

THE CAPABILITY APPROACH AND DISASTERS: THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PROCESSES ON COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT: *We are living in an “age of disasters” that is profoundly affecting societies and communities on a global scale. “Natural” disasters (earthquakes, floods, tsunamis), wars, migrations, famines, epidemics, environmental disasters, and economic crises are reshaping our world and causing significant disruptions in the daily lives of communities. These disasters have a serious impact, especially on vulnerable groups such as migrants/asylum seekers, women, and the disabled, exacerbating existing inequalities and reducing their resilience in the face of such crises. In this study, it is argued that in order to create a society resilient to the disasters that occur in today’s societies, the conditions that will eliminate or reduce the vulnerability of social groups should be considered through the axis of the capability approach and the question of whether it is possible to reduce vulnerability by developing policies that will increase the capabilities of these groups. This study does not address vulnerable groups from an essentialist perspective; rather, it aims to examine how disasters hinder the ability of these groups to act and how pre-existing social and cultural conditions exacerbate the impact of disasters. The study begins with a conceptual discussion of the capability approach, then analyzes the conditions of vulnerability faced by persons with disabilities, migrants/asylum seekers, and women in disasters. Finally, by drawing attention to the concept of “collective capabilities,” it emphasizes the possibilities of the capability approach for guiding policies and developing recommendations for disaster management.*

KEYWORDS: *disasters, the capability approach, vulnerable groups, community resilience, social structure*

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in an “age of disasters” that is affecting entire societies and communities on a global scale. “Natural” disasters, wars, migrations, famines, epidemics, environmental disasters, and economic crises are shaping the world we live in with their devastating effects, disrupting the daily lives of large groups of people. Disasters can no longer be explained solely in terms of “natural” categories, the sovereignty of divine forces, or the sovereignty of physical laws. Disasters, often assumed to be natural, are shaped by the economic, social, political, and cultural organization of the world we live in, influenced by social and structural conditions. In this context, man-made risks turn into “social disasters” that individuals/communities must cope with in the long run. Therefore, we need new perspectives, strategies, and conceptual frameworks to cope with disasters.

Historically and anthropologically, every society’s organizational style also includes a strategy for coping with disasters (Oliver-Smith 2020: 34–35). Until recently, approaches that have discussed the issue of disasters in relation to the theoretical dominance of the “environmental determinism” paradigm have argued that the issue is the control of nature with technological tools and that disasters can be overcome in this way. Modernization, secularization, and a series of changes in the modern understanding of knowledge have led to a transformation of the nature-human relationship, as well as a significant change in the meaning of disasters, through the development of the idea of controlling and dominating nature.

The vulnerability approach, one of the dominant paradigms today, posits that disasters should be viewed as a social phenomenon and focuses on the economic and social conditions and mechanisms required to strengthen society in the aftermath of disasters (Centemeri–Tomassi 2022: 233–234). This approach argues that disasters depend on pre-disaster conditions and should be addressed with a strategy that focuses on vulnerable groups (Furedi 2007: 887–888). It provides a framework that assesses the vulnerability of individuals and communities in the face of disasters in combination with various variables such as socio-economic status, health, and environmental factors.

This includes the most socially and economically vulnerable segments of society, which we categorize as women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, sexual minorities, migrants/asylum seekers, the elderly, and the lower classes. Although the vulnerability approach is widely accepted as a strategy, it treats vulnerable groups in an ontological and essentialist manner (Sparf 2016). It is debatable whether the inequality, injustice, and rights violations faced by these communities change depending on the circumstances;

i.e., whether vulnerability is a process that emerges in response to certain events or a permanent state that defines a fixed group. By labeling a particular group as vulnerable, this approach reproduces vulnerabilities while establishing a framework that leads us to perceive them as “vulnerable victims” (Levent – Gönç Şavran 2024). In contrast, the capability approach, while accepting many of the proposals offered by the vulnerability approach, emphasizes that social groups may vary depending on historical, social, and spatial conditions and the level of democracy and freedom in a country, rather than addressing them from an essentialist perspective.

Over the last three decades, the capability approach has contributed to the development of poverty and development studies and is recognized as a fundamental approach to the human development framework. Studies on this approach have mostly focused on women (Robeyns 2003), youth unemployment (Egdell–Graham 2017), housing policies (Kimbur 2020), and education (Hart 2012). In recent years, some studies have focused on climate change and structural power inequalities (Cappelli 2023; Wasito 2023), discussing the environmental and ecological justice perspective within the framework of capabilities (Serafimova 2023), measuring the housing welfare of disaster victims (Tiwari et al. 2022) and discussing the situation of people with disabilities in disasters in the context of capabilities (Ton et al. 2019). Although there has been a quantitative increase in research based on the capability approach, the adaptation of this approach to global disaster studies and disaster management strategies is quite limited.

