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Mario Biggeri , Renato Libanora , Stefano Mariani , Leonardo Menchini &
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Children Conceptualizing their Capabilities: Results of a Survey Conducted during the First Children's World Congress on Child Labour*

MARIO BIGGERI, RENATO LIBANORA, STEFANO MARIANI and LEONARDO MENCHINI

Mario Bigger is Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Development Economics, Renato Libanora is Lecturer in the Anthropology of Development and Stefano Mariani is a survey expert in the Department of Statistics, University of Florence, Italy, and Leonardo Menchini is a researcher at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

Abstract This paper reports the results of a research project that allowed children to define their capabilities as the basis of a bottom-up strategy for understanding the relevant dimensions of children's well-being. The subjects of this research were children participating in the 'Children's World Congress on Child Labour' held in Florence in May 2004, organized by the Global March against Child Labour and other associations. Children were invited to interact and express their opinions on the most relevant issues related to their childhood and adolescence. The paper has three main aims. The first is to propose and legitimate a view that considers children not simply as recipients of freedoms, but also as participants in the process of delineating a set of core capabilities. The second is to propose a methodological approach to the conceptualization of a list of relevant capabilities. The third is to identify a tentative list of relevant capabilities for children through a participatory bottom-up approach. One of the key findings of the research is that, among the capabilities conceptualized, education, love and care are primary in terms of relevance.

Key words: Children, capablities, well-being

Background

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and the United Nations (2002) document *A World Fit for Children* introduce a new ethical attitude towards children.[1] Children are no longer seen merely as recipients of services or beneficiaries of protective measures, but rather as subjects of rights and participants in actions affecting them. It is relevant to note that in this conceptual framework, recognizing children's rights means acknowledging human rights as a matter of entitlement and accepting the consummate responsibility to ensure their effective enjoyment (Santos Pais, 1999, p. 6).

We affirm that children[2] have and can define their capabilities and that the capability approach can be used as a conceptual framework and as a normative tool, in analyzing the well-being of children and child poverty and in planning social policies for human development. We also think that the relevance of a capability can change according to the age of human beings (Lloyd-Sherlock, 2002). However, there have been few studies on children's capabilities (for example, Klasen, 2001; Biggeri, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Di Tommaso, 2003). Therefore, the first of the three aims of this paper is linked to the importance of legitimizing the theoretical foundation for seeing the child as a subject having identifiable capabilities and considering children not simply as recipients of freedom, but as participants in the process of identifying a set of core capabilities.

The second aim of this paper is to propose a methodological approach to articulating a list of relevant capabilities. Like Martha Nussbaum, we think that an important starting point for operationalizing this approach is to work on a list of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003; Robeyns, 2003a).[3] However, as Sen (2005) and others argue, a central issue as regards the application of the capability approach is the open validation of a list (i.e. through public scrutiny and debate). The problem lies not with listing important capabilities, but with endorsing one predetermined list of capabilities (Sen, 2004). Indeed, for Sen, the selection of capabilities is the task of a democratic process (Robeyns, 2005). To our knowledge, few participatory studies have been carried out in which the subjects of the research themselves are asked what their capabilities are and how relevant these are for them as individuals and as a group of human beings. Therefore, in this research we propose a survey-based method that employs a questionnaire as a means of stimulating the process of thinking and participation.[4]

Although the CRC itself endorses the child's right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter affecting the child,[5] we are aware that all too often children are vulnerable to claims being made on and about them and which, however, they have

comparatively little scope to influence or dispute. In principle, ''there is no problem with the idea that (outsider) adults should be able to determine the best interest of (insider) children. In practice, however, there are often difficulties in the assumptions of superior understanding on the part of self-styled benefactors'' (White, 2002, p. 1101). Therefore, a final goal of the paper is to present a non-definitive list of relevant capabilities for children through a participatory bottom-up approach (i.e. by asking them to conceptualize a list).

The first 'Children's World Congress on Child Labour' (CWCCL) — held in Florence, Italy, 10–13 May 2004 — was considered an important occasion to verify theoretical hypotheses and to translate them into practice. Indeed, the Children's World Congress — organized by the Global March Against Child Labour (GMACL) and other grassroots associations — represents a major expression of the commitment of civil society to the effective protection of all children against work exploitation. It was one of the first ever international conferences where children are the main speakers, decision-makers and beneficiaries. Around 200 children — aged between 11 and 17 years old — representing different regions, countries and organizations, and coming from different cultures and backgrounds, assembled in Florence to interact, share their experiences, dreams and aspirations, and participated in different activities leading to the formation of Action Plans (GMACL, 2004).[6] Children brought a body of experience and knowledge that is fundamental for the understanding of child labor.

Child delegates were selected through consultation processes at the national and local levels.[7] Most of these delegates were former child laborers, who benefited from education and vocational training in rehabilitation centers or local civic organizations. Some children are still working to pay for their education fees.[8] Some children were selected by associations such as Trades Unions and Child Rights Organizations to represent them at the Congress.

Since there is a danger that adults might use children to promote their goals, it is important to establish clear principles and ground-rules that guide events which involve children's participation. We compared this conference organization process with the criteria reported by Gerison Lansdown (2001, pp. 30–39) and, in terms of these criteria, can confirm that CWCCL was 'owned' by the children and young people throughout the entire process. It can thus be considered as a conference run by and for children, with adult support.[9]

To let the children establish their priorities and better understand their capabilities, together with the organizers (the GMACL and the non-governmental organization [NGO] Mani Tese) we planned an *ad hoc* survey, a focus group discussion (FGD) and some case studies. A strongly collaborative environment was created between partners of the research project and the research group, avoiding any form of interference. Congress delegates were invited to identify a list of relevant capabilities for

children and to express their thoughts on the most important issues related to childhood and adolescence. In addition, we were interested in Sen's term "the process aspect of freedom," and in particular in the degree of autonomy in the process of choice (which is connected to agency freedom).

In developing this new bottom-up process, the children were encouraged to conceptualize children's capabilities. Our interest is focused on what children think they should be able to do and be. As we will see, in the course of the process the participant passes through a process of reflection that should help him/her to be able to separate himself/herself from their specific life experience.

