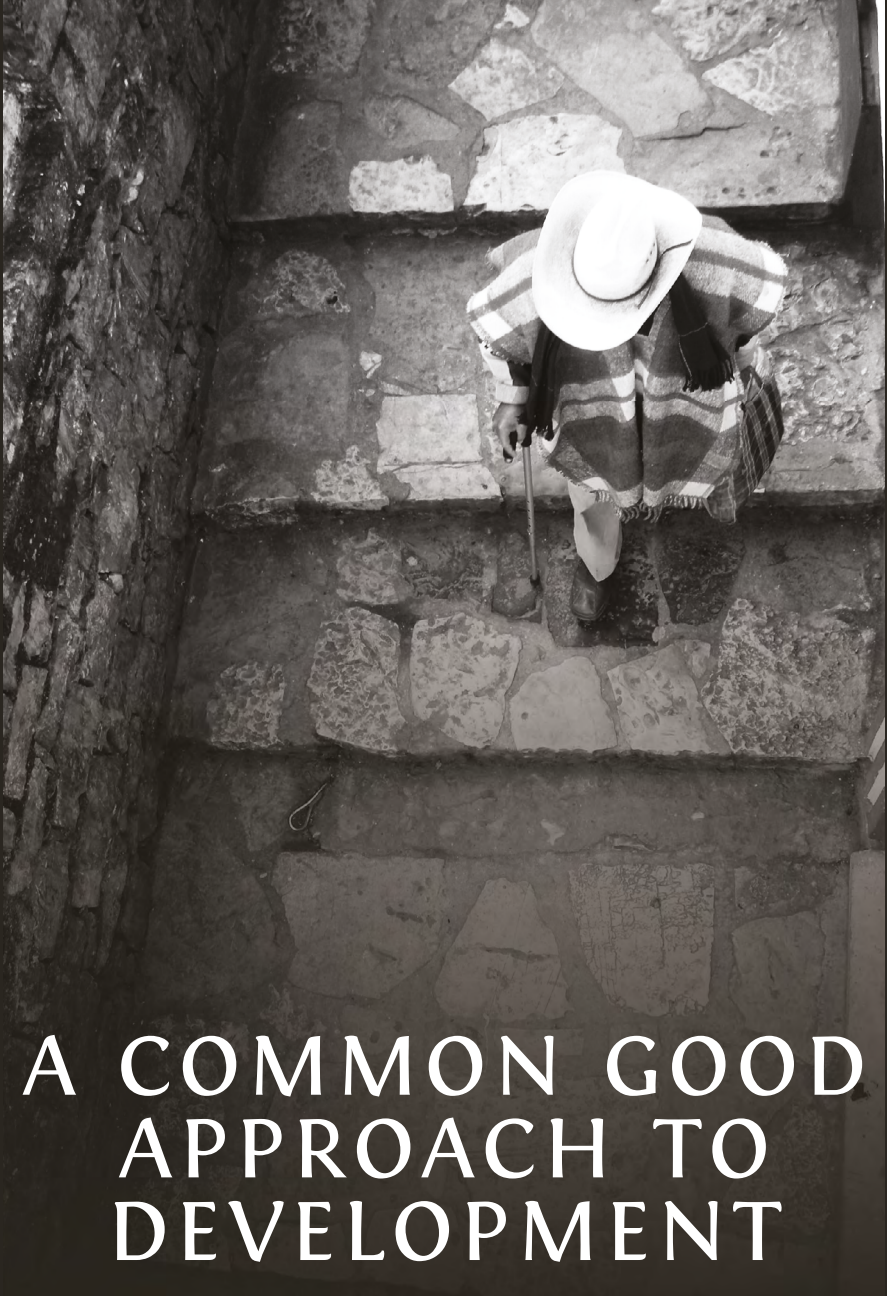


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A COMMON GOOD APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Collective Dynamics of
Development Processes



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8. Development and Stability

Flavio Comim

Introduction

Stability is one of the most neglected aspects in conceptualising the common good nexus. This happens for several reasons: stability is less tangible, it comprises overlaps with other normative dimensions, such as governance, and unlike other elements of the common good, it can be normatively ambiguous. Thus, more agency freedom is better than less, more governance is better than less, more justice is better than less, and more humanity is obviously better than less (this does not mean that they cannot have negative unintended consequences). But is more stability better than less? And if so, how can we measure the stability dimension of the common good?