This study examines whether the conditions that reduce the vulnerabilities of social groups and contribute to a society resilient to disasters should be addressed within the framework of the capability approach, and whether vulnerabilities can be mitigated through policies that enhance the capabilities of these groups. In this context, the study starts with a conceptual discussion of the capability approach and then examines the conditions of vulnerability faced by the disabled, women, and migrants/asylum seekers during disasters. Finally, arguing that the individualistic logic that dominates the standard capability approach is insufficient when it comes to disasters, it draws attention to the concept of “collective capabilities” and aims to develop a framework for policy recommendations to guide disaster management.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DISASTERS AND THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

The capability approach is one of the most important concepts of the political economy approach proposed by Amartya Sen in his work *Inequality Reexamined and Development as Freedom*. Sen's approach has Aristotelian origins as a critique of traditional economic approaches, which have been based on wealth or utility (Alkire 2005: 118). Sen's main motivation is to change the course of development-related debates about the axis of capabilities by developing an alternative model to the utilitarian political economy approach (Robeyns 2005: 94). For this reason, he does not make a definitive judgment about fundamental justice, but focuses on the freedom of individuals to choose among different life possibilities (Sen 1999a). Nussbaum, on the other hand, addresses capabilities within a normative framework.

Sen defines capabilities as the freedom of people to realize their potential (Robeyns–Byskov 2020). Instead of focusing on the material assets or income that individuals possess, Sen focuses on the tools that enable them to address the problems they face in social life. How these tools become functional is directly related to the existence of a number of conversion factors. These factors include the physical and mental characteristics of the individual (personal conversion factors), the influence of social structures such as social norms, gender roles, and discrimination (social conversion factors), and geographical, climatic, or infrastructural conditions (environmental conversion factors) (Robeyns 2005: 99). Thus, just because individuals have the same resources does not mean that they will achieve the same level of well-being, as conversion creates factors that make a difference between individuals. For example, women's right to access education cannot be transformed into capabilities if they face obstacles due to gender norms or care obligations. Therefore, the existence and development of capabilities should be directly assessed in conjunction with social, cultural, political, and structural factors. The approach focuses on what individuals are able to do, not just what they have achieved (Nussbaum 2000: 5; Alkire 2002).

Nussbaum, on the other hand, presents an argument that transforms Sen's approach into a normative framework. Nussbaum's approach is based on a list of ten central capabilities, aiming to establish normative principles. The author claims that the minimum provision of these capabilities for each individual should be a fundamental requirement for a just and egalitarian society (Nussbaum 2011: 18). Due to the priority Nussbaum awards to political liberalism at the center of the approach, it focuses on opportunities and individuals, treating each individual as an end rather than defining a collective life value. In this respect, Nussbaum's approach focuses on choice or freedom from an individualistic

framework (ibid. p. 18–19). Hence, Nussbaum uses the concept of “capabilities,” which Sen refers to as “capability,” despite the more holistic definition, based on the recognition of the plural nature of people’s living conditions.

One of the central concepts of the capability approach is functioning. Life consists of a series of interrelated functions, and these ‘functionings’ are central to the formation of a person’s well-being (Sen 1992: 39). Functionings include the a priori conditions of a person’s ability to do something or be something. In this respect, having a good product is a prerequisite for fulfilling a function, but it is different from it. For example, a disabled person’s possession of multiple bicycles means nothing if they do not have the necessary capabilities to use them (Sen 1999b: 6). Precisely for this reason, income or goods alone cannot ensure the fulfillment of an individual’s functioning and thus cannot lead to capability and freedom of action; more information is needed to establish an individual’s capability and freedom of action (Basu – Lòpez-Calva 2011: 154).

Nussbaum (2000) defines these functionings as the universal foundations of human life and argues that every individual should be able to achieve these basic functionings. The capabilities approach takes into account not only the functionings that individuals have, but also the opportunities and freedom of choice that will increase their capabilities as functions that individuals can achieve. Capabilities are directly related to the freedom to choose, which means that the existence of capabilities cannot be mentioned in conditions where individuals do not have the conditions to make a choice or do not have the freedom to choose among different alternatives. In this respect, the capability approach differs from traditional development approaches in that it does not assume that society is homogeneous and that there is a singular set of conditions required for optimum social functioning, but rather that social life is plural and diverse. Nussbaum (2011: 25–26) argues that the central political goal should not be to increase functionings, but rather to increase capabilities.

