

A Scoping Study of the Impacts of Community-Based Land Reform on Rural Scotland

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Abstract

Scotland has been the setting for a major initiative in what has been described by Bryden and Geisler (2007) as 'community-based land reform' which entails the replacement of private property with community ownership of rural land. New legislation has been passed to give communities a right to acquire land assets. Although there have been significant numbers of community-based acquisitions of land in Scotland in the last decade, many of these predate the specific measures introduced in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Based on recent work undertaken for the Scottish Government, this paper explores the underlying rationale for community-based land reform, scopes the impacts to date with respect to the (non-crofting specific) community right to buy and reviews the likely future impacts of community-based land reform on rural Scotland.

Keywords: *Scotland, Community-based, land reform, livelihoods*

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade in many European countries, public land ownership has been largely dismantled in a move towards individual private ownership. Over the same time, a very different approach to land reform has emerged in Scotland, which resonates more with community development thinking in non-European arenas. In the late 1990s, a broad-ranging review took place by the government-appointed Land Reform Policy Group (LRPG), which examined the policies and other measures needed to remove the widely perceived land-based barriers to the sustainable development of Scottish rural communities and advocated a programme of what has been termed 'community based land reform' (Bryden and Geisler 2007).

The LRPG reported in 1999 in a Vision for the Future (Land Reform Policy Group 1999). That vision contains many legislative and wider aspirational components and their proposals are listed below.

- more local involvement, greater commitment and accountability by private landowners in rural Scotland;
- more scope for community ownership and management of local land where this can be sustainable;

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³ The work on which this paper is based was undertaken for the Scottish Government by the Macaulay Institute, Pareto Consulting, the Rural Development Company and Peter Cook. The authors of this paper would like to thank the study team as a whole and the desk officer and steering committee for their support. This paper represents the views of the authors and not those of the Scottish Government.

- more scope for releasing land for housing and local development where this is sustainable and secures the retention and if possible the expansion of fragile rural communities;
- more scope for smallholdings supporting a wide range of land-based and other economic activity where this is sustainable and secures the retention and if possible the expansion of fragile rural communities;
- about the same level of ownership by public bodies, but with more local involvement and accountability and more employment of local people;
- more local involvement and accountability and more employment of local people by non-Governmental organisations who own land in rural Scotland;
- outdated and unfair feudal arrangements swept away;
- conditionality of land ownership where appropriate to reflect modern circumstances;
- a more constructive approach to problem cases, including those relating to the foreshore and the seabed;
- more definitive information readily available about land ownership;
- more broad-brush information readily available about land ownership;
- more information readily available about beneficial owners;
- more information readily available about public support relating to land;
- better integration of policy for rural land use at national level;
- more integrated planning of rural land use at local level;
- more community involvement in decisions about rural land use;
- more public access on a responsible basis;
- more scope for diversity of agricultural tenancy arrangements;
- simpler and cheaper arrangements for resolution of disputes between agricultural tenants and their landlords;
- wider opportunities for tenant farmers to diversify;
- greater protection for those who own property built on leased land;
- more sustainable crofting communities;
- more local involvement in and accountability for crofting administration;
- much simplified crofting legislation and administration;
- more (or at least not fewer) active crofters;

- undertaking a wider range of land-based and other economic activity rather than predominantly agriculture.

Since that time, what has been described as ‘a suite of measures’, with both legislative and non-legislative components, has been put in place with a view to removing the land-based obstacles to sustainable development. Some of these measures required new legislation and relate to specific changes such as the abolition of feudal tenure; others required no legislative change; and others were aspirational and were hedged with qualifications such as ‘where this can be sustainable’ or ‘if possible’. This suggests certainty about underlying principles and desirability of land reform, but less certainty about outcomes and impacts, alongside recognition that the geography of impact and outcome is likely to be strongly shaped by the current and spatially variable structures of land ownership and land management practices.

Two key stated purposes of the suite of land reform measures were the pursuit of **greater diversity** in land ownership and the pursuit of a **greater degree of community involvement** in relation to rural land use. The underlying structure of land ownership in Scotland has long been considered to exert a negative impact on sustainable rural development. Some data are available (see for example Wightman 1996) which show a highly concentrated pattern of land ownership. A significant proportion of ownership in some of the remoter parts of Scotland is associated with sporting shooting, where amenity-related motives for management prevail. Further, it has been argued that the non-landowning community, including the tenant occupiers, have often had a weak level of engagement with decisions about the use to which the land is put and that a greater degree of community engagement would be desirable.

Seven areas of legislation and associated non-legislative measures were explored in a scoping study of possible impacts and outcomes undertaken by the authors and others, in full recognition by the sponsors that it was ‘too early in the implementation and development of many of these changes to fully evaluate their long-term, cross cutting and cumulative impacts, but that a review of the necessary considerations should be undertaken’ (Scottish Executive 2006). These included:

- the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003;
- the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003;
- the Abolition of Feudal Tenure (Scotland) Act 2000;
- the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2004;
- the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004;
- the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003; and
- the Crofting Reform etc. Act 2007.

The aim of the study was to scope out indicators to enable the performance of these various arenas of land reform to be assessed. The scoping study was undertaken just after a change of government in Scotland in 2007. The new Scottish Government’s has identified five strategic objectives of a healthier, wealthier and fairer, smarter, safer and stronger, and greener Scotland that apply to all areas of policy intervention and should connect to the land reform agenda. This desire to effect a cross cutting approach to the planning and evaluation of Scottish Government interventions indicates a need for a holistic approach to evaluation. For

the evaluation, the study team used a modified livelihoods framework. These new cross-cutting strategic objectives for the Scottish Government (see Table 1) can be seen to be broadly consistent with the livelihoods framework in which capitals/assets are the focus of attention.