Within this context, this chapter starts with a conceptual discussion about the stability dimension of the common good, exploring its links with similar constructs such as sustainability, and resilience (WCED 1987). Then, it examines the normative character of stability, echoing Anand and Sen's (2003) critique of the use of the sustainability concept. The main point is examining positive and negative aspects of stability. Thirdly, it delves into technical issues related to the measurement of this dimension, such as the issue of intertemporal rates of discount (Stern 2007) and the use of RBM to link common objectives to a single framework. Finally, it puts forward a very tentative classification of stability common good indicators according to their usefulness in empirical common good nexus models.

There are several normative and technical challenges that need to be tackled in order to assess and operationalise the stability dimension

of the common good. Thus, it seems *prima facie* natural to suggest that whereas the normative challenges should be solved by stakeholders, there are technical issues, involving handling attribution problems, counterfactual inferences and the use of econometrics, that are better left to technical analyses. This chapter explores however the complexities necessary in this kind of articulation for taking stability as a key element of the common good.

1. The Stability Dimension

In the context of the ‘nexus of the common good’ project led by Nebel, Garza-Vázquez, Sedmak, and colleagues, there is a methodological decision to focus not on a specific list of common goods but on how specific common goods build up. So, the choice of common good metrics should not reflect a simple assessment about the supply or availability of key common goods (as important as they might be) but rather about how they can be used to characterise the processes that takes place in the production of these goods, or in other words, how different interactions can create common goods. This is not a trivial point because often common good analyses are structured around the provision of common or public goods such as health, education, and infrastructure (Etzioni 2015; Kaul et al. 1999).

Stability is an equivocal term. As such, it can be used to designate different processes. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is useful to distinguish between four different senses in which the concept of sustainability could be used, namely:

1. The dictionary sense of stability: in common parlance, stability means a state of continuity without change or with very minor changes. It could also refer to the absence of its opposite, namely, the absence of instability, such as excessive fluctuations in a variable of interest. Quite often, this sense of stability refers to outcome variables. From this ordinary language interpretation, stability of the nexus of the common good would mean simply the continuity or permanence over time of the outcomes that it generates. This is indisputably a valuable property but it does not provide a sufficient criterion depending on its normative quality. Two issues are relevant

here. First, in the dictionary sense of stability, the stability of the nexus of the common good would be the constancy of its outcomes and not necessarily the constancy of the nexus *per se*. Secondly, we should suspend judgment for a while about the normative nature of these results (this topic is further discussed below);

2. The process sense of stability: some aspects of stability are related to governance and the underlying processes that it can control and generate. This criterion focuses on processes rather than on outputs or outcomes. They might even include them, for instance in situations that could be characterised not as culmination outcomes (only final results matter), but as comprehensive outcomes (including processes and their final outcomes), as argued by Sen (2009). In other words, stability means the continuity or permanence of certain processes that might or might not give rise to certain outcomes. In this sense stable processes can produce unstable results and there is nothing unexpected or unnatural with this sense of stability when we see traditional economic systems (very stable in this sense) producing the deterioration of environmental conditions and further instability at the level of outcomes. This seems to provide an interpretation of stability much closer to the concept of the nexus of the common good;
3. The fairness sense of stability: in social terms, stability is not simply about good outcomes or good processes. It can also refer to political or social consensus, to agreement, to harmony. Rawls (2001) employs this sense of stability to argue for the importance of agreement on his principles of justice. Thus, stability becomes an important element for effectiveness, for a public basis of justification, for criteria that might prove relevant for discussing political questions. For this reason, stability is considered a sufficient criterion for supporting a sense of justice. In other words, the common good nexus can be stable because people agree with it and therefore there is no other force of disagreement that will push for its change;

4. The sustainable sense of stability: mostly in environmental terms, stability refers to conservation of ecosystems without undermining people's ability in using them in the future or without unbalancing other social and economic priorities (WDR 2003). Here, stability is not simply about continuity or the absence of changes but about keeping a balance among competing social claims. This is not about processes, nor about governance. It is still about results and about how they should be normatively balanced, but with a clear focus on environmental issues. From this perspective, it is possible to be sustainable, protecting the environment without protecting or even caring about human beings.

Thus, stability is not simply about continuity of outcomes and processes but about their political and normative significance. From this perspective, the issue of stability can be understood in relation to other constituents of the nexus of the common good. Unfortunately, this has not been the rule in sustainability debates. For instance, in the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (1987), the notion of stability, beneath the concern for sustainability, contains a negative moral evaluation of current generations for future ones. The report is careful in specifying that sustainability does not depend on the same level of resources but on the nexus that would allow different generations to maintain their common good. Its view is that this nexus is at risk by practices that do not take into account the nexus of the common good for future generations.