Unlike Sen’s approach, the capabilities approach outlined by Nussbaum focuses on the expansion of combined capabilities instead of “substantial freedoms.” For this reason, she distinguishes between internal capabilities, which are centered on personal qualities, and combined capabilities. Internal capabilities are not innate, given abilities, but are defined as “developed traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment” (ibid. p. 21).

In this respect, in addition to the conditions that must exist at the threshold level in a society, it is necessary to follow the approach that transforms internal capabilities into combined capabilities, which are the sum of social and economic conditions. According to Nussbaum, societies that are successful in producing internal capabilities may fail in producing combined capabilities. For

example, someone who is knowledgeable about political issues lacks combined capabilities if they lack the conditions to express their knowledge freely. As Nussbaum (*ibid.* p. 22) emphasizes, even if migrants are engaged in political practice in terms of internal capabilities, it is not possible for them to create unified capabilities due to their exclusion from the political sphere. Therefore, the existence of internal capabilities in a society may not necessarily lead to the creation of combined capabilities.

Nussbaum's framework of combined capabilities highlights that internal capabilities can only be truly functional when combined with suitable external conditions (*ibid.* p. 22). Therefore, the concept of participation is important for this framework and includes the right and capability of individuals to be actively involved in decision-making processes, where they have more control over their own lives. In Nussbaum's capabilities approach, individuals' participation in political, social, and cultural life is considered as one of the basic conditions for a life worthy of human dignity. In particular, the individual's right to participate in political decisions includes the right to exist on the basis of social dignity (*ibid.* p. 34). In this context, participation is not only a right but also a basic structural condition necessary for the individual to realize his or her potential.

The capabilities approach is a normative framework that emphasizes individuals' opportunities to achieve the goals they value in life and is individual-centered. In the case of disasters, it has a collective impact in terms of its effects, and it cannot be addressed using a framework that focuses solely on the individual. This is because disasters not only reduce the capabilities of individuals, but also lead to a weakening of collective capabilities. Ibrahim (2006) and Rauschmayer et al. (2018) developed a critical perspective on the individualist model inherent in the capabilities approach and emphasize that capabilities should be analyzed not only at the individual level but also at the community level, since some functions and freedoms are only possible for individuals when they are part of a community. Therefore, disasters are a process that affects the community, not individuals, and are not independent from cultural and social conditions.

THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION IN VULNERABLE GROUPS DURING DISASTERS

The capabilities approach provides an important framework for addressing emerging social problems in the contemporary world, and disasters on a global

scale are among the factors that prevent the realization of capabilities in many societies. Considering the global climate crisis, health risks, and the increase in the number of disasters, the importance of having policies that can enhance the capabilities of vulnerable groups affected by these conditions increases. The negative impacts of disasters have dramatic consequences, disadvantaging women, persons with disabilities, and migrants/asylum seekers as the most vulnerable groups in society.

What causes these groups to be most affected by adverse conditions is not their lack of material assets, but rather their lack of opportunities and capabilities to cope with the situations they face in disasters. For example, for a disabled or elderly person, having a high income and property are not sufficient criteria for coping with disasters. Because even though such individuals have material assets, they may have difficulty fully realizing their potential and performing vital functions (Nussbaum 2011: 144). In this context, the fact that social groups do not have the conditions to realize their ability to act and their potential cannot save them from vulnerable and disadvantaged situations. Forms of social regulation are the main reason why these groups lack capabilities.

The capability approach draws attention to historical and social conditions, in contrast to understandings that see vulnerable groups as “vulnerable victims.” According to Nussbaum (2003), individual, social, and environmental factors restrict or enable capabilities. The adverse conditions that occur during disasters are closely related to social and cultural conditions that cause a decrease in capability due to sudden conditions rather than material conditions.

Disability and disaster: The social consequences of social invisibility

Disability studies have become an important agenda item in public and political debates, simultaneously with the rise of those concerning racial and gender discrimination. Historically, disability/injury has been seen as “natural” or as specific groups being punished by divine powers. With modern society, it has become the subject of biomedical medicine and is seen as an “individual” phenomenon. Approaches that perceive disability as a political and social phenomenon (thus should not be understood in terms of “natural” and biological categories) have led to the discussion of the social aspects of the issue (Hedlund 2000). From this perspective, the adverse conditions faced by people with disabilities in disasters are caused by cultural and social conditions and regulations rather than their lack of individual ability to act (Stough et al. 2016).

