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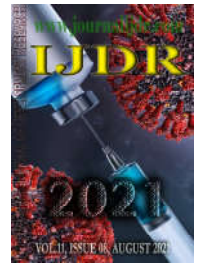
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH IN TRANSFORMING PEOPLE'S LIVES

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ABSTRACT

Reducing poverty in urban areas is a growing need for governments and policy makers. The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) is claimed to mitigate vulnerabilities of people and it centers on understanding realities and priorities of the poor population in an urban region. It is a way of thinking about objectives of development activities, its scope and priorities. To realize the opportunities of people centric urban development, it is necessary to first acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of poverty and that the poor develop diverse and changing livelihood portfolio. SLA provides a systematic basis for identifying how people manage assets within the context of their own vulnerabilities and institutional framework. This paper assesses the impact of sustainable livelihood as a transformative change towards development.

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING 'LIVELIHOOD AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD'

There are thousand daily activities that end up providing what we call, Livelihood. In times of crises, the mechanisms of resilience, that is to say, the ability of people to face and recover from crises vary, depending on various factors.

The DFID defines livelihoods as "a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living..." it further says that "... A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities or assets while not undermining the natural resource base." (DFID, 1999)

UNDERSTANDING 'VULNERABILITY' IN A LIVELIHOOD CONTEXT

While focus of humanitarian effort continues to support the victims, the sustainable livelihoods approach is being adopted by numerous

state and nongovernmental organizations to build up preparedness, resistance and resilience. Vulnerability is the term with multiple dimensions.

"Much prose uses "vulnerable" and "poor" as alternating synonyms. But vulnerability is not the same as income-poverty or poverty more broadly defined. It means not lack or want but exposure and defenselessness. It has two sides: the external side of exposure to shocks, stress and risk; and the internal side of defenselessness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss" (R.Chambers, Poverty and livelihoods, UNDP).

To systematise vulnerability, Birkmann in his research introduces different definitions and conceptual frameworks developed and used by different schools of thought (Fig.1). From the various explanations of the terms, one of the interpretations can be made that those who are unable to cope or adapt are inevitably vulnerable and unlikely to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Livelihood principles to address vulnerability: Many authors have long argued over the applications of the sustainable livelihood in different context and interpretations over the years.

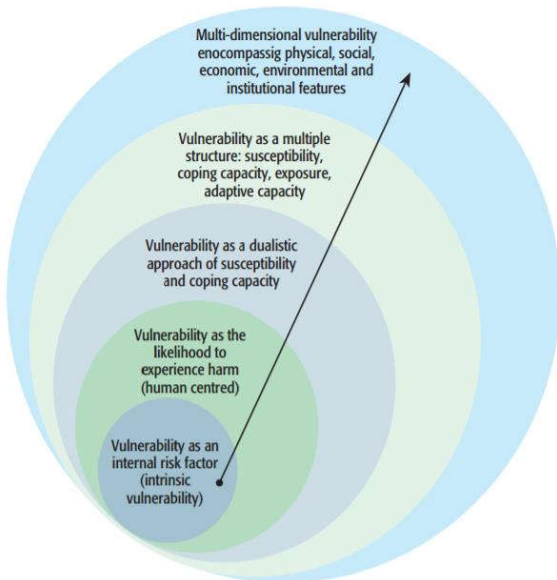


Figure 1. Source: Birkmann 2005

Sustainable livelihoods intensely depend on the multiplicity of activities and resources. The capabilities approach was further described as “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living” (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The features of SLA are that they are people centered, responsive, multi-level, conducted in partnerships, sustainable, dynamic and by applying a holistic perspective more relevance in given on improving peoples’ livelihoods. To address poverty holistically through mainstreaming good development principles, the Department for International Development (DFID) sought to form a framework to operationalize in a structured way. In her Paper emphasizing on the *principles and methodologies* of SLA, Diana Carney wrote about the operational principles of this approach (D. Carney, FID ; SLA: Progress and Possibilities for change). The paper describes the analytical/operational guidelines that flow from the normative principles which are essentially;

- People centered
- Empowering
- Responsive and participatory
- Sustainable
- Multi-level and holistic
- Conducted in partnership
- Disaggregated
- Long-term and flexible.

This framework highlights some of the key points of SLA such as assets, vulnerability, policies/institutions and the fact that all these interact. A few authors complement the discussions of vulnerability with the notion of “*capacity*” – the ability of a group or household to resist a hazard’s harmful effects and to recover easily” (Anderson and Woodrow 1998; Eade 1998; IFRC 1999b; Wisner 2003a)

IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS:

Analytical frameworks: To assess the effective implementations of the SLAs has been a concern over the years that many state and institutional organizations have voiced. The framework adopted by UNDP is quite different from the ones discussed earlier yet; they have overlapping areas as they describe the scope in a broader aspect.

- The Human ecology side refers to the human society and its relation with the natural resource base.
- The policy matrix refers to the policy structures embedded at the macro and micro level and its relationship with the livelihoods system.