The child delegates — although elected by other children through a democratic consultation process — were not expected to be considered representative of all the world's children.[10] However, we argue that this sample is both selective and of high quality, not only in virtue of having important characteristic of being delegates representing other children, but also because they acquired a high level of consciousness through their life experiences, especially through their participation in NGO activities. Indeed, both the research group and the conference organizers[11] believe that the child delegates who took part in the congress — considering their life experiences as former child laborers and activists — can understand better than adults a child's wishes concerning how their life should progress. As Lansdown put it, "there is a powerful body of evidence showing how prevailing attitudes towards children, based on the view that adults both know best and will act in their best interest, have failed many children. Many of these failures resulted from the refusal to listen to the voices of children themselves" (2001, p. 3).

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we present the main characteristics of the capability approach applied to children and we report a base list of relevant capabilities of children. In the third section we present the methodology used in the research outlining the principal features of the instruments used. The subsequent section reports the main results of the study, and in the final section our conclusions are presented.

The capability approach and children's capabilities

The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen and other authors in the past two decades, has provided the intellectual foundation for an alternative view of human development.[12] This approach has influenced, and continues to influence, the thought of development economists and has had a significant impact on the United Nations Development Programme's annual *Human Development Reports* and programming (Sen, 2000).[13] However, little attention has been given to the potential of this approach for understanding children's well-being.

Childhood and adolescence are the periods of human life during which interaction and receptiveness within the household and social

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environment reach their highest levels, and they are, in a certain sense, the foundation for the development of human beings with both personal and societal consequences.[14] The capabilities, the choices and the living conditions during this decisive phase of life crucially affect the children's position and capabilities as adults; as stated by Sen (1999b, p.4) ''… capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experience as children''.

The capability approach can provide an accurate theoretical under-pinning for the measurement of the well-being of children and poverty. In embracing this approach for children, we affirm that the child has capabilities that are specific to the phases of life. This also means, as stated by White (2002, pp. 1095–1096), that ''children should not simply be regarded as scale models of adults'' and, as Klasen (2001, p. 422) underlines, deficiencies in important capabilities during childhood not only reduce the well-being of those suffering from them, but may have larger societal implications.

Explicitly, what matters for the child's well-being are her/his functionings and capabilities. Through the capability approach we are interested in what children are effectively able to *do* and to *be*. Therefore, capabilities are children's potential functionings. Functionings are 'achievements' and 'outcomes.' As Ingrid Robeyns puts it, ''the difference between a functioning and a capability is similar to the difference between an achievement and the freedom to achieve something, or between an outcome and an opportunity. All capabilities together correspond to the overall freedom to lead the life that a person has reason to value'' (2003a, p. 63). The capability set is the opportunity set of achievable functionings. The human development of children can be regarded as 'an expansion of capabilities' or of 'positive freedoms' and, in this view, human beings are the ends of economic activity rather than merely its means (Sen, 1999a). Indeed, although household or individual resources, such as income and assets, or commodities are important for generating a child's functionings (as achievements) and capabilities (as freedom to achieve), they clearly have an instrumental function. The ability to transform resources and commodities into capabilities and functionings depends on *conversion factors*[15] (Robeyns, 2003b).

There are at least five important issues related to children's capabilities that are worth considering (Biggeri, 2004a) — although some of these observations are relevant to adults as well, they assume a central role in the child's development. The first observation concerns the fact that the capability of parents to function may directly or indirectly affect the capabilities of the child; that is, a sort of intergenerational transfer of capabilities (although not necessarily of the same ones) may exist. The child's capabilities are at least partially affected by the capability set and achieved functionings (as also by their means; i.e. assets, disposable income) of their parents, as an outcome of a cumulative path-dependent process that can involve different generations of human beings. For

instance, there is a link between maternal health and nutrition, and the birth-weight and health of the child, or between the mother's education and the child's education. Another example would be children entering into bonded labor because of parents' debts. In other words, this reflects the lack of available choices, and underlines Sen's notion of ''development as freedom'' (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2002).

Secondly, in the case of a child, the possibility of converting capabilities into functionings depends also on parents', guardians' and teachers' decisions implying that the child's conversion factors are subject to further 'constraints.' On one side, parents need to respect the child's desires and freedoms, but, on the other, they assist children to expand or acquire further capabilities even if the expansion or acquisition of the capability to function, in their own interest, is enforced as a duty. These two factors can conflict since the child is not a passive actor, especially as age increases.[16] However, although sometimes the constraints can be perceived by the child as negative or unjust, on the contrary they can also be enabling and supportive of child development. Therefore, while on the one hand children desire to be more autonomous, on the other they require parental care. This issue recalls the fact that in the expansion of each capability (opportunity) or of positive freedom, agency has a central role. We argue that the degree of autonomy of choice — as a measure of autonomous action and of empowerment in the context of choice (Comim, 2004) — can vary according to different ages especially regarding some capabilities. Considering this to be a central issue we decided to explore it in a FGD.

A third relevant aspect, present in adults as well, is connected to the relationship between different capabilities and functionings. Although each capability has an intrinsic value, it can be instrumental for other capabilities. For instance, the capability of being in good health is an end in itself, but also a means of realizing the capability to be educated. Therefore, one form of capability failure constrains realization of another capability and/or functioning, and vice versa.

The fourth aspect concerns the life cycle and the importance of age in defining the relevance of a capability. This implies that a child could have different relevant capabilities to those of adults and it suggests that the relevance of these capabilities can vary according to the age and even to gender. An analysis of the relevance of each capability during the life cycle could also reveal impediments to a 'decent life' from a gender perspective and is quite important for the timing of policy interventions. Childhood is complex and constituted by different sensitive periods and, as a consequence, careful timing of interventions for children's well-being is required (for examples, see Yaqub, 2002).

The final issue concerns the role of the child in the construction of future conversion factors. She/he can change her/his conversion factors and, through participation with others, can modify external conversion factors. From this point of view, children can be key resources for a better

future. The 'speaking-out' surveys conducted by UNICEF (and the congress organized at the United Nations) underline that children are frequently aware of their rights. According to children, leaders demonstrated lack of vision for children, and a disregard for the value of educating and protecting young people (UNICEF, 2003). Consequently we affirm both that the child can be at the same time the center of an intergenerational transfer of capabilities and — as a future parent — a vehicle of change.