People with disabilities are in a disadvantaged position in terms of access to social resources in terms of health, education, employment, and access to public spaces. As can be seen when we look at different examples of disasters in recent years, people with disabilities experience more negative conditions in disaster conditions than they face in the ordinary course of life. For example, a recent study conducted by Amnesty International after the February 2023 earthquakes in Turkey showed that disabled people are affected more than “normal” individuals in disaster conditions, do not have access to specialized services, quality auxiliary equipment, and become dependent on assistance (Amnesty International, 2023). Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Asian tsunami in December 2004, it was emphasized that people with disabilities faced great difficulty in the processes of survival, receiving assistance and integration into society and this situation should be considered as a result of the social structure rather than an individual situation (Hemingway–Priestley 2006).

From this perspective, the conditions caused by disasters also lead to increased exclusion, discrimination, lack of access, and stigmatization, and become factors that affect them more than the physical and mental conditions they experience (Ton et al. 2019: 12). Although the vulnerabilities caused by disasters are seen as the result of individual preferences and choices, they mainly depend on a number of factors stemming from socio-structural conditions and social organization (Stough–Kelman 2018: 236). For example, a case study from the Solomon Islands shows that the systematic disregard of people with disabilities in disaster management processes increases their exclusion within the community and reduces their chances of survival (Kings et al. 2019: 460).

The main reason why disasters affect people with disabilities more is not the unequal distribution of income, wealth, or material assets, but rather the lack of policies to increase their capabilities. It has been shown that disaster plans center on a “normal” or “healthy” human population, and this approach generally does not take into account disabled people before or after disasters. For example, a study conducted in New Zealand revealed that the skills and capabilities of children with disabilities were ignored in disaster risk reduction plans for students with disabilities in schools, which jeopardized the safety of students during disasters (Ronoh et al. 2017).

Although the International Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) 2015–2030 decisions initiate an important discussion that takes into account the possibility of vulnerable groups being affected by disasters, it is evident that these decisions have not made sufficient progress in relation to the formulation of national disaster management strategies. Policies that will increase the potential of persons with disabilities to eliminate their

vulnerability to disaster conditions should not only focus on functions, but also on opportunities to enhance their capabilities and freedom of choice, as well as effective participation in local and community decisions, thereby making persons with disabilities a part of disaster planning and ensuring their freedom to choose and make choices in this regard.

Migrants and asylum seekers: Prejudice-based disaster

Disasters have an unequal impact on different layers of the population in a world where resources and rights are not equally distributed. Looking at the impacts caused by disasters in different regions of the globe, migrants/asylum seekers are the most vulnerable and capability-deprived groups that feel the effects of “social disaster” more during a disaster due to their financial, administrative, and legal status, considering their position in the general population. Of the 16 million people affected by the February 2023 earthquakes in Turkey, 1.8 million were migrants and asylum seekers (Türk Kızılay 2023: 6). During the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants and asylum seekers constituted groups at greater risk in terms of death, disease, and losses than the general population (Trentin et al. 2023: 2).

The main problems faced by migrants/asylum seekers in disasters are accessing shelter, health services, nutrition and food security, psychosocial problems, social exclusion, and discrimination. On a global scale, migrants/asylum seekers are vulnerable to a series of negative impacts, such as homelessness and death in disasters, as they are the groups that have to live in inadequate and precarious housing. Situations such as difficult access to clean water sources, hygiene, and epidemics may worsen the situation of migrants/asylum seekers.

With disasters, conditions of hunger/starvation may arise even if there is an abundance of foodstuffs due to a possible reduction in food supply, the disappearance of conditions supporting access to food, or the collapse of commodity markets (Sen 1999a: 161). Another challenge faced by migrants/asylum seekers is the psychosocial and traumatic experiences that disasters may cause. Since they have already had traumatic experiences related to migration, separation, and loss, they may experience the stress and anxiety brought about by disasters more intensely. These groups face the risk of being exposed to possible discriminatory and exclusionary practices and discourses of the dominant group.

From this perspective, disasters cause migrants/asylum seekers to become groups lacking in capabilities. Especially, language and cultural barriers hinder the ability of these groups to cope with the problems they face before, during,

and after disasters. The fundamental reason for this is that these groups lack several capabilities common to the general population of the society they have migrated to, and policies and programs sensitive to the needs of migrants and asylum seekers have not been developed. Prejudices created about migrants/asylum seekers cause these groups to become incapable. Therefore, effective disaster planning for these groups must necessarily take into account the social, political, and cultural dynamics that “otherize” them and deprive them of capabilities.