The Earth Charter (1992) highlights an important characteristic of sustainability that can influence future stability prospects, namely, people's acknowledgement of their interdependence and fragility. This point cannot be ignored, because it provides a simple, but essential, link between stability and the common good, mediated by the use of natural resources. Instability comes as a result of our lack of acknowledgement of our interdependence and common destiny. Stability is thus an outcome of a common good based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace. There is clearly a mix of different conceptual perspectives here but it should not detract us from the main point about stability being a feature of societies in which

people assume responsibility to one another, including the challenge of taking into account future generations.

Having said that, it should be noted that both paradigms (Brundtland and the Earth Charter) are based on a well-established diagnostic of instability regarding not simply the dominant patterns of production and consumption, their negative environmental impacts with consequent depletion of resources, but also their unequal impacts on poverty, education and the wellbeing of the world population. These reports argue for a 'shared vision of basic values' that could provide an ethical foundation for the nexus of the common good that they are proposing. However, they articulate this vision based on a set of principles that gave rise to an approach to tackle these issues consolidated by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and further extended to the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within these frameworks the issue of stability disappears and sustainability becomes the achievement of particular goals within very specific timeframes. The dictionary sense of stability seems to become prominent in these frameworks given that their main emphasis is on outcomes. It is true that some of them might refer to processes that generate these outcomes but issues of fairness among goals are very difficult to tackle within this perspective.

The concept of resilience, understood as a capacity to manage negative shocks without suffering long-term losses, is also relevant to this discussion because it addresses underlying conditions that can explain stability over time. It has been applied to a wide range of disciplines, such as environment studies, education, psychology, medicine and sociology (Southwick et al. 2014). We can talk about resilient individuals, resilient ecosystems, resilient families, resilient organisations, and resilient societies. When societies are not resilient, they suffer long-term, irreversible losses. When they are resilient, they can recover and return to their previous (one would assume 'stable') trajectory. Often, resilient societies might learn in the face of adverse social experiences or events.

Resilience is then the capacity to maintain a stable trajectory despite adverse shocks. This does not mean that stability cannot be affected by a brief period of instability (or disequilibrium) but that, overall, its underlying structures have this potential to recover, bouncing back to stability. When we apply this concept to the nexus of the common good,

we can appreciate how some unstable outcomes can temporarily coexist with a stable nexus or how even some elements of the nexus can be transitorily unstable as part of a resilient nexus. This is an important acknowledgement because we should not expect a stable nexus to always appear stable. This is not a necessity.

If stability shares similar properties as the concept of resilience, it might entail a demand for actually moving forward, namely, that as a result of adverse shocks there is a learning from the experiences that potentialise future gains (rather than losses). In fact, the more a system is exposed to adverse situations and recovers from them, the stronger its capacity for resilience will be.

Overall, it is important to acknowledge that there are different senses in which the stability of the common good nexus can be interpreted. Thus, we should not restrict it to mere notions of continuity. Rather, it entails aspects of interdependence, fragility, shared values, and counterfactual notions of how the nexus can manage adverse shocks (and might suffer or benefit from them). Therefore, stability cannot be simply assessed by what we can empirically see from the nexus. It has to refer to normative features of the nexus—the point that is examined in the sequence.

2. Stability: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Stability and sustainability are different concepts. But they are intrinsically related because stability involves certain things to be sustained. This is not however a trivial relationship. As Anand and Sen (2000, p. 2036) note, ‘The approach of sustainable development presupposes some basic agreement on what is to be sustained’. This opens a range of normative issues related to the processes, or the nexus, behind the social choice of these ‘certain things to be sustained’. For instance, these things to be sustained can be *underspecified* in such a way that nothing concrete can be preserved for future generations. As such, they can become an article of political speeches, rather than concrete goals for policy-making. Alternatively, they can be *overspecified*, making it harder to actually achieve those specific things to be preserved. This overspecification can also be conducive to a generalisation of targets, leading to a homogenisation of results. In both cases they are not

operational in a policy sense. Be that as it may, the real complexity behind the notion of sustainability and stability is their normative status. As Anand and Sen (2000, p. 2038) put it:

There would, however, be something distinctly odd if we were deeply concerned for the well-being of the future—and as yet unborn—generations while ignoring the plight of the poor today. The moral obligation underlying sustainability is an injunction to preserve the capacity for future people to be as well off as we are. This has a terribly hollow ring if it is not accompanied by a moral obligation to protect and enhance the well-being of present people who are poor and deprived. [...] It would be a gross violation of the universalist principle if we were to be obsessed about *intergenerational* equity without at the same time seizing the problem of *intragenerational* equity: the ethic of universalism certainly demands such impartiality.