We can therefore argue that there are plenty of reasons why policy-makers should place higher priority on children's capabilities. From the policy perspective the capability approach recognizes that human well-being is multidimensional.[17] People have different ideas of what constitutes a good life, and this is why, in principle, capability, and not achieved functioning, should be the appropriate political goal (Robeyns, 2005, pp. 101–102).[18] In other words, this approach addresses positively the fact of human diversity,[19] since the capability space, even if a list of relevant capabilities is selected, allows much flexibility within each context (e.g. country/region) as regards the way in which this will be implemented.

Children's capabilities

As already mentioned, one way to implement the capability approach is to define a list of central capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003), thereby extending the approach beyond a general framework.[20] There is a growing literature on the implementation of this approach in different contexts through the development of a list,[21] but at present only a few studies examine and propose a list of relevant capabilities for children. Di Tommaso (2003) uses Nussbaum's list of central capabilities and selects seven out of 10 capabilities by considering children as subjects of capabilities, while Biggeri (2003) proposes an *ad hoc* ''non definitive and open ended'' list of 14 children's capabilities selected following the method suggested by Robeyns (2003b).

In order to organize our research and initially classify children's conceptualization of capabilities, we chose the categories in Biggeri's list (2004b, pp. 6–9) as follows:

1. *Life and physical health* — being able to be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length.
2. *Love and care* — being able to love and be loved by those who care for us and being able to be protected.*
3. *Mental well-being* — being able to be mentally healthy.
4. *Bodily integrity and safety* — being able to be protected from violence of any sort.
5. *Social relations* — being able to enjoy social networks and to give and receive social support.*

6. *Participation* — being able to participate in public and social life and to have a fair share of influence and being able to receive objective information.*
7. *Education* — being able to be educated.
8. *Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation* — being able to be protected from economic and non-economic exploitation.*
9. *Shelter and environment* — being able to be sheltered and to live in a safe and pleasant environment.
10. *Leisure activities* — being able to engage in leisure activities.
11. *Respect* — being able to be respected and treated with dignity.
12. *Religion and identity* — being able to choose to live, or not to live, according to a religion and identity.*
13. *Time-autonomy* — being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one's time and undertake projects.*
14. *Mobility* — being able to be mobile.*

It is significant to note that some capabilities can be more 'relevant' as age increases. Indeed, the presence of an asterisk in this list indicates that, on the basis of previous studies (Lansdown, 2001) and field experience, up to a level that is appropriate given the age and maturity of the child, the relevance of a capability may vary (whether the child is in her/his 'early' childhood [0–5 years old], childhood [6–10 years old], 'early' adolescence [11–14 years old] or adolescence [15–17 years]). For instance, it is possible that children in different age groups may attach different importance to each of the aforementioned capabilities, while the complete list of capabilities may be fully only by the older category of children.

The method used for selecting the list of relevant capabilities is based on the four steps suggested by Robeyns (2003a, 2003b). In the first step, the researcher selects relevant capabilities for evaluating children's well-being and proposes a list. This list has its foundation in previous work on central capabilities (Nussbaum 2000, 2003;[22] Robeyns, 2003a[23]) and in literature about children's issues carried out mainly by UNICEF and UNESCO. In the second step, he justifies the selection of each capability and links them with the 42 substantive articles of the UN CRC (Biggeri, 2004b). Finally, as a third step, this list should include the uniqueness of each child and the generality of children as a group. The capabilities on the list, in the fourth step, should include all these elements and no dimension that is relevant for the analysis of children's well-being should be left out.

For the purposes of legitimacy of the list, it is important to recall the fact that while the CRC is, at present, ratified by 192 States, this cannot be considered enough. Indeed, "Here, there was no social movement preceding the granting of rights, indeed there was no participation by children at all in the formulation of the CRC'' (Lewis, 1998).

As already asserted in the background section and following Sen (2004), with this study we try to move a step forward by applying a participatory method through public reasoning and scrutiny. This is the main reason why we changed the method of selecting the capabilities and

we propose a participatory approach directly asking children to express their opinion in order to conceptualize a list of relevant capabilities. A bottom-up approach to the definition of the relevant set of capabilities would not impose any external, and hence debatable, value judgment on the analysis of well-being, and at the same time would provide a general framework for the operationalization of Sen's approach.

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the research. Along with the survey, a FGD, case studies and in-depth interviews were carried out.

The survey

The *ad hoc* survey was based on a core questionnaire designed by the research group. The questionnaire was divided into five different sections:

    i.) Personal Characteristics or Introductory Section.
    ii.) Education Section (formal/informal).
    iii.) Work Section.
    iv.) Capabilities Section (the core of the questionnaire).
    v.) General and Policy Section.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 20 items (or main questions), some of which are further divided into sub-questions (60 questions in total). As stated at the beginning of the questionnaire, all the information collected in the survey is strictly confidential and was used for statistical purposes only. A brief manual on the purpose of the research and on how to conduct the interviews was also prepared.

The questionnaire was conceived bearing in mind the importance of maintaining the children's full attention and participation and was to be completed in 25–45 minutes maximum (if the child wanted to answer all the sections, i.e. including the work section). In order to reduce the length of the questionnaire the part on children's capabilities and the degree of autonomy of choice according to the age of the child was eliminated and left to the FGD. We decided to validate (by 'public scrutiny', i.e. the Congress) the relevance of a capability if two conditions were satisfied: if at least one child delegate identified it without any interference; and if it was considered by the majority of child delegates as either important or very important.