Women: Gender inequalities in disasters

Globally, women face a series of gender-based inequalities in education, work, family, etc. The emergence and rise of women’s movements have drawn attention to the gendered social division of labor and questioned the discriminatory practices to which they are subjected due to biological and social norms. The emergence and rise of women’s movements have led to more attention being paid to the gender-based social division of labor and questioned the discriminatory practices women are subjected to due to biological and social norms.

Situations such as “natural” disasters, wars, migration, economic crises, and epidemics exacerbate the discriminatory and unequal conditions experienced by women worldwide. Since women have to cope with unequal conditions in access to resources and opportunities before, during, and after disasters, they become more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters. The primary reason for this is that social, cultural, and religious norms and values influence the social nature of disasters and shape the risks faced by individuals and groups affected by them (Ahmad 2018: 108).

Since the social construction of femininity varies due to social and cultural reasons, women are exposed to unequal conditions in different ways across different countries. At the same time, since women are more affected than men by disasters (Seager 2014: 266), disasters are “gendered.” Gender roles that limit women’s participation in education, employment, business, and decision-making mechanisms, unequal conditions such as the lack of access for women to a series of opportunities offered to men in society, cause women to become vulnerable and defenseless in disasters.

Neumayer and Plümper (2007), in their disaster research conducted in 141 countries, state that there is a direct relationship between the deaths caused by disasters and gender roles. For example, ninety percent of those who died in the 1991 cyclone disaster in Bangladesh were women (Ikeda 1995), as well as the majority of those affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and eighty percent

of the deaths in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The fact that women are more often affected or killed in disasters indicates not only the lack of women-centered disaster management strategies, but also the inadequacy of policies for increasing women's capabilities.

The fact that women are excluded from working life compared to men and lead a home-centered life makes them vulnerable to disasters. For example, numerous examples illustrate this, such as women being at home while men were at sea during the Indonesian tsunami, women not knowing how to swim, and men sleeping outside due to the heat during earthquakes in India and women inside, all of which highlight the extent to which the gender-based division of labor and traditional norms contribute to women's vulnerability to disasters (Neumayer–Plümper 2007: 554).

The need for “caregiver and protective roles” such as child and elderly care and housework, which are seen as a part of women's social roles, increases under disaster conditions, showing that women are not only affected by disasters through fatalities, but also because of the increase in the work expected from women, increasing their vulnerability. In disasters, women's gender-based division of labor causes an increase in emotional labor and consequently burnout, and women's traditional roles negatively affect their coping and recovery process (Gündüz 2024: 2). Reducing the capability deprivation experienced by women in disasters is possible through the development of strategies and policies that increase the fundamental capability of this group, which faces vulnerable and unequal conditions.

Why individual capabilities are insufficient: The collective experience of vulnerable groups in disasters

Disasters have a multilayered and intersectional impact on the most vulnerable groups of society, such as persons with disabilities, migrants, asylum seekers, and women, leading to capability deprivation. The experiences of these groups during and after disasters are often intrinsically linked to both social norms and approaches that a priori view these groups as “vulnerable victims.” Indeed, while persons with disabilities face systematic exclusion in accessing information, space, and services, migrants and asylum seekers face linguistic and cultural barriers as well as problems in accessing rights due to their citizenship status. Women are vulnerable to the impacts of disasters due to gender norms, domestic roles, and care labor.

The common characteristic of these groups is not only their lack of material resources but also their exclusion from participation in decision-making

mechanisms. Exclusion due to social, environmental, political, and cultural reasons leaves them in a cycle of inequality. In this context, capability deprivation renders these groups vulnerable in terms of not being able to make decisions about their own lives, excluding them from participation and protection. Therefore, the resilience of these groups against disasters can be enhanced not only by increasing their individual capabilities but also through the effective development and institutionalization of collective capabilities.

DEVELOPING COLLECTIVE CAPABILITIES IN DISASTERS: OVERCOMING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROCESSES

Providing effective solutions that remedy the vulnerable situations of vulnerable groups in disasters is directly related to the development of alternative perspectives and the creation of disaster plans within this framework. The capability approach can form the basis for an approach that will minimize the impacts of disasters and ensure that vulnerable groups are transformed from perpetrators into active subjects. In this context, while accepting a priori the view of society of the capability approach as atomized individuals with plural life worlds, we need to focus our perspective on the development of “collective capabilities.” Individuals do not exist in an isolated world, but rather are influenced by structural/collective elements that determine their consciousness, their tastes, and guide their actions when making choices.