Table 1 Capital assets in the DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) framework and Scottish Government (SG) Strategic objectives

SRL capitals/assets	SG strategic objectives
Economic	Wealthier
Human	Smarter/healthier
Social	Fairer
Environmental	Greener/healthier
Physical	Greener

The land reform measures were implemented alongside other policy reforms which, although not formally related to land reform measures, were similarly disposed to connect to some of the overarching aims of land reform. Rural Scotland Better Still Naturally (SEERAD 2007) summarises thinking just before the change of government, but only one short paragraph touches on community land ownership. The new Scottish Rural Development Plan frames rural policy thinking and its measures support sustainable rural development. Local involvement in nature conservation has been promoted widely through Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs), which derive from the Rio Earth Summit; community involvement in land purchase has been supported for the last decade by the work of the Community Land Fund in Highlands and Islands Enterprise; and endogenous rural development and community engagement has been promoted actively within the LEADER programmes and through a range of other initiatives.

In a crowded policy field, the association of effects as evidenced in indicators of socio-economic impact to specific land reform-related causes is extremely difficult, especially when dealing with publicly available aggregate datasets which have limited coverage of many facets and limitations of availability at appropriate spatial scale. There is a constant state of flux in policy design and implementation and much scope for different policies and instruments to interact. Teasing out the relative impact of different measures is extremely difficult over a time when the mood music of rural policy has been changed across such a broad front as is the case in rural Scotland over the last decade.

A second feature of the environment of land reform merits attention in relation to scoping of impacts. Some land reform measures were operationalised ‘across the board’, such as the reform of feudal tenure, while others provide a new menu of opportunity to communities to take advantage of particular provisions to change the ownership or tenure of land and/or use that land differently, if they so choose. Whilst an ‘across the board’ measure can be monitored readily at aggregate level, other measures based on voluntaristic uptake demand a much more spatially focussed approach at community level, even down to the level of individual land holdings. Consequently, whilst it might be possible to offer some limited data on aggregate

effects of across-the-board policies, the elicitation of the effects of take-it-or-leave-it measures must be undertaken at appropriate spatial scale.

This paper focuses purely on the general Community Right to Buy (CRtB) provisions introduced under Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This legislation was influenced by the long history of popular and political interest in community land ownership within Scotland (e.g. Wightman, 1996; Macmillan et al., 2002; Brown, 2004). Bryden & Geisler (2007) report examples of community buy-outs spanning almost a century, from Glendale in 1908 to Assynt in 2005.

The legislation covers all parts of rural Scotland and relates to buildings, mineral rights and fishing rights, as well as land. However, unlike Part 3 of the Act that refers to a further, specific Crofting CRtB, Part 2 does not include an absolute right to buy. Rather it offers a framework within which communities can register a formal interest in purchasing land such that when it is offered for sale; they then have a pre-emptive right to buy if certain conditions are met. These include demonstrating community benefits and support plus securing funding to meet a market price identified by an independent valuation (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2006a; HIE, undated a).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers some of the relevant literature relating to community-based land reform. The pursuit of greater economic efficiency and social equity through a redistribution of property rights is a common theme of land reform across various countries, particularly in less developed and transitional economies. If current patterns of ownership are seen as inhibiting development by stifling entrepreneurial behaviour, then transferring ownership to individuals or communities may relieve some of the market failure constraints and lead to greater economic activity and a more even distribution of prosperity (Williamson, 1985; Bromley, 1991; de Soto, 2000, Macmillan, 2002). In general, recent European experience has indicated a strengthening of private property rights, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Swinnen et al. 1997). In many cases outside Europe, land reform is also viewed as a mechanism for recognising traditional ownership claims made by indigenous peoples (FAO, 2004) and/or simply strengthening communities and levels of self-determination without necessarily seeking tangible economic gains (Bryden & Geisler, 2007). Such reform may potentially also lead to improved information for greater transparency and democratic accountability with respect to ownership and management (e.g. Wightman, 1996, 2001; Deininger & May, 2000; Warren, 2002).

The assertions of benefits of community ownership and/or other forms of control are not restricted to rural areas. In the Scottish context, this is reflected in the extension of public funding for community initiatives to urban areas. Hence the Scottish Land Fund that had supported rural projects has evolved into the Growing Community Assets fund administered directly by the Big Lottery Fund Scotland (BLFS) under the Investing in Communities Programme. This extension reflects an earlier Partnership Agreement of the Scottish Executive, but also wider UK government interest in the role of social and community enterprise in promoting regeneration (pers. comm. Communities Scotland; pers. comm. BLFS; Lyons, 2004; Hart, 2005).

Whilst examples of community-based land reform and therefore evidence of its impacts are somewhat scarce in Western economies, evidence from less developed economies is often positive (Deininger et al., 2000; FAO, 2000; Galiani & Schargrodsy, 2005). The types of potential benefits associated with community ownership are described in the literature and are often identified (if not quantified) by communities themselves (e.g. HIE, undated b; Quirk, 2007). The main types include:

- Ownership may offer greater security than a tenancy or an informal arrangement for usage, allowing users to plan better for the future.
- Ownership may offer greater freedom to use an asset for more diverse purposes, opening-up opportunities for infrastructure improvements and new production or consumption activities.
- Ownership may facilitate access to greater funding, through financial gearing/leverage from a collateral base, thereby enabling more ambitious development.
- Ownership may encourage social networking that was inaccessible to private or public landlords but which may deliver efficiencies in local service delivery and business development.
- Ownership may allow more of the surplus (profit) from wealth-creating activities based on the asset to be retained within a community, raising local incomes and employment both directly and indirectly through multiplier effects.
- Ownership may promote community cohesion and pride through building confidence and a sense of self-worth through control of an asset, particularly if it has iconic, symbolic status that can act as a focal point for community organisation.
- Ownership, or rather the transition process to ownership and the need to self-organise as an empowered community, may engender a cultural transformation that encourages greater transparency and accountability in decision making and greater maturity in interacting with other bodies.