A full census of the delegates was conducted. We were already aware of a possible 'risk' with the children's participation and therefore followed existing suggestions for child-oriented research (Boyden, 1997; ILO-UNICEF, 2000; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Lansdown, 2001, UNICEF, 2002; RWG-CL, 2003; Laws and Mann, 2004). "In public meetings children may be treated as window dressing, tokens of child participation; they may be

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treated as though they are representative of their peers when they are not; adolescents may be considered to speak for young children when they are in fact closer to adulthood'' (UNICEF, 2002, p. 56). Furthermore, from the start we were also aware that children between 6 and 10 years old were not represented physically and that young children 11–14 years old were under-represented. For this reason the age issue was not considered in the analysis of the questionnaire, while this aspect was raised in the FGD.

Another central issue is that perception-based statistics, as opposed to normatively derived objective measures, may have their own problems and complexities (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2001). There could therefore be some problems related to the fact that choices may not reflect real desires, the so-called 'deformed desire' problem. These can be expressed in what Sen refers to as 'valuation neglect', or what Jon Elster (1982) calls 'adaptive preference formation'. Both human perceptions and desires are influenced by personal, cultural and social history,[24] by the present environment, by personal expectations about the future and by personal attitudes towards interaction (e.g. shame).

The participatory approach to the definition of a set of capabilities must therefore be a process that should be conductive to the reflective reasoning around individual preferences and that should ideally detach them from the constraints of the adaptation to personal experience. First of all, the child is not aware of capability as a concept nor about the way we decided to categorize capabilities. Thus, we let children establish which capabilities are relevant for themselves without any interference or suggestions. Then, throughout the administration of the questionnaire, an active process of reflection was aimed at helping the child to conceptualize children's capabilities, and separating expressed preferences from her/his own life experience.

The questionnaire, as well as the validity of the manual, were tested. The pilot tests — which turned out to be fundamental — were conducted at the end of April 2004 both in Italy and in Nepal, and gave very important feed back. The reactions and interactions of the children helped us to prepare a more child-friendly questionnaire and at the same time to add questions they may judge important and which were not initially considered.

We then prepared a one-day workshop for training the interviewers.[25] The interviews were scheduled between 9 and 13 May 2004 according to the conference timing (in coordination with the organizers). They were conducted directly with the children and with the help of interpreters only if needed.[26]

The FGD and case studies

A FGD involved child delegates from South Asian countries. The discussions focused first of all on the influence of the age dimension on the relevance of the capabilities (which emerged throughout the first

survey) and on the degree of autonomy of choice regarding each of them according to the age. The second topic of discussion focused on the definitions of child activities such as child work, child labor and other non-economic activities in which children engaged. There was no need for the preparation of the FGD since the children were fully involved in the topics. The FGD was in fact held at the end of the congress after three days of intense activities. The methodology used was based on a structured discussion and on a game (Boyden, 1997; ILO-UNICEF, 2000; RWG-CL, 2003; Laws and Mann, 2004).

More than 10 case studies were carried out through in-depth interviews so as to capture sensitive issues — such as, among others, age, gender and child labor issues. Case studies included male and female children. These can be found in the report we prepared for the GMACL (Menchini, 2006). In-depth interviews were conducted with the CWCCL organizers in order to understand their thoughts on definitions for children's activities (child work, child labor and other child non-economic activities). FGDs, case studies and interviews were extremely useful. They brought a body of experience and knowledge that has been fundamental for our understanding of child issues (especially child labor) and ensured that the conference was owned by the children with the adults having the role of facilitators.

Children conceptualizing their capabilities

In this section we present the main results of the research. We focus on the core of the questionnaire, the capabilities section, and on the relationship between age and capabilities in the FGD.[27]

Survey results: children conceptualizing their capabilities

All the child delegates were interviewed.[28] The main characteristics of the child delegates are reported in Table 1. As already mentioned, the younger children accounted for over one-third of all the delegates. Female delegates were 59% of the total. The accounted share of delegates coming from developing countries was slightly higher than that of developed countries.

The core section on capabilities consists of four main questions. The first question of the section is an open one and is fundamental since children are asked to indicate (Q12): 'What are the most important opportunities a child should have during her/his life?'[29]

The child, at this point of the interview, is not aware of capability as a concept or about the list of child capabilities. This question, as already mentioned, thus allows the researcher to identify which capabilities are considered as relevant by the children without any interference or suggestions. If the child mentions a new capability (that is not included in the codified set) it is then recorded; if she/he mentions one of those in

Table 1. Summary description of the congress delegates

Delegates' characteristics	Percentage
Age	
11–14 years	34.6
15–17 years	65.4
Total	100.0
Sex	
Female	58.7
Male	41.3
Total	100.0
Country	
Developed	47.1
Developing	52.9
Total	100.0
Ever worked	
No	43.3
Yes	56.7
Total	100.0

Source: Calculations based on survey results.

the list, it is marked (in cases where interpretation was difficult, the interviewer added it as a 'new' capability, which is inserted and integrated in the following questions regarding capabilities). In this way the child can interact and participate directly in the formulation of the questionnaire.

All the capabilities on the list were indicated by at least three children (Table 2). This is a very important result as regards legitimacy. Some capabilities were added by the interviewers according to the replies of the child delegates but all of them were in any case reflected in those already codified.[30]

It is important to highlight that some capabilities were more frequently identified than others (i.e. Education, Love and care, Leisure activities, and Life and physical health). We would like to point out the relevance of education according to their responses: children are aware of the importance of this capability for their future for its intrinsic value and, as also reported in case studies (Menchini, 2006), as instrumentally valuable for their present and future well-being. Columns 2 and 3 report the results per age category. It may be noticed that, according to the age group of the respondent (11–14 and 15–17 years), the share of child delegates in the sub-group that identified the capability can vary; for instance, for the capability 'Participation/information' the share of children reporting its relevance is higher in the older children, while the capability 'Love and care' and 'Leisure' is higher for the younger ones. In this context it is important to mention that Mobility is identified only by children of the older age group. Children can be grouped into different categories according to gender, their place of origin (developing and developed countries) and their past experience, or lack of experience, as workers.