Therefore, the economic, political, and social environment, as well as the individual elements in a society, determine the limits of freedom and capabilities. In disasters, when appropriate conditions for increasing social or collective capabilities are not created, it may become difficult for individual capabilities to function effectively. For example, the “shock” caused by disasters may disrupt individuals’ ability to act. In particular, in recent disasters, inadequacies in satisfying basic needs, such as food and shelter, and potentially the resulting looting, are the result of individuals’ reduced capabilities due to sudden conditions (Aykutalp 2019).

The individual is at the center of the standard capability approach. However, collective dimensions become particularly important in the context of disasters. Since the standard capability approach focuses on individual capabilities, it does not sufficiently emphasize collective aspects involving interaction and cooperation (Rauschmayer et al. 2018: 346). Disaster management policies should be based on strengthening collective capabilities through social solidarity,

collective action, and institutional-political participation, as well as developing individual capabilities, because disasters cause a serious decrease in collective capabilities by damaging the integrity of communities and social networks. At this point, the concept of collective capabilities emphasizes that an individual can realize their life values only as part of a community (Ibrahim 2006).

In this respect, the study uses Nussbaum's ten central capabilities of life, bodily health, physical integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment as the basis for the development of collective capabilities (Nussbaum 2011: 33–34, 2003: 41–42). Nussbaum's model provides a detailed and normative framework for assessing human development and justice. With its universalist basis, the approach offers the possibility of analyzing structural injustices in diverse cultural and geographical contexts. In contrast to Sen's approach, Nussbaum's approach clearly identifies ten central capabilities that are universally considered essential for justice (Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011). In the case of disasters, life, bodily health, bodily integrity, emotions, affiliation, other species, and control over one's environment have an important place in the development of collective capabilities.

1. *Life*: Life, identified as the foremost of Nussbaum's central capabilities, signifies "being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living" (Nussbaum 2011: 33). From a different perspective, death is the deprivation of the freedom to live (Sen 1999a). Since disasters involve conditions that remove or endanger people's control over life, it is vital to develop collective capabilities that center life and enable control over life.

Disaster plans should include qualities that prioritize life on the axis of fundamental rights. Since the most vulnerable and fragile groups in society are those most affected by disasters, it is necessary to implement policies that strengthen the capabilities of individuals and communities not only during and after disasters but also in the pre-disaster period. The primary objective of these policies should be to establish collective structures and mechanisms that enable safe living at the social level. For example, during disasters such as floods, inundations, or tsunamis, the fact that women know how to swim constitutes the starting point for protecting their freedom to live. However, the acquisition of this skill is often not a matter of individual preference, but rather demands a collective effort that involves offering swimming training as a public service, taking into account inequality.

Living in a healthy environment, receiving education, having access to income, not being subjected to racial-ethnic discrimination, living in a durable dwelling and not being excluded due to disabilities are conditions involving a number of

elements not being realized, which naturally means restricting the freedom to live of groups or individuals who are deprived of these rights in disasters. This situation is directly linked to the lack of collective capabilities. This is because the fulfillment of these rights is possible only through the infrastructures that are built not only by the individual but by members of society together: public health systems, equally accessible education opportunities, policies that ensure income justice, and inclusive disaster planning. Therefore, the real securing of capabilities is only possible through the construction of collective capabilities that transcend the individual level, where communities can act together in solidarity.

2. *Bodily health*: Bodily health means “Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter” (Nussbaum 2011: 33). Effective planning for disasters requires taking into account the issue of physical health. In this context, reproductive health is becoming an important indicator of lack of well-being, especially in developing countries. The fact that women are at the center of reproductive health, reproduction, and fertility is seen as part of women’s gender roles, and women’s freedom of choice in reproduction is limited, which is an important factor affecting the development of women’s capabilities (DeJong 2006: 1167). The result of this situation is that women’s life expectancy differs significantly from men’s.

The norms of sexuality and gender roles in reproduction are directly embedded in social relations. For this reason, the issue of reproductive health cannot be solved solely through policies that increase individual capabilities; it can only be addressed by enhancing social/collective capabilities, in short, by reforming social norms and opening discriminatory practices to discussion. Collective capabilities here refer to the capabilities of not only women but also communities to co-create social organizations and services that will enable a healthy life. From the perspective of disasters, conditions in which human reproductive health is underdeveloped, gender roles are rigid, and there is no freedom of choice create conditions that reduce the capabilities of a certain group, usually women, starting from the pre-disaster period. Therefore, disaster planning should focus on social conditions and gender roles that are ostensibly not related to disasters. At this point, structures such as social services, counseling networks, and women’s solidarity centers can play a critical role in strengthening collective capabilities during the pre-disaster period.