Against these benefits, it is also acknowledged that community ownership incurs some costs and risks. In particular, beyond the actual cost of purchasing land or any other asset, the capacity of a community to self-organise to acquire and then manage the asset may require additional and on-going resources (Dùthchas, 2001). That is, ownership incurs liabilities as well as assets and income-generation potential may be insufficient to make community ownership self-sustaining (Hart, 2001). In particular, relative to specialist and/or long-standing (land)owners, many community acquisitions are under-capitalised and suffer from a lack of appropriate financial and management expertise, which suggests the need for advisory as well as financial support (Thake, 2006; Quirk, 2007).

In addition, the effectiveness and appropriateness of transferring property rights is typically contingent upon other factors, including political stability and local cultural conditions. This means that different policies – some aimed at private, some at community and some at state control - may be required in different locations and it can be difficult to characterise and isolate impacts from other contemporary influences (May et al., 2002; Daley & Hopley, 2005; Borrás, 2006). Consequently, ownership may not necessarily be the preferred route to achieving development in all

cases (e.g. Macmillan et al., 2002; Bell, 2007; SQW, 2007) and the Community Right to Buy (CRtB) encouragement for greater community involvement – perhaps through partnership or other formal management arrangements – reflects this.

METHODS USED

In order to capture the range of impacts of community based land reform, a sustainable indicators approach was used. The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) approach was developed in the early 1990s by Chambers and others at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex (Chambers and Conway 1992). It was absorbed into the Department for International Development (DfID) orthodoxy in the late 1990s. At about the same time, other international organisations, ranging from the United Nations to NGOs such as Oxfam, developed variants on the livelihoods approach. In the late 1990s, DfID summarised the state of the art in a wide-ranging publication (Carney 1998).

The principal rationale for the application of the SRL approach is that it enables a more flexible and holistic perspective on the impacts and outcomes of changes in livelihoods arising from changes in practice and policy or donor interventions than narrower mono-disciplinary, predominantly economic approaches. It is its capacity to offer a holistic means of exploring impacts and outcomes that makes it appropriate to the task of this paper.

Although most early applications of the livelihoods approach have been within developing countries, there is nothing about the approach which invalidates it in the context of developed countries. Chambers and Conroy's (1992) definition is equally valid in both developed and developing countries:

'A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, both now and in the future, while not undermining the resource base' (quoted in Carney 1998).

The first element in the SRL framework (See Figure 1) is to recognise that rural (or any) people are at different times and for different reasons subjected to trends, shocks and stresses which compromise the livelihoods of different groups and individuals. In the Scottish context, the long-run situation of the land resource being in the hands of relatively few people, whose resource management often relates to their amenity interests rather than wider community development, constitutes the most significant trend with potentially negative repercussions.

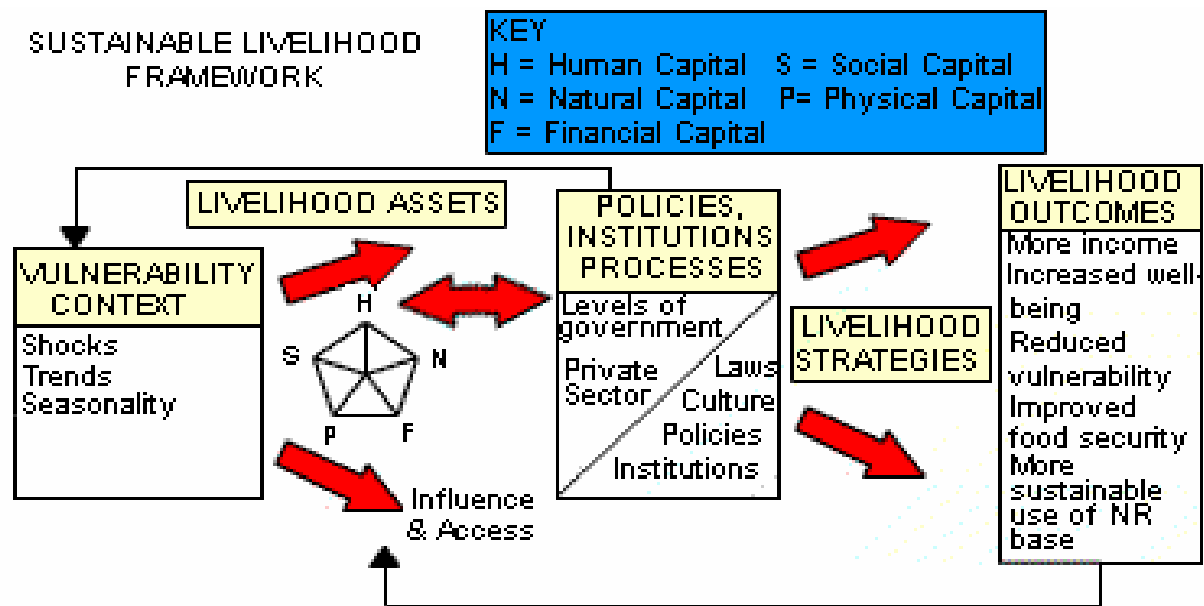


Figure 1 The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Framework

The second element of the livelihoods framework comprises the livelihoods assets pentagram. The differential ability of different groups to adapt to these stresses (and the overall impact on their livelihoods) is contingent on their livelihood assets. The assets pentagram is at the heart of the SRL approach and in the DfID approach is based around the identification and measurement of five types of capital: social; human; financial; natural; and physical.

These assets can be considered at a number of levels from individuals to households, to groups and communities. The centrality of the asset base to sustainable livelihoods is self-evident:

‘Sustainable systems – whether livelihoods, communities or national economies – accumulate stocks of assets; they increase the capital base over time. Unsustainable systems deplete or run down capital, spending assets as if they were income, and so leaving less for future generations.’

http://www.livelihoods.org/info/info_guidancesheets.html#1

White and Ellison (2006) have argued strongly for the inclusion of cultural/symbolic capital and offer a somewhat different more socially oriented framework, using the term resources rather than capital. Within a conventional livelihoods framework, this would suggest the model be based around a capitals/assets hexagon rather than a pentagram.