This argument challenges any conception of stability and sustainability that would claim to be normatively neutral. There is a *good side* of stability when the ethical principles that it stands for and the universalist principles of intra- and intergenerational equity are respected. On the other hand, there is a *bad side* of stability when it entails contradictory principles that might perpetuate situations of injustice or (unfair) inequality. When applied to the nexus of the common good this means that the normative aspect of stability needs to be added to this concept. For instance, stability of institutions might lead to a lack of adaptation to new environmental challenges and can actually act as a conservative force against the common good. In addition, stability of discrimination or prejudices can undermine the common good of societies. So, unlike the other pillars of the common good nexus, namely, agency freedom, governance, justice and humanity, the dimension of stability can be normatively ambiguous and therefore needs a normative anchor to make sense in the nexus. Thus, the *ugly side* of this discussion is to ignore this important aspect of the stability dimension.

Indeed, the stability dimension projects the nexus into the future and embraces issues related to its dynamics (see Chapter 2). But what does it mean? It means that stability involves a comparison of elements of the common good nexus at different moments in time. This means that intertemporal issues cannot be ignored. But neither can intratemporal issues, as Anand and Sen (2000) argued. A good example of issues that combine inter- and intratemporal equity concerns would be for

instance the current trends of inequality in the world. According to the World Inequality Report (2018) there is a rising inequality (within our generation) from 1980 to 2016 of the top 10% share income across the world, which is today achieving levels of 37% in Europe, 47% in the US, and 61% in the Middle-East. From a historical perspective, this increase in inequality marks the end of the postwar egalitarian era in the world. From a conceptual perspective, this increase undermines the stability of the common good nexus. But this is only the case because these very high levels of inequality can be considered normatively negative. Otherwise, we would have to investigate whether particular levels of inequality would not be positive, in the sense of conducive to higher incentives and higher prosperity. So, the selection of what are positive and what are negative aspects of stability will depend on the normative anchor that we attach to them. The good and the bad, as we call them here, depend on the values about what is to be sustained.

Common bads, such as bad institutions, bad public schools or bad democracy, can be very stable and this does not make them any better, quite the opposite. This is not simply a conceptual issue but a practical one affecting how different dimensions and scales are to be harmonised when part of a composite index. It is important to note that behind any index there are conceptual links establishing their dimensions. In the case of the nexus of the common good there are five key normative dimensions (stability is one of them) that contain among themselves potential good and bad features of stability, as described by Table 1 below.

If agency freedom depends on individual and collective capacity for action and interaction (see Chapter 4), it is to be expected that a minimum of predictability and stability are necessary for them to happen. A society where individuals randomly change their views is a society with immense difficulties for coordination and interaction. Indeed, collective agency freedom would be extremely difficult to achieve under these conditions. At the same time, stability could not be supreme such that the freedom (understood here as opportunities or possibilities) could not be characterised. Indeed, Buchanan (1954) argued that what makes democracy an ideal political regime is the possibility of revising its agreements. If the outcomes of collective choice processes were cast in stone, this would undermine the possibility of

revision that for Buchanan is the core of democracy. This means that the optimum level of stability of the common good nexus, as far as agency freedom is concerned, should be defined at an intermediate level. Too little stability cannot support individual and collective agency, but too much stability can undermine the foundations of freedom and agency.

Humanity (see Chapter 5), as recently argued by Nussbaum (2019), should count on a material basis for its flourishing. The original Ciceronian-Stoic ideas of respect for humanity need duties of material aid that are enjoyed by everyone in a given society. Within this perspective, social goods are essential for defining people's conditions of life. In their turn, these conditions affect not only people's values, habits and collective processes of choice, but the imbalance of power between people from different walks of life. So, part of the stability of humanity can be achieved by external social goods, not simply for their influence on individual practical reason and moral choice but for their impact on the values relevant for collective processes. Rawls's (2001) concern, for instance, with primary goods was related to fairness and impartiality in defining constitutional principles. Nussbaum's argument is more about the moral psychology necessary for motivating humanity in the promotion of common good. Here, stability depends on a constant provision of fundamental social goods, not because of the goods *per se* but because of their implications for common good processes.

Table 1 Good and bad features of the stability of the common good nexus.