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Table 2. Percentage of child delegates who identified the capabilities

Relevant capabilities	Total	Age group		Sex		Country of origin		Ever worked	
		11–14 years	15–17 years	Female	Male	Developed	Developing	No	Yes
1. Life and physical health	29.8	22.2	33.8	31.1	27.9	36.7	23.6	37.8	23.7
2. Love and care	48.1	58.3	42.6	52.5	41.9	53.1	43.6	53.3	44.1
3. Mental well-being	5.8	11.1	2.9	4.9	7.0	6.1	5.5	6.7	5.1
4. Bodily integrity and safety	17.3	13.9	19.1	16.4	18.6	28.6	7.3	24.4	11.9
5. Social relations	8.7	8.3	8.8	9.8	7.0	8.2	9.1	13.3	5.1
6. Participation/information	13.5	5.6	17.6	18.0	7.0	14.3	12.7	15.6	11.9
7. Education	89.4	94.4	86.8	88.5	90.7	89.8	89.1	88.9	89.8
8. Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation	11.5	8.3	13.2	8.2	16.3	16.3	7.3	8.9	13.6
9. Shelter and environment	13.5	11.1	14.7	14.8	11.6	16.3	10.9	15.6	11.9
10. Leisure activities	34.6	47.2	27.9	37.7	30.2	30.6	38.2	37.8	32.2
11. Respect	12.5	13.9	11.8	11.5	14.0	10.2	14.5	6.7	16.9
12. Religion and identity	3.8	2.8	4.4	3.3	4.7	4.1	3.6	2.2	5.1
13. Time autonomy and undertake projects	11.5	8.3	13.2	16.4	4.7	14.3	9.1	13.3	10.2
14. Mobility	3.8	0.0	5.9	3.3	4.7	4.1	3.6	2.2	5.1

Question: 'What are the most important opportunities a child should have during his/her life?'
Note for the interviewer: 'Do not read out; multiple answers allowed, add capabilities not present in the list of 14 to the end.'
Source: Calculations based on survey results.

The results reported in Table 2 (column 4 onwards) show that all groups conceptualized the same categories of capabilities, suggesting that, in our sample, children's points of view across cultural and economic divides do not seem to differ.

In order to enable children to be as detached from their life experience as possible, we inserted the question (Q13): 'How important/unimportant has this opportunity been in your life?' Thus, the child had to concentrate on her/his own experience. This question was conceived as functional to the following central question regarding children as a group. The interviewer had to read Q13 for one capability and then, after the answer and referring to the same capability, ask another question (Q14): 'In your opinion how important/unimportant is this opportunity for children during their life?' Children had to choose if, in their opinion, this opportunity/capability was unimportant, had little importance, was important or very important for children in general.[31]

As mentioned in the methodology section, we decided *a priori* that a capability is relevant if at least one child delegate identifies it (Q12) and if it is considered by the majority as important or very important. Table 3 shows that all the capabilities were not just identified and conceptualized

(Table 2), but all of them were considered important or very important by a large majority of the child delegates. Furthermore, the results obtained by dividing the delegates into groups, by age, gender, type of country of origin (developed-developing) and working status, validate the list of relevant capabilities presented. The children in each sub-category identified all the 14 capabilities (except age for Mobility, as mentioned before) (Table 2), and for more than 75% cent of the answers these were important or very important (Table 3, column 5 onwards). This seems to reinforce the result that, irrespective of their specific background, among the children in our sample there is a common view on core capabilities.[32]

The final question of the section was conceived of in order to select the most relevant capabilities without formulating a complete ordering of all of them (Q15): 'Among the aspects we discussed could you tell me which are the three most important opportunities a child should have during her/his life?' Among them the first five mentioned are Education, Love and care, Life and physical health, Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation, and Leisure (Table 4). Education, Love and care and Life and physical health clearly stand out among the capabilities. This confirms the finding of Table 2. Mobility is never mentioned as one of the three most important capabilities, but clearly this does not mean that it is not a relevant capability for a child's well-being.

The results obtained by dividing the children into groups — as specified in Tables 2 and 3 — indicate the same capabilities, with small differences according to the group. For instance, the capability to participate and to be informed is selected more by older children and females, while shelter/environment is favored by the male group.

Focus group discussion: age, capabilities and the degree of autonomy of choice

The FGD[33] was structured into two parts strongly related to each other. The first part was on age, capabilities and the degree of autonomy of choice, and the second on the definition of child activities according to their impact on the child's well-being. Here we concentrate on the first part.

Eight children from South Asian countries (three from Nepal, two from Pakistan and three from India) were invited to participate in the FGD. The group was mixed and composed of males and females. All the children (one aged 13 years, one aged 14, two aged 15 and four aged 16 years) were quite mature, could understand each other and all understood at least a sufficient level of English (five accompanying persons assisted in the FGD as well, to help in translation if needed; i.e. not as participants).

All except one of the child delegates participating in the FGD were former child laborers who had new opportunities as a result of education and vocational training provided by rehabilitation centers or by the local civic organizations. Some of these children are still working to sustain their

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Table 3. Results of core question on capabilities (%): relevance

Relevant capabilities	Total					Important or very important								
	Unimportant	Low importance	Important	Very important	No answer	Total	Age group		Sex		Country of origin		Ever worked	
							11–14 years	15–17 years	Female	Male	Developed	Developing	No	Yes
1. Life and physical health	1.0	0.0	21.2	76.0	1.9	97.1	97.2	97.0	96.7	97.7	100.0	94.5	97.8	96.6
2. Love and care	1.0	0.0	13.5	83.7	1.9	97.1	97.3	97.0	96.7	97.7	100.0	94.5	97.7	96.7
3. Mental well-being	0.0	1.0	14.4	82.7	1.9	97.1	97.2	97.1	98.4	95.3	98.0	96.3	97.8	96.6
4. Bodily integrity and safety	1.9	2.9	20.2	73.1	1.9	93.3	97.2	91.1	95.1	90.7	95.9	90.9	95.6	91.5
5. Social relations	0.0	4.8	51.0	41.3	2.9	92.3	91.6	92.6	91.8	93.1	89.8	94.5	91.1	93.3
6. Participation/information	0.0	0.0	16.3	81.7	1.9	98.1	97.2	98.5	98.3	97.6	100.0	96.4	97.8	98.3
7. Education	0.0	1.0	5.8	92.3	1.0	98.1	97.2	98.5	96.7	100.0	100.0	96.3	100.0	96.6
8. Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation	0.0	0.0	11.5	87.5	1.0	99.0	97.2	100.0	98.3	100.0	100.0	98.1	100.0	98.4
9. Shelter and environment	0.0	2.9	26.9	68.3	1.9	95.2	91.7	97.0	93.5	97.7	98.0	92.8	95.5	94.9
10. Leisure activities	0.0	1.0	26.9	71.2	1.0	98.1	97.3	98.5	98.4	97.7	98.0	98.2	100.0	96.6
11. Respect	0.0	2.9	15.4	79.8	1.9	95.2	94.4	95.6	98.3	90.7	95.9	94.6	95.6	95.0
12. Religion and identity	1.0	13.5	49.0	32.7	3.8	81.7	77.8	83.8	81.9	81.4	75.5	87.3	77.8	84.8
13. Time autonomy and undertake projects	1.0	2.9	26.9	68.3	1.0	95.2	91.7	97.0	96.7	93.1	97.9	92.8	97.7	93.2
14. Mobility	0.0	7.7	35.6	52.9	3.8	88.5	86.1	89.7	90.2	86.1	95.9	81.8	95.6	83.0