Another aspect of physical health is the right to food and adequate housing. In terms of functions and capabilities, the function of having access to food does not necessarily imply the capability to access healthy food, nor does the function of having a roof over one’s head necessarily imply capabilities that take the form of living in a disaster-resilient dwelling. These conditions relate to the

collective resilience capabilities of communities rather than individual choices; for example, collective capabilities such as post-disaster shelter solutions, communal food distribution, and neighborhood-based care networks can be critical for the protection of physical health.

3. *Bodily integrity*: Bodily integrity means “being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction” (Nussbaum 2011: 33). It is clear that this ability is disrupted in disaster situations, where women face an increased risk of sexual assault and a rise in domestic violence. For example, global lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that women and children are exposed to higher levels of domestic violence due to social isolation. Similarly, women’s increased caregiving responsibilities in post-earthquake periods make them more vulnerable to violence.

In this context, one of the main objectives of disaster plans should be the construction of collective capabilities that will enable women, and especially migrant and asylum-seeking women, to break out of the cycle of violence. This is possible not only through the development of individual coping skills but also through the operationalization of collective mechanisms such as institutional support systems and community-based solidarity networks. These collective structures increase the capability to detect violence while also supporting the implementation of abuse prevention policies (Campbell 2021: 6). In particular, it is possible to make visible the types of violence that women and children may be exposed to and to increase collective capabilities by bringing violations in the private sphere into the public sphere.

4. *Emotions*: Emotions, “Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger” (Nussbaum 2011: 33). When it comes to disasters, emotions play a decisive role in terms of individual and collective capabilities, as the sudden changes and shocks caused by disasters can become emotionally charged moments that impact the capabilities of individuals and communities. The increase in fear and anxiety after a disaster, mourning practices caused by deaths, and anger towards the situation are directly related not only to individual but also to collective capabilities.

Emotions, which Nussbaum associates with individual capabilities, are directly related to the changes that occur in the body’s power of action as a result of its encounter with other bodies in the Spinozian sense (Deleuze 1988: 19), revealing the collective nature of emotions. Therefore, the increase in the body’s power of action is directly related to the increase in collective capability that

transcends individuals. As a result, there is a need for a framework based on collective capabilities that puts emotions at the center when it comes to disasters.

5. *Affiliation*: “(A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation, being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.” (Nussbaum 2011: 34)

Bonding basically involves the development of community consciousness and the possibilities of living together with individuals and groups while building their daily lives in the social world. Increasing collective capabilities related to bonding includes a series of processes such as ensuring common spatial unity in the case of disasters, especially in cases of physical destruction, preventing spatial segregation dynamics, operating planning processes that take into account the demands of individuals and communities instead of spatial arrangements that eliminate urban identity, and shaping common living spaces in line with the demands of the local community.

The other dimension of the concept of attachment, which takes into account a number of differences inherent in the social or self-identity of individuals and groups, especially the elimination of barriers such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, which constitute the center of exclusion practices in today’s world, should be one of the most fundamental dimensions of the strategy for coping with disasters.

6. *Other species*: It should be understood as “Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature” (Nussbaum 2011: 34). The nature of the human relationship with the non-human living or non-living environment is an important subject of debate. The fact that the anthropocentric perspective has become an important subject of criticism in recent years also constitutes the main subject of environmental justice debates.

From the perspective of the capability approach, the natural environment, including plants and animal species, is instrumental in the development of human capabilities. The development of human capability at the threshold level is not independent of environmental conditions. For example, living in a clean environment, accessing healthy food and thus achieving the capability of “physical health” or the existence of ecological elements such as clean water, oxygen and soil, which are necessary for the capability of “life,” depend on how the relationship with “other species” is constructed (Holland 2008: 323).

Acting together by taking into account common environmental values not only enables the development of collective environmental awareness and pre-disaster resilience, but also supports the development of collective capabilities. This is because coping with ecological risks is not possible through individual action but through the collective participation of the community.

When it comes to disasters such as floods and epidemics, which are increasingly likely to occur due to the climate crisis, the need to rethink our relationship with nature emerges. At the same time, an urban planning process that takes into account the possible effects of nature as well as animal and plant species in the planning of urban living spaces will make it possible to increase collective capabilities.