Normative dimensions	Stability: good features	Stability: bad features
Agency freedom	Consolidation and coherence of social views, stability, predictability and revisable goals	Uncertainty and irregularity of social views, unpredictability and non-revisable goals
Humanity	Social goods as guarantees of stability; collective values crystallised into habits and harmony towards the universal common good	Humanity not materialised into a shared basis of social goods; random collective values

Normative dimensions	Stability: good features	Stability: bad features
Governance	Existence of a management capability is important to guarantee the integration and stability of the nexus; capacity of efficient management and provision of common goods; stability as expansion of the nexus	Lack of governance undermines the stability of the nexus; the nonexistence of an efficient provision of common goods challenges its stability; the nexus can be impoverished and shrink
Justice	Stability of shared arrangements and implementation in the generation and distribution of social goods	Absence of shared arrangements and instability in the processes that are behind the implementation of generation and distribution of social goods

Nebel and Medina (Chapter 2) observe how the dynamic nature of the nexus is inherently fragile. What gives materiality to it is its governance that adapts new demands towards a common future and consolidates past achievements (see Chapter 6). But governance cannot exist without stability. Governance needs structures, with institutions and organisations and their corresponding norms, protocols, etc., that do not come out of nothing and that cannot be changed all the time. In fact, many instruments of governance might be defined constitutionally, thereby meaning that a qualified parliamentary majority is required to change them. When stability promotes a deeper and broader integration of the nexus, it fosters governance. When conflicts and new situations do not allow a minimum of stability for governance, it cannot fulfil its basic functions. So, stability is a key ingredient of management capability, helping not simply with the functionality of governance but its ability to tackle new issues. In its turn, governance can also impact negatively on the stability of the nexus, characterising their interdependence. One interesting case is when governance is not stable but it is resilience, that is, it is able to adapt to shocks without losing its functionality. The concept of stability can also be understood as a form of resilience.

Finally, stability seems a critical element for the promotion of justice, in particular distributive justice. In the common good nexus, justice is not simply about how people participate in the generation of social goods and how these goods are shared among them, but how the nexus itself incorporates processes of interaction, cooperation, and collaboration necessary for these results (see Chapter 7). Of course, these processes need to be stable somehow, because otherwise they cannot take place. As such, they demand stability in the way that different individuals recognise each other at a societal level and that the state consolidates in rights and laws the results of these processes of interaction, cooperation, and collaboration. For many, justice can only be achieved when these more consolidated, stable elements are in place. This is as much the case of philosophers in the liberal tradition such as Rawls, Sen, and Nussbaum as it is the case of philosophers in the critical tradition such as Honneth. Therefore, the common good nexus demands stability in the establishment of shared meanings of justice and implementation of socially just arrangements.

In order to achieve the social function of justice a minimum stability is also required, otherwise we would see much volatility in the processes necessary for certain basic arrangements of justice. One cannot develop a certain relation with others and then suddenly change it in a random way. The element of 'togetherness' of justice needs some minimum stability for its evolution.

Stability is neither good nor bad *per se*. It depends on how it complements other dimensions of the common good nexus. As much as it is true that it seems important for the characterisation of other dimensions of the nexus, it needs to be further clarified in relation to its normative quality. We can have good stability and bad stability and probably only participatory and communicative processes, similar to what Rawls named public reason or overlapping consensus, can establish this normative quality in democratic states. At the bottom, there is an element of collective choice in defining the normative quality of stability. We cannot forget however that different social groups have different powers and voices and that somehow these processes will always be imperfect. There is an aspect of ugliness in considering this imbalance in power and voice as shaping the normative guidelines of the common good nexus. But it is a reality that needs to be faced.

Sometimes, the common good nexus defined by societies might reflect the power and prestige of a select few.

3. Measuring the Stability of the Common Good Nexus

Assuming however that the normative aspects of the common good nexus work in a democratic and stable environment, it remains a challenge to operationalise these measures of stability of the nexus. Indeed, there are several technical issues involved in the measurement of this dimension. Let's start with the most evident: given that stability involves different moments in time, how do we compare them? This would be a trivial question if not for the fact that people (and societies) normally have a time preference. That is, enjoying the benefits of the common good nexus today is better than enjoying the same benefits tomorrow. Or, alternatively, enjoying the common good nexus today is better than enjoying the common good nexus tomorrow. But if we prefer to have it today, how much are we willing to pay to have it today, rather than tomorrow? This will depend on our time preference. The result will define our intertemporal rate of discount.

This is a traditional common problem that has not been fully addressed by well-known sustainability definitions such as the one from the Brundtland Report (1987), according to which sustainability involves a kind of development that satisfies the needs of the current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. But why should current generations bother about future generations, if quite often they will live longer, and be more educated and richer? Thus, the issue of discounting is not a trivial one. More importantly, behind this technical issue there is a serious debate about the notion of intergenerational equity. The same thing applies to the common good nexus. Why should we bother about the common good nexus today and not about the common good nexus tomorrow? But if we do, should we discount the future common good nexus in relation to our current one or not? If we discount it, we are actually favouring our generation over the future generation.

