

Dissertation Proposal: Extended Abstract

**The Role of Human Recognition in Economic Development:
Theory, Measurement, and Evidence**

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During the past two decades, development economists and practitioners have expanded the objectives of development to increase focus on outcomes that are less tangible than income, health, and education. Sen, a leading force in this process, places individuals' capabilities at the center of the development process (Sen 1985; Sen 1984) and identifies freedom as both a key objective and a critical instrument of development (Sen 1999). Empowerment has become an important focus area for development programs and studies, particularly empowerment of women and marginalized populations (see World Bank 2002; Kishor 2000). Recognizing the important role empowerment plays in development, the World Bank supports efforts to improve its measurement (World Bank 2005; Malhotra et al. 2002). Mullainathan applies behavioral economics to examine psychological factors that affect economic behavior in developing country contexts (Mullainathan 2004), and Patel examines the interplay between poverty and mental health among populations of poor, rural women (Patel and Kleinman 2003; Patel et al. 2002; Patel et al. 2001). The social capital literature looks at the role that shared norms, values and networks play in the development process (see for example Balamoune-Lutz and Lutz 2004; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Durlauf 2001).

A concept that is related to, but distinct from, these concepts and that has not been explicitly addressed in the development economics literature is human recognition. I define human recognition to be *the acknowledgement provided to an individual by individuals, groups, communities, or institutions that s/he is of inherent value with intrinsic qualities in common with the recognizer(s), i.e. recognition as a fellow human being.*

Recognition can be negative or positive. Negative recognition refers to viewing an individual as lacking inherent value as a human being or not acknowledging this value. The concepts closest to negative recognition are objectification and dehumanization. Provision of negative human recognition is a form of objectification or dehumanization and is an interactive dynamic that enables humiliation and cruelty.

Positive recognition refers to acknowledging an individual to be of value as a human being. The concepts closest to positive recognition are respect and dignity, though positive human recognition is conceptually distinct from both. Respect can be based on foundations other than acknowledgement of one's inherent value as a human being. Dignity is a quality or feeling that an individual possesses or experiences, while human recognition describes an interaction between two (or more) individuals.¹ One way to understand the relationship between human recognition and these concepts is that

¹ Treatment with dignity is an interaction but describes a behavior, while human recognition describes a way of being viewed and valued.

positive human recognition is an interactive dynamic that can enable both respect and dignity.

I hypothesize that human recognition is relevant to development processes and outcomes in a number of ways: 1) Marginalized and impoverished segments of the population, which are often the target of development programs and policies, receive lower levels of human recognition than other segments of the population. 2) The level of human recognition individuals receive affects critical development outcomes such as health, income, and education. 3) The level of human recognition individuals receive affects their well-being directly through recognition's psychic effects and indirectly through the effects recognition has on material outcomes (e.g. health, income, and education), which in turn affect well-being. 4) Development programs and policies can affect the human recognition levels of targeted populations (positively or negatively) through the content of interventions, approaches and processes used, organizational norms of implementing agencies, and behaviors of the individuals who implement activities.

If development interventions affect human recognition levels of affected populations and recognition levels affect well-being, this implies that human recognition needs to be considered in the design and implementation of development programs and policies in order to maximize net benefits.

A number of areas require theoretical or empirical study to improve understanding of the specific roles human recognition plays in development and to support effective incorporation of human recognition considerations in the design of development programs. The proposed dissertation consists of four essays that address some of these areas.

While there has been little or no study of development through the specific lens of human recognition as such, human recognition is closely related to an array of other concepts that have been studied extensively in the development economics literature. A review of this literature helps to illuminate both the relationship between human recognition and these other concepts, and gaps in the current literature that human recognition fills. The **first essay** provides such a review and presents a more in-depth exposition of human recognition and its sources, impacts, and relevance, with examples from developing country contexts.

Analysis of human recognition is greatly facilitated by a theoretical model describing and predicting human recognition provision behavior, equilibrium outcomes, and human recognition's contribution to well-being. The **second essay** presents a theoretical model of human recognition and looks at the predicted effects receipt of human recognition has on health outcomes and labor supply. The model examines possible multiple equilibria, determinants of equilibria, and policy implications.

One of the biggest challenges to empirical work on non-tangible aspects of development lies in measuring the component in question. The **third essay** develops a method for measuring human recognition levels using a composite index of the amount of

recognition individuals receive in the different domains of their lives. Using data from a randomized controlled trial in Kenya and from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in Kenya and India, the index is applied to measure human recognition levels of adults in Kenya and India. Measurement results are included in multivariate specifications of the determinants of subjective well-being and nutritional status.

The **fourth essay** examines empirically the impacts specific program interventions have on human recognition. Data are from a randomized controlled trial in Kenya that includes questions specifically designed to measure the levels of human recognition received by approximately 1,000 malnourished, HIV-infected adults. The multivariate specifications estimate the impacts of food supplementation and HIV treatment on human recognition levels, using self-reported levels of recognition received and an objective measure of whether individuals are allowed to eat with other household members. These panel data are also used to examine determinants of human recognition and to assess whether changes in an individual's recognition level is a determinant of changes in physical and mental health and nutritional status.

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