7. *Control over one's environment*: "(A) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers." (Nussbaum 2011: 34). The most important element of control over one's environment is the creation of conditions to express oneself in the political sphere: i.e., the freedom to make decisions and choices about public issues. Political issues involve not only individual preferences and choices but also participation in decision-making mechanisms that address collective problems.

Treating the processes of creating disaster plans as a technical issue means that the groups that will be affected by possible disasters are passive in the creation of the former and therefore have no control over their environment. Since migrants/asylum seekers are not citizens, they are not part of citizen political participation. Women also have difficulty in participating in politics due to the influence of social norms and traditional roles, such as housework, childcare, and elderly care. Similarly, the disabled are excluded from social life to a large extent and constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of exclusion from political participation.

Another important dimension of the control over one's environment is the question of property. Nussbaum considers property and the right to own property within the framework of the individual's property in general. Although the capability approach frames the social position of the individual in terms of the freedom to do and choose rather than the distribution of income, wealth, and welfare and the ownership of material assets, the issue of the fair and equal distribution of property and resources among social groups constitutes the main

cause of many forms of equality and inequality. In particular, neoliberal policies tend to concentrate resources and property in the hands of certain groups (Harvey 2006: 149–150).

Another important effect of neoliberal policies is the decline of the social welfare state, which involves public intervention in the market, and the fact that citizens are deprived of minimum threshold conditions, becoming vulnerable to the influence of the market. This trend creates the social basis for a series of possible disasters. In particular, the “disaster capitalism” approach is becoming an important topic of discussion, as it views disasters as exciting market opportunities for social change and property development, and sees the crisis/trauma experienced by disaster-stricken groups as a tool for profitmaking (Klein 2007: 6). Thus, social and economic organization based on individual ownership necessarily leads to the existence of at least two social groups: losers and winners.

Therefore, creating a resilient society against disasters can be the starting point of a more realistic solution by putting the right to collective property at the center. Therefore, considering both the political and economic (property) dimensions of control over one’s environment, it can be said that women, migrants/asylum seekers, and disabled people have limited control over these areas, causing them to be the groups most affected by disasters. From this perspective, effective disaster management for these groups depends on creating policies that will establish environmental control mechanisms and thereby enhance collective capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Considering the capability approach in the context of disaster studies helps generate an important framework for developing policies that empower individuals and communities. Although Sen’s and Nussbaum’s capabilities approaches follow different trajectories, it should be emphasized that when it comes to disasters, a discussion aimed at increasing “collective capabilities” should be conducted without disregarding the individual-centered approaches of both theorists. In particular, Nussbaum’s list of ten central capabilities provides a conceptual foundation for the development of a holistic and inclusive approach for disaster studies.

It cannot be explained as a coincidence that disasters affect the most vulnerable, fragile, and the groups/communities at the bottom of the social stratum in developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries in different regions of the

world. In this respect, disasters are shaped by the economic, social, cultural, and political conditions of the age we live in. We need to see why disasters lead to more adverse conditions for women, migrants/asylum seekers, and disabled people, and why it is not possible for these groups to become more resilient to disasters only by strengthening their economic conditions. This is because vulnerabilities caused by disasters are directly linked to pre-disaster social justice and inequalities. Therefore, coping with the devastating effects of disasters is directly related to the development of collective capabilities for doing and joint action.

Within this framework, we need to recognize that an effective coping strategy for disasters depends on several variables, such as political participation, patriarchy/traditional gender roles, and property, which influence the pre-disaster conditions of disasters. In this context, disaster management is not a technical issue, but a process with a collective dimension that takes into account the real conditions of real people and their diverse and plural capabilities, and opens up for discussion different cultural norms and values. A minimum threshold level of capabilities in every society is a prerequisite for creating a disaster-resilient society.

In this respect, there is a need to create a strong social structure and empower social groups that will reduce social and cultural-based inequalities by mitigating the impacts and destructiveness of disasters through strengthening physical elements, such as housing, urban planning, and environmental sensitivity. We should focus on developing collective structures, not only on mitigating the effects of disasters from an individual-centered perspective. For this reason, local administrations, community-based organizations, and civil initiatives should assume central roles in this process.

In the context of policymaking, the active participation of groups such as women, persons with disabilities, migrants, etc., in decision-making mechanisms in pre- and post-disaster processes should be ensured, and participatory and pluralistic policies should be developed to reduce the structural barriers arising from cultural norms. In addition, disaster planning should consider not only individual capabilities but also the collectivization of these capabilities through social solidarity and institutional support.

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