and technological change (and their interaction). At the same time, these views have not overlooked the role of within-country policy – albeit different authors have focused on different aspects, for instance ascribing a greater or lesser role to fiscal policy. Dominant narratives have also recently received attention – for instance through the analysis of ‘ideology’ in Piketty (2020).

Meanwhile, views focused on relational equality are particularly concerned with factors that hinder the construction of a community of equals and thus identify as key drivers those that prevent people to function as equals within society. As noted, social and relational egalitarian lenses allow to appraise several dimensions of inequality and this is reflected in a broad range of drivers. While these are particularly within-country drivers, work around issues such as globalization has also brought scholars to focus on the global sphere (Fraser, 2007). Opportunity/luck egalitarian views have also largely focused on within-country context and in line with these views, key drivers are those that affect people’s opportunities within their society, particularly in relation to children – such as unequal endowments or access to goods and services, unequal exposure to risks which shape people circumstances as well as policies failing to mitigate these (e.g. failing to provide adequate social protection for children which in turn has repercussion on their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development). Circumstances might also disproportionately affect life chances through discriminatory institutions or through lack of administrative capabilities, legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms which hamper the equitable provision of services.

Figure 2: Approaches and drivers



Global drivers are located in the inner circle, while within-country drivers are in the middle circle. Global phenomena are shown as mediated in their impact on inequalities by within-country drivers. Continuous lines connect different approaches to drivers which are their main focus – this simplified map does not include potential further articulation of these views which may lead to encompass other drivers (e.g. views focused on within-country drivers whose approach may be compatible with accounting for the role of global drivers).

Unequal access to goods and quality services

Including for instance quality healthcare, education, water, sanitation, energy supplies, transport, legal services

Policy failures

Including lack of progressive fiscal and labour policies, lack of adequate social protection

Unequal exposure to risks

Including greater risks of exposure to accidents, disasters, environmental shocks

Unequal endowments

Including in the distribution and control over land, other productive and natural resources, appropriate new technology, financial services, human capital

Social norms

Including norms related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability which shape practices, attitudes and cultural expectations

Institutional discrimination

Including due lack of appropriate framework anti-discriminatory frameworks, but also due to weak institutions lacking capacity and funding to fulfill obligations

Political and regulatory capture

Including due to corruption, lack of accountability mechanisms, but also due to lack of support for inclusion and participation

Source: Authors' own data

11. Concluding remarks

This review outlined the key concepts and normative grounds of seven approaches which provide a systemic and multidimensional understanding of inequality. As the previous section has emphasised, this analysis has aimed at identifying their key conceptual tenets and show how these bear on the salient dimensions of inequality they consider and on the drivers of inequality they emphasise. In doing so, it is possible to appreciate how different approaches relate to one another, their synergies and overlaps as well as the tensions between some of them. Some aspects of inequality are central to the analysis of most approaches (e.g. economic or knowledge inequalities) but this review shows that different approaches offer different interpretations of these dimensions – for instance, some may consider mainly inequalities in formal education when it comes to knowledge inequalities, while others adopt a broader concern for recognised sources of knowledge and how knowledge is produced.

It must be noted that in the attempt of outlining the key concepts and mapping relationships with drivers and dimensions of inequality, this analysis does not pretend to be exhaustive. The applications chosen, in particular, are useful to flesh out key strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches but are by no means the only ones that can be considered. Moreover, within each of these approaches there are fertile and dynamic developments which may lead to revisit interpretations of relevant dimensions or to include dimensions which have not been emphasised here (say, for instance, around environmental inequalities). Nevertheless, this exercise is useful to provide a simple platform to understand the background underpinning these developments.

What this analysis has hoped to show is that there are several conceptual grounds to understand multidimensional inequality with bearing on the systemic drivers and salient dimensions they cover. The analysis has not attempted to weigh the different approaches against one another or make an argument for prioritising one approach over others. Nevertheless, it has emphasised that the concepts and normative grounds underpinning our understanding of inequality matter: they shape our concerns with different forms of inequality and their drivers and therefore affect the possible policy responses which are considered relevant. This is despite the fact that those who work on (or are concerned about) inequality do not often explicitly or consciously endorse a particular conceptual approach. Empirical research and policy responses nevertheless reveal underlying assumptions related to the most relevant dimensions of inequality and the drivers at work. Both policy and inequality research may suffer of overlooked inconsistencies or tensions which greater conceptual clarity may enable to identify and address. Lack of conceptual clarity and transparency bear on our ability to tackle inequality, as the limitations of different approaches risk to be inadequately addressed, interrelations are not appreciated and synergies are not exploited.

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