Question: 'In your opinion how important/unimportant is … for children during their life?'
Source: Calculations based on survey results.

Table 4. Results of core question on capabilities (%): the three most relevant capabilities

Relevant capabilities	Total	Age group		Sex		Country of origin		Ever worked	
		11–14 years	15–17 years	Female	Male	Developed	Developing	No	Yes
1. Life and physical health	34.6	33.3	35.3	32.8	37.2	38.8	30.9	37.8	32.2
2. Love and care	51.9	52.8	51.5	50.8	53.5	59.2	45.5	51.1	52.5
3. Mental well-being	9.6	11.1	8.8	14.8	2.3	18.4	1.8	13.3	6.8
4. Bodily integrity and safety	5.8	5.6	5.9	3.3	9.3	8.2	3.6	8.9	3.4
5. Social relations	3.8	5.6	2.9	3.3	4.7	4.1	3.6	2.2	5.1
6. Participation/information	18.3	8.3	23.5	23.0	11.6	22.4	14.5	15.6	20.3
7. Education	73.1	69.4	75.0	77.0	67.4	65.3	80.0	66.7	78.0
8. Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation	25.0	36.1	19.1	24.6	25.6	26.5	23.6	35.6	16.9
9. Shelter and environment	13.5	11.1	14.7	6.6	23.3	18.4	9.1	15.6	11.9
10. Leisure activities	24.0	33.3	19.1	21.3	27.9	8.2	38.2	17.8	28.8
11. Respect	11.5	13.9	10.3	14.8	7.0	10.2	12.7	13.3	10.2
12. Religion and identity	2.9	0.0	4.4	3.3	2.3	2.0	3.6	2.2	3.4
13. Time autonomy and undertake projects	9.6	11.1	8.8	6.6	14.0	10.2	9.1	11.1	8.5
14. Mobility	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Question: 'Among the aspects we discussed could you tell me which are the three most important opportunities a child should have during his/her life?'
Source: Calculations based on survey results.

education fees. Clearly they did not need any introduction to the subject of child well-being and it is important to note that all of them were interviewed for the questionnaire, both in their countries as well as during the three full days of the congress, where they had meetings on matters related to the issues of the FGD.

First, the children agreed on the age and capability categories. Second, they discussed the relevance of each capability according to the age categories and, then according to the degree of autonomy of choice. They reached a common view and attributed a final assessment of the capability and related autonomy in the process of choice according to the age of the child. Table 5 reports the main results of the discussion.

Although the results of the FGD have to be treated with caution, they complement the results of the survey quite well. The first observation is that the level of relevance of the capability can vary according to age. The same is observed for the related autonomy issue. This result emphasizes the point that each capability on the list is relevant for all the children but, for some capabilities, the level of relevance varies according to age. We highlight, for instance, that the level of relevance of some capabilities (such as Time autonomy and Mobility) increases with the higher age of the child. Most of the other capabilities move in the opposite direction.

The categories used for analysis of the level of autonomy are: no autonomy, little autonomy and partial or full autonomy. Autonomy of choice increases as age rises. As expected, the younger the age category, the less degree of freedom in choice the child has. It also emerges that for younger children (between 0 and 5 years old) some autonomy related to a capability is not present at all and children have no degree of autonomy in the process of choice. This is the case for capabilities such as Religion and identity, Time autonomy and Mobility. For younger children, apart from Leisure activities, the level degree of autonomy is very low, ranging from no autonomy (for those capabilities mentioned above) to little autonomy (for the rest of capabilities).

Some remarks made by the children during the FGD highlight the point that a further division could be useful for the younger age category (0–5 years). Clearly childhood is a period of extraordinary and rapid growth and development, in which cognitive, physical, social, emotional and moral capacities evolve very fast (Lansdown, 2005, p. xiii). Therefore, the relevance of the capabilities varies more dramatically than during adult life.

Another important issue that emerged in the second part of the FGD is the presence of paid work as a capability, but only for older children (aged from 15 to 17 years). This issue was introduced by one female child during the FGD debate and interaction, but not appreciated by all the participants in the FGD. This is a relevant finding since 'paid work' in Nussbaum (2000, 2003) and in Robeyns (2003a, 2003b) is an adult capability. In other words this confirms not only that the relevance of some capabilities varies according to age, but that some capabilities are age specific.

Considering that both human perceptions and desires are probably influenced by personal and social history, by the present environment and by personal expectations about the future, the question — that we cannot answer fully here[34] — is: 'Would paid work have emerged as a valued capability with other children from a different background?'

The answer, according to the results of the survey, is 'no'. Indeed, none of the child delegates mentioned or conceptualized work as an answer to the key question (Q12): 'What are the most important opportunities a child should have during her/his life?' So ability to work is not conceptualized as a relevant capability by children. Nonetheless, during FGD and case studies, some of the participants expressed the view that they were also aware of the 'importance' that child work can have — in the case of need — to contribute to and to sustain the household economy. A central point in their responses is that they recognize that in an 'ideal' situation, without constraints and interferences, working during childhood and adolescence is unacceptable, at least for children under 15 years of age.