We can proceed with the current generation discounting the common good of all future generations, and each successive generation doing the same for their successors. But should we allow discounting on a regular basis? As Solow (1993, p. 165) has argued,

You may wonder why I allow discounting at all. I wonder, too: no generation 'should' be favored over any other. The usual scholarly excuse—which relies on the idea that there is a small fixed probability that civilization will end during any little interval of time—sounds far-fetched. We can think of intergenerational discounting as a concession to human weakness or as a technical assumption of convenience (which it is).

However, not everyone would be happy with this alternative. In analysing the issue of climate change, which comprises very long timeframes (such as 50–100 years), Stern (2007) advocated for a zero-discount rate on the ethical basis that every person should count equally in this problem. There is also a practical issue. Because the timeframe is very long, even a very small rate of discount will produce net present values of their flows (of wellbeing, for instance) that will be close to zero.

This raises a key issue when we talk about the stability of the common good nexus, namely, what is its temporary? Is the nexus something that lasts four to five years, as part of a political cycle, or is it something that might last a generation? Or even longer, if we consider that it can reflect the political history of a country? In this last case, one can approach the issue following Stern's advice of discounting less and less the outcomes of the common nexus that will flow to future generations. But if we are talking about arrangements (in terms of agency freedom or governance) that might have a more immediate impact, then perhaps we should discount the outcomes for future generations. How much this discount would be is an important policy issue to be discussed depending on the particular configuration of a certain common good nexus.

This will have another important implication concerning the use of strategic planning behind the promotion of a particular common good nexus: the choice of outputs (what one does) and outcomes (the results of what one does) within different timeframes. This is different from the theoretical frame that establishes the logical relations between the different dimensions. When stability and time are the essence of the matter, as is the case in strategic plans, one should move towards implementation issues and distribute outputs and outcomes in time. Because all different dimensions of the common good nexus have different time horizons, concern with stability might suggest different arrangements between the dimensions of the common good nexus. By

doing so, the pure conceptual model can be translated into a diversity of ‘impure’ empirical models, such as one that tackles the empirical links between governance and agency freedom towards a particular justice issue (Figure 1):

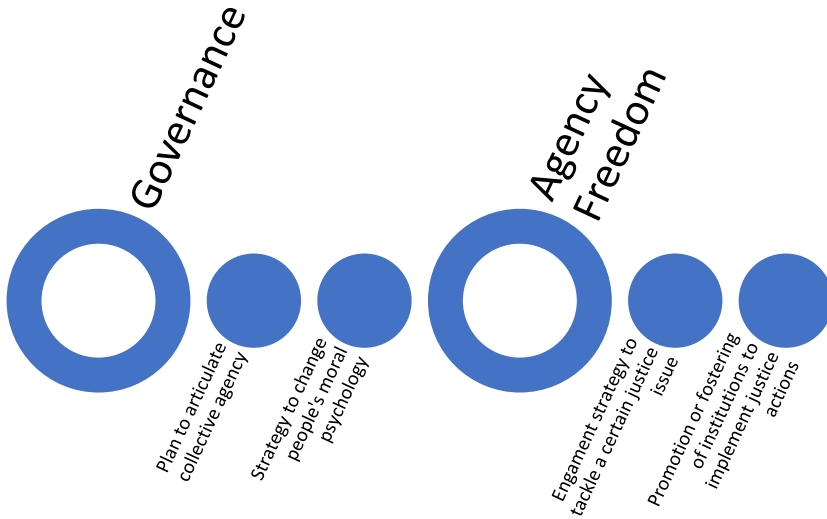


Figure 1. Illustration of a possible empirical model of common good nexus.

Stability in these dimensions would imply different timeframes for each of these outputs and their corresponding activities. In fact, the methodology of RBM (Results Based Management) would be most convenient here, allowing an analysis of the degree of coherence of the stability of different dimensions of the common good nexus. This analysis is relevant depending on the implementation model of the nexus (for instance, bottom-up vs top-down). Quite often, bottom-up models would take more time to be implemented and would add more demand on the stability component whereas top-down models tend to be accompanied by stronger governance elements and might, at least for the short-term, be more stable.

There is an additional complication that might arise in terms of stability: if the common good nexus can be employed to achieve different policy objectives, it is natural that the nexus can be affected by the temporality of these objectives. Not to mention that some of these objectives, following Cunha and Heckman (2007), might be subject to

sensitive and *critical* periods. For instance, if the common good nexus is applied to the promotion of child education, the dimensions of humanity, governance and justice should be considered altogether for a period of at least eight to nine years for primary school and twelve years for primary plus secondary school for many countries in the world, allowing the nexus to finish a cycle of human flourishing. The situation might be different if the common good nexus is to be used to tackle for instance a pandemic, such as the one resulting from COVID-19. The nexus necessary for fostering short- to middle-term agency freedom should be built (empirically) on well-grounded forms of governance that need strong stability to cope with an emergency situation. So, different timeframes for different policies or institutions can be translated into distinct policy commitments with specific stability requirements. We should expect a multi-stability requirement because there are diverse durations that will produce or enable multidimensional human flourishing.

