

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Ian Goldman¹, James Carnegie¹, Moscow Marumo¹, David Marumo², Elaine Kela³, Somi Ntonga⁴, Ed Mwale⁵

This paper reports on work carried out in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa, which used a Sustainable Livelihoods approach to assess the impact of policy and services on poverty. It used the approach in following through a 'vertical transect' of the public administration from village to central ministries. As a result the sustainable livelihoods framework has been adapted into one for examining institutional issues. This first paper addresses the conceptual issues and methodological learnings of undertaking this type of audit. Paper 50 in this series summarises the key findings from the four case study countries/provinces.

Policy conclusions

In terms of process:

- In all cases a government partner hosted the project and was in some way interested in implementing the recommendations⁶. This is critical for such a study to have impact, and recommendations are being taken forward already in at least two of the four situations.
- To ensure ownership, representatives from national/provincial stakeholders participated in the study and report-writing.
- The importance of linking micro and macro is recognised in the sustainable livelihoods (SL)⁷ approach, and was addressed by undertaking a vertical transect, in which the team started with the centre to get an overview of policies, then undertook rapid assessments at village, district, province levels and returned to the centre. This approach worked well and gave considerable power to the arguments.

In terms of the framework:

- The framework provided a useful way of structuring the understanding of poverty and of rural development options.
- The framework needed adaptations to be user-friendly; these have been tested successfully and proven useful in practice.
- The framework provides a useful way of structuring the policy analysis, but provides only a limited snapshot of institutional issues.
- A four⁸ level analysis has been developed which is a useful way of looking at rural people and their empowerment, and then how they can be supported by services at village, district, province and national levels.

Part A The framework

Understanding the SL framework

Sustainable livelihood approaches are being used as an 'optic' through which poverty can be better understood, and development options prioritised. The version used by the Department for International Development (DFID) is outlined in Carney (ed) (1998) (see also paper 42 in this series). A livelihood is defined as '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 natural resource base' (Carney (ed), 1998:4). Khanya's use of the framework and approach can be seen in Khanya (1999a-d and 2000) and is summarised below.

Using the concept of assets and vulnerabilities

Rural people not only have needs but also resources or assets. Recognising this provides a respectful and positive framework for interacting with them. The five types of assets in this model are natural, social capital, human, physical and financial. Rural people are vulnerable to a range of challenges and reducing vulnerability may be a higher priority than say, increasing production, or the quantity of their assets.

Livelihood outcomes

Rural people have their own aspirations. It is important that government or programmes do not impose outcomes, but negotiate with communities to find out what their aspirations are, and what may be achievable outcomes, combining

people's assets and access to resources with the external resources that government and other agencies may be able to provide. Participatory appraisals can provide tools for finding out what their desired outcomes are, in terms of increased assets, or reduced vulnerability, or such higher order concerns such as self-esteem or 'voice'.

Institutional structures and processes

A variety of organisations provide services and support to rural people, and operate within a set of laws, policies and procedures. These define the options that are available. Depending on this institutional environment, the outcomes desired and the context of vulnerability, people then select livelihood strategies.

Livelihood strategies

The key strategies in rural areas can be categorised as NR-based, non-NR-based or migration. Development initiatives can empower people by broadening the range of strategy options. One critical area is that of diversifying livelihood choices, which also reduces vulnerability.

Implications

Some of the features of the approach are that:

- It starts with (poor) people as the focus, and so puts clients at the centre. This means that client-focused, participatory, and responsive approaches are needed.
- It recognises the holistic nature of people's lives, their use of multiple livelihood strategies, and so the need for

- responses which are not limited by sectoral boundaries.
- It builds on positives – a respectful approach to rural people's strengths and opportunities and, not just needs.
- It recognises the differences within rural communities, and implies the need for a range of responses.
- It recognises the importance of institutional structures and processes which determine access to assets and their value and so the attractiveness of different livelihood strategies.
- It implies the need for bottom-up participatory work as well as top-down strategic work.
- It implies a partnership approach among state, community and private sector – with the role of the state as facilitator, animator, or provider.
- It recognises the need to listen to those with whom we are working and learn about their objectives, but that there needs to be a dialogue about short versus long-term objectives, e.g. on the environment, where people may sacrifice long-term sustainability for short-term gain.
- It recognises that rural and urban areas are intimately connected, and that policy and service linkages need to be examined, rather than seen in isolation.