Table 5. FGD results on age, capabilities and degree of autonomy of choice

Relevant capabilities	Age group			
	0–5 years	6–10 years	11–14 years	15–17 years
1. Life and physical health	+++	++++	++++	++++
2. Love and care	++++	++++	++++	+++/
3. Mental well-being	++++	++++	++++	++++
4. Bodily integrity and safety	++++	++++	++++	+++/
5. Social relations	++++	++++	++++	++++
6. Participation/information	++*	+++	+++/	+++/
7. Education	++*	+++/	+++/	+++/
8. Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation	++++	++++	++++	++++
9. Shelter and environment	++++	++++	++++	++++
10. Leisure activities	++++	++++	++++	+++
11. Respect	+++	+++	++++	++++
12. Religion and identity	++	+++	++++	++++
13. Time autonomy and undertake projects	+	+++	++++	++++
14. Mobility	+	+	++	++++
Paid work[a]	−	−	−	+

Capability: −, no relevance (not a capability); +, little relevance; ++ and +++, relevant; +++/ and ++++, very relevant.

Degree of autonomy in the process of choice: dark shading, no autonomy; light shading, little autonomy; no shading, from partial to full autonomy.

[a]Added during the FGD by children exclusively for the older category

*For children aged 4 and 5 years.

[a]Paid work: being able to work in the labour market.

Source: The authors' elaboration on FGD results.

Conclusions

The main results of the research are connected to the methodology applied, which uses a survey-based technique to stimulate the child, through a participatory process of reflection, to conceptualize her/his relevant capabilities.

The paper emphasizes that children can conceptualize capabilities, some of which are age specific. The research identifies a (non-definitive) list of relevant capabilities, and, through the FGD, analyzes the different levels of relevance of capabilities according to the age of the child. It also emerged from the FGD that the degree of autonomy in the process of choice also varies according to age. Education, Love and care, Life and physical health and Leisure are foremost among the capabilities conceptualized by children. In particular, when interviewed during thequestionnaire, the case studies and the FGD, children had clearly in mindthe importance of education for its intrinsic and instrumental value regarding other capabilities both at present and for their future.

The capability approach *per se* is a powerful tool for understanding a child's well-being since we are forced to think about the complexities that characterize a child's life. The capability approach — as an opportunity-based theory and as a general normative framework for the evaluation of individual and social well-being — can provide an accurate theoretical underpinning for the analysis of a child's well-being and child poverty, and to examine gender issues. Indeed, we believe that the capability approach could become the theoretical base for the measurement of a child's well-being (both at micro and macro levels; e.g. by developing a Human Development Index for children), the definition and measurement of child poverty, the definition of children's activities (e.g. child labor, children's non-economic activities) and for the design of social policies for children's human development.

For instance, according to our results the capability approach may conflict with the definitions of child labor and child work, and calls for policy-makers to be aware of the relevance of non-economic activities (e.g. household chores) and their effect on children's capabilities. The current definitions (United Nations, UNICEF, World Bank, International Labour Office) and categories used in the literature are problematic in terms of coherence and are inadequate for the analysis of child work (especially from a gender perspective) and of a child's well-being (Biggeri, 2003).

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The foundation of almost all analyses of child issues are the UN CRC and the two International Labour Office conventions on the 'Minimum Age' (number 138, 1973) and on the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour' (number 182, 1999).
2. Age — measured by the number of completed years at last birthday — is the parameter that international instruments generally use to define a child: ''A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'' (article 1 of the UN CRC; Detrick, 1999).
3. Nussbaum has developed her list drawing on 'first principles' based initially on Aristotle's philosophy (Qizilbash, 1998) and, later, on a form of 'political liberalism' that involved 'years of cross cultural discussions' (Nussbaum 2000, 2003). The change of approach has not much altered her initial list (Deneulin, 2002). It is important to note that Nussbaum's list is intentionally broadly universal and it is intended to reflect common human values and experiences. She also has stressed that her list could be made more specific by the local people (Clark, 2003).
4. For instance, Clark (2003) uses a questionnaire method based on a survey in South Africa to understand the concepts and the perceptions of human well-being. See also Alkire (2002).

5. Article 12 of the UN CRC is a milestone for the advocacy of children's participation. ''There is no lower age limit imposed on the exercise of the right to participate. It extends therefore to any child who has a view on a matter of concern to them'' (Lansdown, 2001, p. 2). Indeed, there are many issues that very small children are capable of understanding and to which they can contribute thoughtful opinions (Lansdown, 2001).

6. Children from all continents participated in discussions and activities to formulate proposals with a view to ending child labor. Preparations and the selection of children took place in different countries over a one-year period. They selected their own representatives for the Florence conference. These representatives brought National Action Plans to the event. These plans were created by the children participating in the various national activities supported by Global March partners, national and regional coordinators, together with the Trade Unions, teachers' organizations and child rights' groups. Therefore, most of these children are advocates of child rights in their local communities and have gained a wealth of experience and leadership skills in their struggle against the exploitation of children (Cutillo, 2004; GMACL, 2004). For further details see www.globalmarch.org.

7. As reported by GMACL (2004), the participants were chosen, with a balance of girls and boys aged between 10 and 17 years, by the children themselves through a fair and democratic selection process during national and regional consultations intended to avoid any kind of discrimination. A common feature of the participants was involvement in the cause of ending child labor and the promotion of universal and qualitative education, and the awareness of the rights of the child. For further details on the selection process and suggested criteria for child participants see www.globalmarch.org.

8. For the definition of child labor and child work see International Labour Office (2003).

9. For other recent meetings and conferences with such participation, see Lansdown (2001, pp. 39–46).

10. This characteristic (non-representativeness) is common to qualitative and participatory research, but it does not reduce the relevance of the results. Furthermore, as Lansdown emphasizes ''Children can rarely be formally representative but this does not invalidate their contribution, provided they make no claim to speak for all children'' (2001, p. 17).