Different dimensions can also show different sensitivity to change. Altogether, this makes the measurement of the stability dimension of the common good nexus very complex and to a large extent dependent on the aims for its use. For this reason, it is important to make a distinction between the common good nexus theoretical model presented in this book and its several different empirical manifestations. One should expect, as Sen (2009, 2017) warns us, that empirical counterparts of the common good nexus (as other justice artefacts) would at their best be incomplete, partial, and limited in their outreach. We should expand further on this discussion in the next section, but for the moment it is important to acknowledge that several technical issues involved in seriously taking the stability issue into account would comprise an extended concern with intertemporal rates of discount, empirical models of the common good nexus, different timeframes, and attention to different policy objectives.

4. Stability Indicators: A Tentative Taxonomy

Whereas most indicators focus on outputs and outcomes, stability indicators are more concerned with processes and as such seem suitable for use in analyses about the common good nexus. They are part of what Sen named 'comprehensive indicators', tackling not only culmination

outcomes but also their processes. This means that they should not be seen as a list or a checklist about the provision of common goods. Rather, they should focus on the normative aspects involved in the stability of the common good nexus, such as fairness and equality. This is not a minor point. The normative or ethical aspects of stability indicators should not be ignored, because unlike other dimensions there is no clear scale in the stability dimension. One can perpetuate unequal and unfair arrangements and therefore a simple notion of continuity is not enough to assess the common good nexus in this situation.

Stability indicators can be classified according to the influence that they have on particular dimensions that we are talking about. We should however keep in mind that these dimensions interact, either logically or empirically, and as such they might provide a much more complex picture resulting from their integration. This is normally the case when the nexus is part of policy planning. Stability indicators should also respect some technical issues that cannot be ignored once we employ the common good nexus for social policy objectives. Similarly, they should adapt to particular empirical models that do not by necessity have to comprise all dimensions of the common good nexus. Table 2 below offers a tentative and simplified picture of this taxonomy (with some examples as illustrations).

One important point to remark on is that not all indicators need to be quantitative. In the absence of quantitative information, qualitative indicators can be used, where ratios can be compared, trends can be analysed, different assessments and scenarios can be considered, etc. The key issue is that indicators should contain a threshold or any other indication about the normative status of the situation that one is analysing. That is, one should know whether the situation is good or bad, as simple as that. When this is not possible, an alternative, as suggested by Sen (2017) could be the use of partial rankings or complementation strategies with the use of other informational spaces (subjective views, resources, etc.).

Another key point is that this table offers a series of examples of stability within selected common good dimensions taken in isolation. This is often not the case both conceptually and empirically. In fact, the common good nexus is precisely about the interaction of these dimensions. However, it is very difficult to assume or to guess what

Table 2 A taxonomy for stability indicators.

	Agency freedom	Humanity	Governance	Justice
Normative anchor	<p>Indicators of the degree of consolidation and coherence of social views. Example: difference of time trend between what governments want vs what opinion polls suggest</p> <p>Indicators of revisability of values. Example: number of times collective agency freedom changed during a certain timeframe (this can be seen here as a positive aspect)</p>	<p>Indicators of stability of moral psychology and collective values. Example: evolution of values measured by a well-known scale</p> <p>Indicators of coherence of collective choice. Example: existence of incoherent claims and inconsistencies over time (this can be a qualitative indicator)</p>	<p>Indicators of quality of stability of management. Example: qualitative trend suggesting evolution of management on similar or different governance nexus</p> <p>Indicators of expansion of the common good nexus. Example: number of times that governance changed to favour common good policies</p>	<p>Indicators of the degree of generation and distribution of social goods. Example: proportion of the top 20% poorest and top 20% richest appropriators of a country's social goods</p>
Characteristics of processes	<p>Indicators of aggregation of individual agency freedom. Example: qualitative availability of referendums or compilation of initiatives of popular participation</p>	<p>Indicators of provision of social goods. Example: degree of decentralisation (or other process characteristic) of provision of basic social goods</p>	<p>Indicators of stability of governance. Example: progressive vs radical changes in the constitution of the governance apparatus</p>	<p>Here, it depends on how we consider justice. For instance: if injustice is understood as a lack of legislation necessary to achieve a certain end, a compilation of this legislation could be a good process indicator of the nexus.</p>