The third element of the livelihoods model is the appraisal of the institutional structures and policies and processes which mediate possible livelihood enhancing strategies. Typically the identification of weaknesses in this area (such as the structure of land ownership in the case of land reform) provides the basis for developing a strategic response which, in essence, becomes the fourth stage of the model.

This fourth element comprises the elaboration of the livelihood enhancing strategies. These strategies can be policy-driven or based on other actions or interventions by a range of actors and stakeholders. They are an explicit response to the juxtaposition of the identified vulnerabilities, the capital asset weaknesses and the transforming structures and processes. The livelihoods approach highlights the need for stakeholder engagement, both in identifying levels of capital assets and in delivery of livelihood enhancing strategies.

The final element of the livelihoods model is the examination of the various feedback loops, which expose whether the interventions or changed practices have altered the capital asset base and reduced vulnerabilities. It is at this stage that it is necessary to revisit the baseline indicators of capitals/assets in order to explore the impact of the livelihood enhancing strategies. This project involved the scoping of this type of examination.

The implementation of the SRL approach is highly flexible. There is no rigid template. It is frequently associated with the use of indicators to assess each of the capitals/assets. The indicators are often expressed qualitatively or ordinally through web-graphs which give a visual indication of the strengths and weaknesses with respect to the different capitals, but the framework can also readily accommodate more quantitative approaches.

A cluster of indicators is normally identified in order to assess levels of capital in one of the fields. In the context of this study, available statistics from published sources were used as well as expert knowledge from key informants. Further evidence gleaned from published work was also used to identify key variables with respect of the six capitals as they are affected by land reform measures. In such a search, there is almost always a need to balance the desirability of using appropriate indicators with the cost of obtaining them. Compromises are almost always necessary.

In recent years, considerable interest has been shown in applying the livelihoods approach in rural development in more developed countries. A scoping exercise was undertaken in Scotland in 2002 by the University of Glasgow and a 2003 special issue of the *Community Development Journal* was devoted to the subject. A Rural Net conference in England recently argued the case for a livelihoods approach based on the capitals model

(http://ruralnet.typepad.com/conference/2006/07/ruralnet2006_ex.html). In the Cairngorms National Park in the UK, Forster (<http://www.maposda.net/bioforum/Cairngorms%20cs.pdf>) advocates a modified SRL approach to addressing the complex policy challenge of rural housing. It has also been suggested that the SRL approach has salience in exploring the adjustment challenge in relation to Scottish fisheries policy (Allison, 2003).

Although the bulk of applications relating to SRL still relate to developing countries, there is evidence that it may be particularly appropriate as a lens through which to explore complex resource management/rural development in economies in transition (Slee 1997) and in developed countries too. In Australia, the SRL provides a significant research theme in CSIRO's work where they seek to research how

'prosperous and sustainable rural enterprises driven by innovative management attuned to the Australian environment and adapted to global change' can be created. An application of the method to the assessment of impacts of land reform can be seen in IMPACT, an EU FAIR project (O'Connor et al, 2006). They use the term livelihoods assets to describe the five capitals and note that:

'the sustainable livelihoods approach is intended as an analytical structure for coming to grips with the reality of people's livelihoods. The assumption is that people pursue a range of livelihood outcomes such as adequate income, material well-being, quality of life, quality of environment, reduced vulnerability - by drawing on the pool of available assets to pursue a range of activities.

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They go on to assert that livelihood strategies are a function of person choices, available possibilities and note that *'these factors in turn are greatly influenced by the policy and institutional environment and the processes created by the state and the private sector (ibid.)*. The focus in the IMPACT study is on how new types of organisation and enterprise have deepened, broadened and regrounded the asset base of the farming community, a context not dissimilar to land reform.

The SRL approach is a highly suitable technique for exploring livelihood changes arising from policy and other interventions. From its beginnings in a developing country context, it has been increasingly applied within the UK or more widely in European evaluative studies of rural development. It is highly non-prescriptive and flexible and thus requires careful application. It is more constructivist than positivist in its theoretical underpinnings, as it usually depends on significant stakeholder engagement, but it is sufficiently flexible to allow quasi-positivist analysis of selected variables and indicators.

Within livelihoods approaches, indicators occupy a critical position in the evaluative process, whether *ex ante*, when the selection of appropriate indicators to map what the project or policy is setting out to achieve, is a crucial step, or *ex post*, when the measurement of change from a known baseline is a critical issue in assessing impacts. Indicators are widely used in policy evaluation to determine the success or otherwise of policy.

The degree of sophistication of indicator sets varies enormously between different types of evaluation. The forest sector has perhaps the most coherently elaborated approach based on the identification of criteria and indicators (C&I) approaches in the evaluation of sustainable forest management. This situation arose because of recognition at the Rio Earth Summit of the need to address sustainable forestry and of the emergence of three major international groupings to develop criteria and indicators approaches to determine progress towards sustainable forest management. Although the early approaches in Europe were strongly dominated by bio-physical criteria, the criteria and indicators approach has evolved to give much greater recognition to social and economic criteria.

Behind the use of C&I approaches is the critical distinction between criteria and indicators, which separates out the arena of measurement (the criterion) and the measure (the indicator). Behind the use of indicators in policy evaluation, lies the need to elaborate the criteria to be explored. In this paper, we review the contextual literature and, in collaboration with key informants and stakeholders, tease out

appropriate criteria and then match these with indicators that are either available or may potentially be gathered. Given the spatial resolution/incompleteness etc. of datasets, the matching of criteria with appropriate indicators is often a formidable task often beset with the need to compromise.