11. The organizers were, and are, confident that children, ''more than anyone else, are concerned with the present situation. They have first-hand knowledge of the suffering that is brought by child labor. For that reason the children themselves must be the ones who analyze the situation from their own perspective, propose solutions, and, in their own language, tell the world how to build a more equal and humane world for them and future generations'' (Cutillo 2004; GMACL, 2004).

12. For instance, Sen (1987, 1993, 1995); Nussbaum (2000), Gasper and Van Staveren (2003), and Alkire (2005).

13. See United Nations Development Programme (2003) and Fukuda-Parr (2003).

14. Unfortunately dictatorial regimes have often abused these characteristics to build a 'new' society.

15. *'Internal' factors*, such as personal characteristics (e.g. physical conditions, sex, skills, talents, intelligence, sensitivity, interaction attitude), convert resources (or commodities) into individual functionings. The conversion is also related to *'external' factors* such as social characteristics (e.g. public policies, institutions, legal rules, traditions, social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations, public goods) and environmental endowments (e.g. infrastructure, country, public infrastructure, climate, pollution).

16. Parents/tutors can be inspired by different motivations and they can be either autonomy supportive (for instance, giving an internal frame of reference, providing meaningful rationale, allowing choices, encouraging self-perspective) or just controlling (e.g. pressure to behave in specific ways). Self-determination theory concerns the analysis of basic psychological needs for applying autonomy, competence and

    relatedness and their relations with healthy development, motivation and health (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

17. The capability approach needs a plural informational base, including information concerning freedom, rights and distributive justice.

18. "Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead" (Sen, 1987, p. 36). Indeed, well-being achievements can be measured in functionings, whereas well-being freedom is reflected by a person's capability set.

19. As pointed out by Robeyns (2005), our ideas of a good life are profoundly influenced by our family, tribal, religious, community or cultural ties and background. As White puts it: "The primary thrust of recent social science attention has been to stress the diversity of childhoods across cultural context, space and time, with an attempt to develop a more child-centered forms of analysis (*sic*.)" (2002, p. 1097).

20. As we have argued elsewhere, this step can form a bridge between the capability approach and the human rights approach that — although different — can complement each other (Biggeri, 2004a)

21. For instance, Clark (2003) and Ackerly (2000).

22. Nussbaum (2003, pp. 41–42) presents the following list of central human capabilities: life, body health, body integrity, sense, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reasons, affiliation, other species, play, control over one's environment. Furthermore, she distinguishes among basic, internal and combined capabilities so that "all the important distinctions can be captured as aspects of the capability/functioning distinction" (Nussbaum, 2000).

23. Robeyns (2003a) presents the following list regarding gender issues: life and physical health: being able to be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length; mental well-being: being able to be mentally healthy; bodily integrity and safety; being able to be protected from violence of any sort; social relations: being able to be part of social networks and to give and receive social support; political empowerment: being able to participate in and have a fair share of influence on political decision-making; education and knowledge: being able to be educated and to use and produce knowledge; domestic work and non-market care: being able to raise children and to take care of others; paid work and other projects: being able to work in the labor market or to undertake projects, including artistic ones; shelter and environment: being able to be sheltered and to live in a safe and pleasant environment; mobility: being able to be mobile; leisure activities: being able to engage in leisure activities; time-autonomy: being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one's time; respect: being able to be respected and treated with dignity; religion: being able to choose to live or not to live according to a religion.

24. It could therefore be important to investigate both the relation between achieved functionings and the relevance attached to a certain capability, and the link between *actual* and *perceived* achievements, to verify to what extent perceptions and judgments are shaped by personal and social experience and socio-demographic correlates.

25. Ten PhD students of the course in Policy and Economics of Developing Countries of the University of Florence were trained: in the capability approach; in how to conduct interviews (including exercises of cross-simulation); and in the methods to conduct interviews to children. We gave them a short manual and other materials, a booklet (as a gift for the children) and a certificate of participation for the children. Each interviewer had to interview approximately 10 children. In order to facilitate direct dialog with the children (or the interpreter/accompanying person if needed), the children were divided among the interviewers according to the languages spoken. The final questionnaire was translated into five languages (English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, French).

26. The major organizational problem occurred at the time of interviewing the children since the research group did not want to disturb the conference and several meetings

where the children were actively involved. We agreed with children, organizers and the accompanying person the place and time of the interview, but in more than one-half of the cases the interview time was re-scheduled in order to reduce to a minimum the interference with the children's active participation at the conference meetings.

27. For more detailed analysis, see Biggeri (2005).

28. Officially there were 134 children delegates (Cutillo, 2004). However, only 105 delegates were elected or selected (indeed, 29 were from two Italian classes who won a competition between Italian schools on the theme of the congress). One hundred and four out of 105 child delegates were interviewed. The children fully involved (including the child delegates) were around 200 (GMACL, 2004). Originally more delegates had been involved as stated by the children themselves in the final declaration. ''Although our Congress has been successful, we are missing some of our important delegates. These children were already selected to participate in the Congress. But, these children did not get visas necessary to come to Italy because the Italian government thought them as a security risk. These children who were not allowed to attend, felt very discriminated. We all missed their ideas at the Congress, because these children are from the regions where child labor is most common. At the next Congress, we would like to see them participate because their voice is their vision and the world must hear it'' (from the children's final declaration, May 2004; *sic*., www.globalmarch.org).

29. The note for the interviewer stated: 'Do not read out, multiple answers accepted, add capabilities not present in the list of 14 at the end.'

30. During the interview process, around 20 children conceptualized at least four possible categories of capabilities that were not directly codified by the interviewers and were therefore added at the end of the list. However, during the analysis of the questionnaires, the four categories were absorbed into the original codified list. For example, 'national identity' was inserted under the 'religion and cultural identity' category.

31. Therefore, the conceptualized capability set reflects the capabilities that all children should have.

32. Although quite challenging, this perspective should not be overvalued. Indeed, on one side further empirical analysis is required.

33. The FGD was conducted on the fourth day of the congress. Initially two FGDs were planned. There was no time for both so the FGD on gender issues was not carried out (this issue was discussed by children between themselves in a workshop during the congress).

34. See note 17.

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