	Agency freedom	Humanity	Governance	Justice
Policy objectives	Indicators of discount rate in cases where the policy in question is long-term. Example: assessment of the use of discount rates for different groups of people in society (and their respective agency freedom)	Indicators of representativeness of humanity. Example: degree of stability in the collective values inbuilt in certain policy objectives (this depends on the policies in question)	Indicators of implementation power. Example: degree of coherence between policy objectives and the power constituted for a governance nexus structure	Alternatively, if justice is a question of income distribution one can assess the processes that are conducive to unequal income distributions, as part of the nexus. The key element is to see how these processes evolve over time in relation to these fair or unfair outcomes
				Indicators of alleviation or mitigation of injustices over time. This will clearly depend on specific policy objectives. Example: with the objective of managing a pandemic, the stability of the common good nexus in relation to objectives and justice can be given by the proportional share of sacrifice demanded from different sectors of society and how this evolves over time.

Empirical model	Agency freedom Empirical indicators of stability of individual or collective agency freedom. Example: indicators of stability of municipal agency or indicators of stability of community agency, measured by a series of questions focusing on a particular link between a partial form of agency freedom and certain outcomes (one of the features of an empirical model would be its partiality)	Humanity Indicators of sensitivity to change (should change be necessary). Example: subjective indicators about how people feel affected by a certain category of interventions	Governance Indicators of implementation timeframe. Example: indicator of density of governance during a certain period of time, related to a particular activity or to a particular timeframe	Justice Indicators of sustainable achievable outputs and outcomes. Example: indicators of constancy of provision of certain common goods
Timeframes	Indicators of duration of agency freedom (individual and collective). The point is that the duration might not be compatible with expected timeframe. Example: time of mobilisation of certain collective agency freedom	Indicators of transmission of culture. Example: assessment of intra- and intergenerational transmission of certain cultural values Indicators of projection of human community. Example: subjective indicators of aspirations and expectations	Indicators of duration of governance within a certain policy frame. Examples are context dependent	Synchronicity indicators. Within the context of RBM one should find certain synchronicity and coherence among timeframes. It is not possible that an input to a certain process takes more time to be achieved and is not available when needed

the appropriate stability indicators would be without knowing the particular problem at hand. This does not mean however that we have no guideline in this task. Instead, the table above can provide a starting point, with some suggestions. But these should be complemented with indicators that will register the stability of interactions between all of the other dimensions. This would be tantamount to a 3D picture (given that the table above already crossed the stability dimension with other dimensions, as if we had a 2D picture, to use the same metaphor).

One additional complication is that all of the five vertices in the common good nexus are bi-directional, suggesting that some indicators might not be symmetrical when we add time, which is precisely the case with the issue of stability. Perhaps when we use the political (Rawlsian) notion of stability, the temporal dimension might be less pronounced, but for those of governance, humanity, and agency this seems to be less the case.

Of course, there will be trade-offs to sort out and normative issues to be settled before the nexus is established. In certain cases, where the nexus depends on overcoming certain violations of human rights and key hurdles, such as gender discrimination, these should be tackled before a nexus can be established. This is what Sen (2009) suggests when he argues that justice should not be seen as a perfect concept. Instead, common good can be promoted by tackling several senses of injustice on a realisation-focused basis. The common good nexus does not need to be all encompassing when applied to the messy real world. In addition, the stability of basic institutions of society should be viewed critically as evidence (or not) of agents' disposition to construct the common good in the short and long term. We cannot take for granted that stability is a desired property of the common good nexus and attention to its appraisal should be constant.

Conclusion

The stability dimension is one of the most complex and intricate dimensions in the common good nexus. This happens because there is not as much reflection about it as we find for other dimensions such as agency, humanity, governance, and justice. But this does not mean that stability is less important, only that we know less about it and how it interacts with the other dimensions.

Perhaps one of the reasons why it is not as popular as the other dimensions is that it does not have a clear normative scale behind it. One can achieve stability from within a very bad state of affairs. Therefore, there is not a clear line separating good and bad, as there is in the case of other dimensions where we can see the lines between agency and anomy, good and bad governance, good and bad moral sentiment, and just and unjust arrangements. This means that we should first clarify what the normative sense behind certain kinds of stability within the nexus is. Only after this has been sorted should we face operationalisation issues.

These technical challenges are far from trivial, and quite often they can only be addressed within empirical counterparts of the common good nexus. This reflects a clear distinction between the design and implementation of social policies. But here, because the focus is on the nexus, on the processes that generate the common good, we have to factor in the additional complexity of the interaction between different dimensions. The suggestions offered here are just the beginning of an agenda that should entail attribution problems, counterfactual inferences and the use of econometrics, that are better left to empirical analyses.

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