In a recent study for DEFRA, Yaron (2006) argues strongly for an approach to policy evaluation based on so-called logic models, such as the Log-frame approach. Yaron (2006) also argues forcefully for a mixed methods approach, based on both qualitative and quantitative components, noting also that it may be important to avoid a snap-shot, one-off evaluative approach. It is recognised that the impacts will not necessarily arise immediately after the policy intervention or legislative change. Consequently, evaluation approaches should recognise the need to revisit the field to assess for outcomes with a long gestation period.

Bryden and Geisler (2007) argue explicitly for the need to understand the relationship between community and land reform in a Scottish context. They identify the Scottish model as 'community-centric, inspired in part at least by community-based natural resource management and community development visioning, bolstered by mixed models of community ownership and control' (op. cit: 30-31). Equally, Mackenzie (2004) asserts the distinctiveness of the Scottish land reform model by reference to its strongly articulated community dimension. These observations imply a necessity to grasp the cultural and the community dimensions of land reform and to recognise that the metrics through which the performance of the suite of land reform measures needs to be assessed need to accommodate more than a narrowly determined set of socio-economic variables. However, many land reform measures do not have so much a community vision as a more conventional individualistic assertion of rights, as in the proposals to remove feudal tenure. Even within the quintessentially communal domain of crofting tenure, de facto privatisation has occurred (Brown, 2007).

In practice, a combined Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Framework and Log-frame approach provides a bridging means between qualitative social science with its focus on process and culture and quantitative social science with its tendency to focus on socio-economic outputs and outcomes. For example, there is an argument for using both expert and lay groups to establish perceived outcomes using an indicators approach, with no implied supremacy of one indicator over the other. Indeed, in many ways, the indicator approach replaces the more conventional reductionist positivist approaches of traditional economically centred project appraisal (such as cost benefit analysis) by invoking a collectively agreed range of indicators to shed light on a wider range of social and economic outcomes which assumes no primacy of economic over other indicators. Further, the SRL approaches and the Log-frame approach readily allow room for discursive and qualitative evidence alongside their more formal analyses.

The use of indicators raises significant practical challenges. Indicators are needed for several reasons: in positivistic studies to explore a relationship between an input and an output or outcome; and in studies looking at impacts on different stakeholders to identify their differing perceptions of outcome. In almost all situations, there is a need to compromise between availability and comprehensiveness. A wide-ranging study needs a broad set of indicators, but if the

most desirable indicators are unavailable and too costly to obtain, compromises may be necessary.

The approach was triangulated in a stakeholders' workshop, which enabled a range of stakeholders to establish *ex-ante* what they would be seeking as indicators of success of the suite of land reform measures. Subsequently, subgroups of stakeholders were offered opportunities to comment in detail on the draft set of indicators in each arena of reform.

The next section explores the outcomes of the research with respect to the Community Right to Buy outside crofting areas. It is based on a review of relevant literature and information gleaned from a succession of exchanges by e-mail, 'phone and face-to-face meetings with selected stakeholders and communities within Scotland.

THE ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BUY IN SCOTLAND

FINDINGS

The impact of the CRtB legislation may be categorised into two separate elements. First, there is the impact on diversity of land ownership and management and on community involvement. These were the first-order effects envisaged by the LRPG. Second, there is the second-order effect on sustainable rural development via the types of impacts listed previously. Whilst actual development outcomes may be difficult to identify, impacts on inputs, processes and outputs may be easier to discern.

DIVERSITY AND INVOLVEMENT IMPACTS

In headline terms, the uptake of the CRtB appears to have been somewhat limited. The Register of Community Interests in Land held by the Registers of Scotland shows that, to date, there have been 79 applications to register an interest in land under the CRtB provisions (viewed at <http://rcil.ros.gov.uk/RCIL/default.asp?category=rcil&service=home> on 12/09/07). Of these, 27 have been deleted for various reasons, 41 are currently registered, four are pending and only seven have been activated – with an eighth currently in progress. Moreover, many of the applications overlap to some extent since they are for multiple, adjoining parcels of land that require separate applications, even from the same community.

Consequently, it appears that there are less than 25 communities that have successively sought recourse to the formal powers. Wightman (2007) suggests reasons for this slow uptake, including the complexity of the process and apparent inconsistencies in interpretation of the rules. Nevertheless, the legislation has provided an opportunity for communities to seek ownership.

Taking figures from all of the currently registered or activated applications, these communities represent approximately 32,000 people and 44,225 ha. The seven

activated instances represent approximately 9,000 people and 44,030 ha, the latter dominated by 44,000 ha for one community. This compares with a rural area of approximately 7.6 million ha and a rural population (including small towns) of about 1.6 million (Scottish Executive, 2006b). Hence the observable direct contribution to the Land Reform aim of seeking increased diversity in the way land is owned and managed is distinctly modest.

However, such calculations may underestimate the relative impact of CRtB. Whilst the legislation has provided an opportunity for any community to register an interest in land, not all communities (and therefore not all land) would necessarily choose to pursue the opportunity – even if perceived weaknesses in the application process (see Wightman, 2007) were absent. Hence the baseline population and area denominators used to calculate headline impacts above should perhaps be smaller. More importantly, community ownership and/or involvement in land is not confined to CRtB-related activities alone. That is, instances of land transfers to and/or management agreements with local communities pre-dated the Land Reform Act and have continued outside the limited number of formal CRtB examples. Consequently, it is possible that the existence of the CRtB powers has influenced other arrangements for ownership and/or community-friendly management without recourse to the legal powers. Additionally, the latent interest and capacity in community ownership may have been ‘mopped up’ by pre-legislative support for communities that exhibited a strong demand for community acquisition.