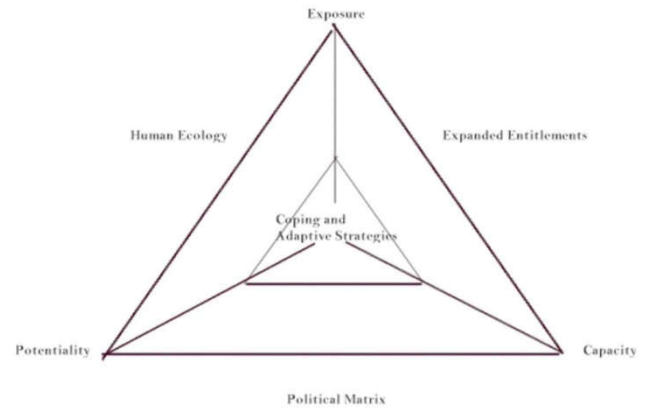


Figure 2. Analytical framework for SL used by UNDP (Hoon et al. 1997)

- The expanded entitlements refer to the social support structures and capacities to make use of the environmental resources.
- The core of this triangle comprises of the coping and adaptive strategies of the livelihood approach.

The vulnerability assessment model (VA) is of direct relevance in the humanitarian context. The sustainable livelihoods framework adapted by the DFID; is a holistic effort to capture many complexities of livelihoods along with their constraints and opportunities (explained in figure 3). These constraints are shaped by various factors over which an individual may not have control over or not even be aware of. To emphasize on this, let's consider the example of a household unit for our analysis.

Not all individuals within this unit have equal decision-making power or they may not even benefit equally from household asset or income. The vulnerability context comes into the picture here. It refers to the environment in which the people live. National, economic, political trends, technology changes, shocks such as illness/death, conflict weather and seasonality (prices, production cycles etc.) are emphasized. The 'transforming structures and processes' box refers to the institutions and policies that affect poor peoples' lives.

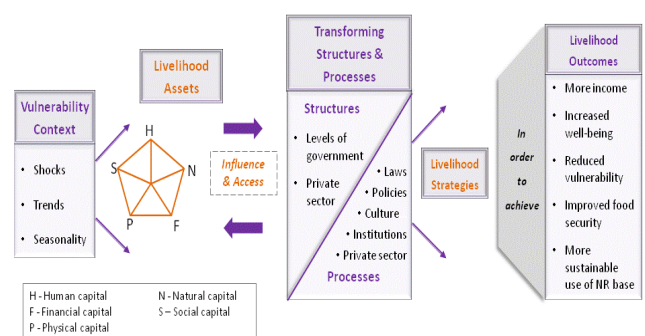


Figure 3. Source: DFID (1999) p. 1.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

Case studies and examples

“Development is the process by which vulnerabilities are reduced and capacities increased.” (Anderson and Woodrow, 1988), which is the core value that various SLAs propagate. Poverty remains as one of the core dimensions of vulnerability. As quoted (ActionAid, 2005: 7), “All poor people are vulnerable, but not all vulnerable people are poor.” Vulnerability is like a time bomb waiting to explode into poverty. According to a brief on case study provided by ODI(1999), the impact of programme design are discussed in detail.

Programme design in Pakistan and Zambia on the positive side, the SL approach

- Provided a basis for a coherent poverty-focused programme;
- Helped in setting up a platform for policy linkages;
- Drew in the findings of a wide range of experience from development projects and from policy (and other) research;
- Provided a common goal for technical specialists to work towards in place of sectoral or disciplinary interests.

Remaining difficulties included

- The lack of any obvious institutional partner willing to champion anti-poverty programmes;
- The pervasiveness of discrimination against the poor, making it likely that – without high-level political commitment – initiatives, even in apparently uncontested arenas, will be challenged or dominated by the better-off;
- Potential tensions with those (including politicians and some aid administrators) whose preference is for discrete, new projects that have high public relations value.

Coastal Gujrat, India: In 2001 an earthquake (magnitude 7.7, USGS) struck the state of Gujarat in India. Over 13,000 people had died and 3,00,000 buildings collapsed. This was a tragic blow to the region which was already suffering from a drought and the aftermath of cyclone in the last 3 year. The devastation affected the area socially, economically and physically. The PNY was a joint initiative of 15 diverse organizations of the government, non-government, academics and international organizations for community based effective rehabilitation. PNY focused on disaster mitigation making community safer against future disasters. The project goals and objectives involved;

- Focus on mitigation; to make vulnerable communities safer.
- Identify sustainable means of livelihood; for making the community independent.
- Empower communities; to become aware of its own needs and abilities.
- To establish suitable standards
- Implementation and use of technology.

This initiative was successful especially in terms of community involvement and ownership. *"The PNY was conceived as a model program right from its inception stage. It sought to empower the affected community to the extent that they are sufficiently resilient against future disasters."*(Decentralization.UN 2005).

CONCLUSION

"Sustainable livelihoods are an objective on which most poor people and professionals can agree."(R.Chambers, Poverty and livelihoods, UNDP). He further argues that *"THE ANALYSIS REFRAMES and shifts the balance of objectives of development: from reducing income-poverty to diminishing deprivation and enhancing well-being; and from increasing employment to sustaining livelihood."*The impact of sustainable livelihood is a transformative change towards development.

The SLA in its various adaptations essentially aims for a long term development goal which is excessively micro focused, time consuming and complex. People's capacities are the main resource to set up, strengthen, diversify and protect their livelihood, however these efforts also require proper institutional policies and processes. Livelihoods are the backbone of a person's dignity both in times of crises and in ordinary situations. A minor stress on this existing model can hamper the growth of the community and set the cycle backward. Livelihoods include both what people have (their assets and their capabilities) and what they do to make a living—both of which occur within a larger social context. The asset pentagon can facilitate assessment of what people have and can facilitate comparisons. The sustainable livelihoods framework places these assets, or capitals, into a larger conceptual framework in order to understand the livelihood outcomes. *"Development is the process by which vulnerabilities are reduced and capacities increased."* (Anderson and Woodrow, 1988)

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