Applying the framework

Some of the issues Khanya focused on specifically are:

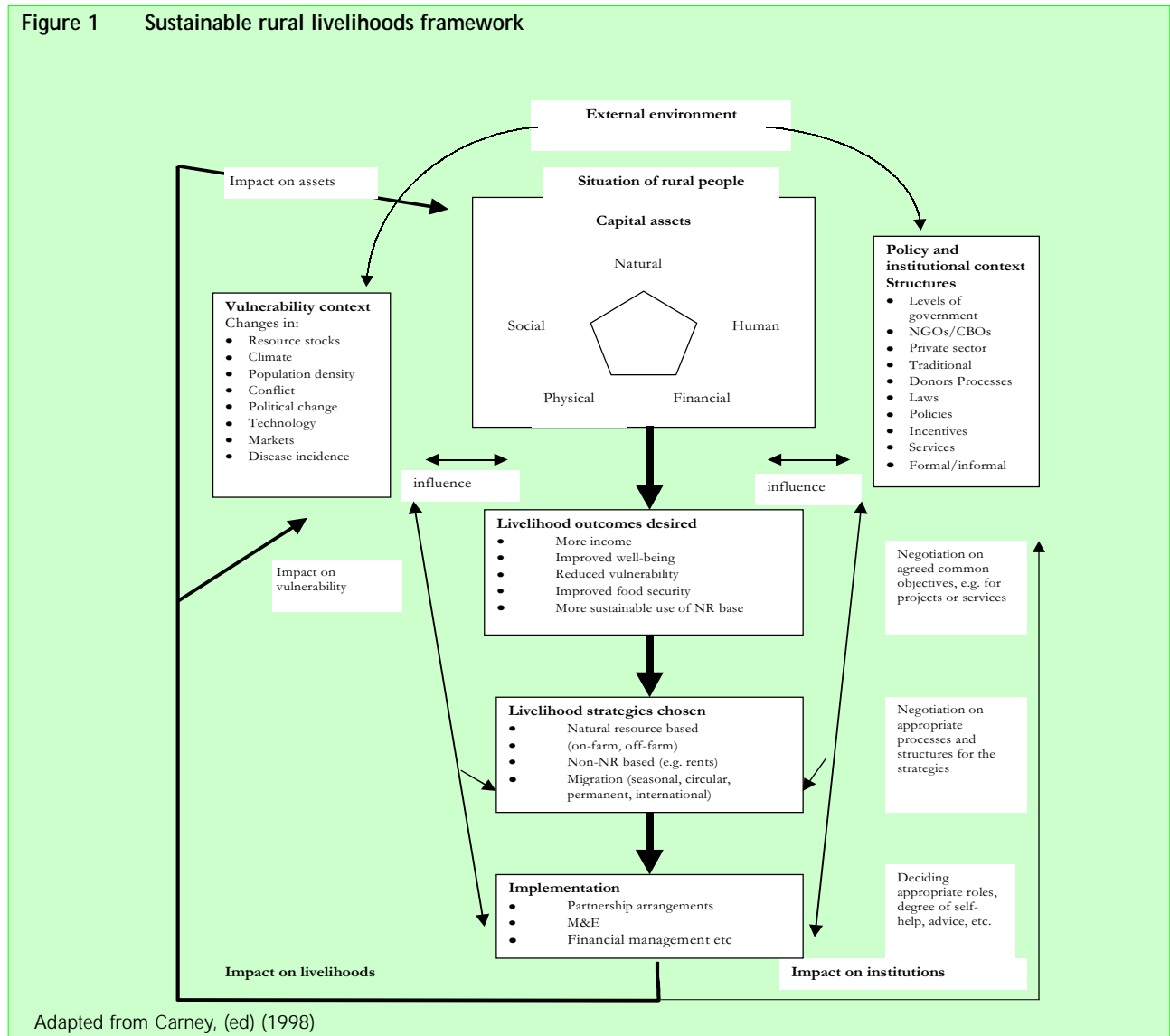
- **Assets** – do we understand the resources, not just needs, that different rural clients have, and how information on these is gathered in the context of resource-allocation and