The perception that the act is an indirect stimulus is held by various stakeholders who cite anecdotal instances of indirect effects. These may take the form of an “implicit threat” of legal action (enhanced by media coverage) encouraging greater co-operation from previously reluctant landlords and/or a generally more positive and proactive and co-operative relationship with community interests. Certainly, bodies such as the Community Woodland Organisation and the Scottish Community Land Network have seen increases in listed membership and the National Forest Land Scheme operated by the Forestry Commission Scotland was clearly inspired by the CRtB. In addition, NGOs such as the John Muir Trust, appear to be acting sympathetically in developing a modus operandi based strongly on community engagement.

Exhortations in the review papers and the Act to encourage more formal and transparent community involvement in the way that land is owned and managed are also claimed to have led to more community engagement by public and NGO bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland. Hence the modest headline impacts are likely to underestimate the wider influence of the legislation.

However, since non-CRtB arrangements are not necessarily announced publicly and voluntary listings of community-based activities are far from comprehensive, it is not easy to gauge whether there has been an increase in overall activity: formal recording of instances of changes in ownership or (especially) increased community involvement appears to be incomplete or simply absent in many cases. Consequently, whilst the indirect effect of the CRtB powers on diversity of ownership and community involvement in land may enhance the direct effect, quantifying the magnitude of this addition is not currently possible.

In principle, communities and landlords could be asked how and why they chose a particular form of ownership or management. However, the accuracy of answers may be hindered by hazy memories, different interpretations and confounding factors. Moreover, given that communities and parcels of land vary enormously in size, scope, capabilities and ambitions, plus the volume of activities in a given year may simply reflect the volume of land coming to market, identifying trends may be somewhat difficult. For example, the Community Land Unit, in existence since 1997, appears to have assisted 80-90 communities per year prior to the 2003 Act being implemented and some 60-70 per year since then.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS

In addition to difficulties in identifying the magnitude of direct and indirect uptake of CRtB opportunities, further questions may be posed regarding the sustainable rural development impact of any change arising from community ownership. Whilst a list of potential impacts may be identified and can be supported by anecdotal evidence from communities and sponsors, formal monitoring effort to measure such effects is apparently relatively scarce.

In principle, changes in infrastructure (such as houses) or economic performance (such as employment or income) could be detected from routinely collected and reported statistical data – such as that available through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS). Unfortunately, the spatial resolution of SNS data is usually too coarse to indicate effects.

The CRtB rules require a community to self-define its geographical extent through the use of Royal Mail postcode units. Since postcode boundaries rarely conform to those of other administrative units, CRtB areas do not fit neatly with standard statistical reporting units, further exacerbating the difficulties of attribution of socio-economic outcomes at local scale.

In a series of mapping exercises, it was found that the available spatial datasets on socio-economic performance indicators could not be matched to communities which had undertaken community purchase. Further, since the overall number of transactions is so small, the use of aggregated data at local authority level is not useful. In addition, beyond the spatial resolution problem, even if data were to be used, it is highly questionable how changes in reported statistics could be attributed to community ownership. For example, whilst the figures for the Assynt CRtB area do show some changes over the period 2001 to 2005, the isolation of the effect of CRtB from other influences on the area is impossible. Moreover, given that impacts may take some time to manifest themselves in “hard” statistics, it may be that more qualitative approaches are needed to identify subtler changes in community confidence and cohesion. This suggests that more bespoke, local data collection exercises are needed to assess impacts – a point made repeatedly by many stakeholder interviewees and workshop participants.

Ad hoc studies, notably of the high-profile success of the community-owned Isle of Gigha do exist and – along with stakeholder interviews conducted for this project – tend to confirm that the transfer of control to community bodies can deliver the types of benefits listed earlier (Brown, 2004; Countryside Agency, 2005; Satsangi, 2007).

However, routine and consistent monitoring of community-level impacts is largely absent, in terms of both occurrence and magnitude. The much cited example of Gigha forms only a small part of a Data Zone, confirming that routinely reported statistics can not be used to gauge local impacts of the buyout.

Given the existence of public support for many non-CRtB and CRtB activities, the absence of monitoring and evaluation is perhaps a little surprising. This point was noted explicitly by SQW (2005, 2007) in their (positive) studies of the Community Land Unit (CLU) and its operation of the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) - both of which were fundamental to, but not restricted to, supporting CRtB activities. Bell (2007) offers a shorter but similarly positive review of the National Land Forest Scheme.

The SQW research sought to overcome the lack of prior monitoring data by conducting surveys of community perceptions of impacts across a one-year sample of 90 assisted projects, and a tracked, three-year sample of 20 projects – the latter including one CRtB example. In general, the reported findings accord with both the wider literature and the anecdotal evidence offered by stakeholders and communities for this research in terms of the types of impacts associated with community ownership and/or other involvement in management of local assets. Brown (2004) reports similar findings for four, pre-CRtB case-study communities.

Whilst reported “hard” economic impacts in terms of jobs and income generation were modest, particular emphasis was placed by communities on social benefits, such as confidence and capacity-building, reflecting the level of engagement and inclusion that was engendered by a community self-organising to undertake a buy-out or other management action. This may point to greater economic benefits in the future, if cohesion and confidence carry through to further aspirations and actions – a point strongly endorsed by several stakeholders. Relatively few environmental impacts were noted (see also Chevenix-Trench & Philip, 2001; Warren, 2002).

Although a high level of additionality was claimed, SQW (2005, 2007) further note the dependency of many activities on continued external funding rather than self-generated income (see also Brown, 2004; Thake, 2006) with most projects being dependent on the CLU and/or SLF.

However, in the absence of prior monitoring to establish a baseline, the survey results were highly dependent on communities’ recollections of prior conditions and accurate assessments of counter-factual possibilities/additionality – leading to recommendations for improved guidance to communities for self-monitoring and a reconsideration of public monitoring efforts.

This weakness is now being addressed for new projects funded through the successor source of public funding to the SLF, the Growing Community Assets fund operated directly by the Big Lottery Fund Scotland under the Investing in Communities programme. More specifically, there is an explicit focus on outcomes. Guidance and support for proportionate self-monitoring is made available to communities through resource packs and contracted advisory services. However, since this has only been in effect since October 2006, there are few results to report as yet (e.g. Burns & MacKeith, 2006; BLFS, 2005; pers comm. Blake Stevenson; <http://www.blakestevenson.co.uk/biglotteryfund/>).

The focus on outcomes reflects a general move to strengthen evaluations, both at community and programme level for activities funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BLFS, 2007; pers. comm, BLFS; Scottish Centre for Regeneration, undated). Hence, in addition to the community-level monitoring, an independent evaluation of the Growing Community Assets fund is intended. Although a brief has been issued for this, the study has yet to be planned in detail and the linkages to community-level monitoring and/or other data sources have still to be explored in terms of establishing baselines and identifying additionality (pers. comm. BLFS).

None of the self-monitoring is retrospective, so, whilst all new instances will be covered, pre-existing CRtB examples will not be. Moreover, linkages to an overall evaluation may be weak since, whilst self-reporting is required, the support offered for self-monitoring is neither obligatory nor prescriptive for individual communities, meaning that consistency of reporting across communities is unlikely to be achieved (pers. comm, BLFS; pers comm. Blake Stevenson).

In addition to identifying the prevalence of impacts, the SQW study also attempted to quantify their strength. If these already-heavily-caveated survey results were applied pro rata to the seven activated CRtB cases, it would imply that around 7.5 FTE jobs have been created, 75 people have had their social networks improved and 168 people have been involved in community activities (more if weighted by community size). These figures could be arbitrarily inflated if an allowance was made for the acknowledged but unquantified indirect impact of the CRtB legislation. Improving such estimates might be achieved by an updated survey of CRtB and non-CRtB examples, perhaps co-ordinated with monitoring activities under the Growing Community Assets fund.

LINKS TO OTHER ASPECTS OF LAND REFORM

As part of the wider package of legislative and non-legislative elements, it might be expected that CRtB would be linked to other aspects of Land Reform. However, few stakeholder interviewees spontaneously identified any such associations and, moreover, typically viewed other areas of Land Reform as having had greater observable effect than CRtB. Indeed, some stakeholders viewed the conflation of different aspects under the single banner of “Land Reform” as unhelpful.

In some cases, links to the Access provisions and aspects of Nature Conservation were mentioned in the context of community assets being used for recreational and environmental purposes. No overlaps were identified with agricultural tenancy arrangements and, perhaps more surprisingly, Community Planning was viewed as largely irrelevant – reflecting a perception of differences in geographical scale and focus. That is, CRtB communities are smaller than a Community Planning area and rural land use planning may not feature as a priority if urban regeneration needs are dominant at the Local Authority level.

Some parallels with the provisions for Crofting-specific CRtB under Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act were identified, although the absence of an absolute right to buy was a key difference. Several stakeholders offered the view that much CRtB activity has been reactive rather than proactive. That is, some communities may not have had a clear idea of what to do with a parcel of land but were spurred into

action by land being offered for sale. Such a perception risks accusations of the legislation being used for anti-development rather than development purposes, although on-going monitoring of CRtB examples might help to dispel this by revealing positive impacts. However, statistics on the timing of application to register an interest suggest that the proportion of proactive applications is increasing (pers. comm., Scottish Executive).

SUMMARY

As a mechanism for encouraging community ownership of land, Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 introduced provisions for the Community Right to Buy (CRtB). As part of the wider Land Reform package, CRtB is viewed as a means of encouraging increased diversity and increased community involvement in the way land is owned and managed, plus also contributing to a wider aim of sustainable rural development.

The potential for alternative forms of organisation to overcome barriers to development is a common theme in many policy areas. Hence, whilst the focus here may be on land, there are clear overlaps with policy interests in the role of social and community enterprise for promoting regeneration more generally. Indeed, the operation of the wider Growing Communities Fund as a successor to the Scottish Land Fund places future CRtB (and non-CRtB land) applications alongside a broader class of community asset projects. It appears that the quality and volume of applications (and therefore funding) is now more evenly balanced between rural and urban communities, having previously been skewed in favour of rural areas (pers. comm. Big Lottery Fund).

Community representatives and other stakeholders interviewed for this project readily identified the types of potential impacts associated with community ownership of assets, whilst acknowledging that – despite the use of public funds to support many activities - little, if any, formal monitoring of actual impacts was taking place. However, the SQW (2005, 2007) reports contain some highly relevant insights and suggest that changes in land ownership and community management (whether CRtB or not) in Scotland are delivering at least some of the expected benefits, although these vary across different examples and in the time taken to appear.

Within the Sustainable Livelihoods framework (SRL), the types of indicators suggested by the literature and by interviewees – sometimes with prompting – were identified (see Table 2 for headline indicators). In most cases, perceived impacts to date were dominated by social capital benefits – although it was felt that these might translate into gains in others categories over time. That is, in most cases, the change in asset ownership has been too recent for significant management changes to be implemented yet and communities should not be expected to (or forced to) move faster than their capacity to adapt.

Table 2 Suggested headline indicators to assess impacts of Community Right to Buy and current availability

<i>Type of capital/asset</i>	<i>Headline Indicator</i>	<i>Availability</i>
Context	Demographic profile (e.g. age, health, gender) as an indicator of community vitality	Existing data available
Social	Local input (e.g. size and profile of active community membership) to asset management, both in planning and practical implementation,	Further data needed
Human	Experience and training of community managers (e.g. with respect to negotiation, conflict resolution, planning)	Further data needed
Symbolic/cultural	Perceived value of community ownership as an end in itself (e.g. non-market value of self-determination), as an indicator of importance attached to symbolic ownership.	Further data needed
Economic	Changes in/safeguarding of employment (e.g. full-time, part-time, self, unpaid) attributable to community ownership,	Further data needed
Physical	New or improved infrastructure (houses, business premises, roads etc.)	Further data needed
Environmental	Condition of land under community management (e.g. ecological status), as an indicator of environmental status and benefits.	Further data needed
Institutional structures/processes	Extent of CRtB and non-CRtB communities (e.g. number of active communities),	Available in future Available in future

Populating the table of suggested indicators is unlikely to be achieved through recourse to existing data collection mechanisms. Indeed, given the subjective nature of some of the indicators – particularly for the human and social capital elements – some form of qualitative investigation will be required. This strongly suggests a case study approach, which would also allow appropriate exploration and representation of the heterogeneity of scope, scale, capabilities and aspirations embodied in different communities and the relative importance of community empowerment and optimisation of resource usage.

One other aspect that may need attention is intra-community variation and conflict. That is, although sometimes presented as homogeneous units, communities themselves can encompass diverse views and preferences and indeed degree of interest. Not all members of a community may have equal access to a “community” asset, and the strategy adopted in its management may limit its benefits to a narrow section of the community or extend its benefits more widely. This can be manifest in differences of opinion regarding asset management – a point noted by several interviewees. Consequently, assessment of impacts may need to also address the

distribution of impacts across different groups within a community (e.g. Anastacio et al., 2000).

DISCUSSION

The considerable push towards community based land reform in Scotland has been underpinned by review and subsequent legislation, but to date modest attempts at evaluation. The study on which this paper is based is a contribution to that evaluation. One particular facet of the evaluation of the impacts of the suite of land reform measures is the extent to which the existence of the legislative measures empowering Community Right to Buy generates an all-embracing positive influence on rural development. It seems plausible that the new legislation might have generated more positive behaviour towards to community-based rural development initiatives by landowners than might have occurred in the past when no back-stop measures could be employed to address the recalcitrant laird (or other landowner) predisposed to deny development opportunities through his/her control over the land resource. It is likely that such a positive impact would be most keenly felt in crofting areas, but it is possible that a similar effect has operated more widely among the landowning community. Where legislation and other measures have been enacted because of perceived adverse effects of particular types of land ownership on sustainable rural development, it might be expected that those whom the LRP had seen as barriers to sustainable rural development, might try to prove otherwise by their actions.

A further issue concerns the time path of outcomes and impacts. The suite of measures put in place may not engender immediate impacts. A snapshot at a point in time may find no discernible outcome, but at some later point an impact/outcome might arise, which is directly contingent on the legislative or other changes. The commitment of the previous Scottish Executive to undertake regular monitoring should pick up this issue, as long as there is a consistent basis for monitoring⁴. Different parts of the suite of measures may generate a different time path of response, not least because of differences in the capacity of different communities to undertake voluntaristic measures. Further, there may be implicit recognition that a demonstration effect should work, one would hope in the positive sense in that communities would become aware of how land reform had made a difference to sustainable rural development outcomes in some communities. However, it is also conceivable that a negative demonstration effect could occur, if for example, any Community Right to Buy (CRtB) cases became mired in controversy.

Any study of indicators in relation to complex multi-faceted policy change such as land reform is fraught with difficulty. The indicators of pressure are rarely quantified at the outset, although can sometimes be elaborated by back-casting where suitable datasets exist. The retro-application of an indicators approach is bound to be problematic (as has been encountered widely in ex-post appraisals of LEADER), in that the best available indicator for the baseline may represent very much a second best variable associated with a particular criterion. Thus, the design of indicators ex-post (in contrast to the approach now being developed ex-ante for the SRDP)

⁴ The Deputy Minister, Allan Wilson, gave a commitment to 'report on progress...more regularly than once every four years' Rural Directorate 2007

creates a problem of often having no benchmark against which to level change, but nonetheless, once established, provides a suite of measures that could be used to measure subsequent change.

As intimated above, any approach based on criteria and indicators approaches depends on recognition of relevant criteria and appropriate indicators. The selection of indicators is nearly always a compromise between the cost of obtaining the indicator and its effectiveness in measuring change in relation to the criterion under scrutiny. It may be better to have no indicator than a bad indicator.

Equally, it may be essential to drill down to community level studies the results of which can sit alongside the formal indicator approaches. It is likely that local factors which may be instrumental in delivering enhanced wellbeing cannot be ascertained from indicator approaches. Mixed methods approaches with a drilling down to case studies may be essential if impacts and outcomes are to be better understood.

We recognise that with a broad suite of policy measures that often depend on the voluntary uptake of measures 'offered' by the legislation (particularly in the Right-to-Buy components), it is extremely unlikely that available indicators will exist at appropriate spatial scale. Equally, it is questionable whether an indicator can fully expose the underlying social processes that effect positive change in rural communities as a result of one or more components of the land reform suite being implemented. The very terminology 'suite of policies' implies a degree of interconnectedness which may or may not be apparent through an exploration of outcome or impact indicators.

Given the pre-legislative phase when a number of communities acquired ownership of land through public assistance, it is not inconceivable that the latent energy of the communities with strong social capital had already generated positive results. In other communities, it is likely that there is less motivation energy and ability to engage in what is a complex process and a major undertaking. The absence of a significant response in the first few years of legislation should not be interpreted as evidence of community disinterest; more that the vanguard of the social movement that precipitated the reform had found other ways to realise its aims.

This paper exposes the considerable complexities of assessing the likely social, economic and environmental impacts of the suite of land reform measures introduced in Scotland since 2003. It is evident that the measures have had both direct and indirect effects in relation to Community Right to Buy. Whilst the direct effects may be small, as measurable by standard socio-economic indicators such as employment, the less quantifiable effects may be very significant in building social capital. Over the longer term it should be possible to ascertain whether such gains in social capital comprise an adequate justification for public policy development and spending in this arena or whether such newly acquired assets deliver discernible gains in aggregate socio-economic well-being in the longer run.

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