- service providing systems, not just in ad-hoc PRAs?
- **Outcomes** – how do different clients' priorities vary. How should these be ascertained in a systematic way?
- **Livelihood strategies** – in the light of findings on assets and outcomes, what livelihood strategies are likely to achieve the outcomes that rural people desire. What does this mean for services, policies and programmes?
- **Institutions and processes** – what institutional structures can respond best to this holistic people-centred approach, and impact on eradicating poverty?

Khanya's adaptation of the framework

Khanya adapted the SL framework used by DFID (see Figure 1) in order to:

- Prioritise a flow of analysis centred on poor people, their assets, preferred outcomes and strategies, and the implementation of responses to these.
- Have the external environment diagrammatically surrounding rural people, i.e. their vulnerability context, and the policy and institutional context.
- Illustrate how implementation impacts on people themselves and their assets, on their vulnerability, and on the institutions and policies that do or do not address their needs and opportunities.
- Illustrate the process of negotiation required between people and institutions for a SL approach to be implemented.



Part B The methods

Objectives of the project

The purpose of the research was to improve the understanding within key government departments in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, and DFID regionally and in the UK, of institutional support required to promote sustainable livelihoods. The outputs of the project were intended to be:

- Lessons from experience of the appropriate institutional mechanisms to support SLs in each of Eastern Cape and Free State in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, as well as across the region.
- Improved understanding by policy makers in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Eastern Cape and Free State of important policy elements for supporting SLs.
- Wider awareness in the international community of the lessons from southern Africa in institutional support requirements for SLs.

Approach and methodology

The project was to be based on action-research, the intention being that committed partners would follow up the work once they had gone through the learning, on the basis of a report which had been discussed with stakeholders. Much work was put into pre-project ownership creation and linking to partners' on-going reasons for undertaking the work.

Initial meetings were held with policy makers at national and provincial levels. The core of the study was a week spent on a detailed case study of one district. This involved assessing the evolution of institutional support and its effects on livelihoods, using participatory methodologies to obtain the views of clients. Participatory research was conducted in a village within the district, and interviews were held with service providers at district level. A workshop was held with service providers and the community.

The workshop was followed up with interviews at intermediate and provincial levels to examine how issues had been dealt with or policies developed. Finally a workshop was held at the centre with a mix of stakeholders from different levels to test some of the emerging findings.

Pre-project ownership creation

Considerable work was put into identifying partners who had an existing agenda for which the SL approach might prove useful, rather than conduct SL analysis as a separate study which would be 'freestanding' but might lead nowhere (see Box 1). This has succeeded so far except in Zambia, where ownership by government institutions was weak.

Developing a common methodology

All partners joined the Khanya team for a pre-project workshop where the principles behind the SL approach were discussed. Based on this the detailed methodology, checklists, outline of PRA methodology, etc., were drawn up. This workshop was held immediately prior to undertaking two of the case studies and the teams then departed to carry these out. This helped to build understanding among the partners, and get them fully involved in the work. It was agreed to structure the work based on the assets, and the human assets were split into two. The main content areas became: human capacity development; safeguarding human resources; conserving and exploiting natural resources; promoting jobs and incomes; infrastructure (physical assets); and social environment. A set of cross-cutting institutional issues were identified (planning, coordination, M&E, role of private sector, etc.). In the end, based on experience in the field these were combined, to be reported under the four levels in the final chapters:

- **Community level** – what is needed to build communities'

capacity to articulate their needs, to release local energy so that growth begins at the bottom, with people who are active protagonists in their own development and free from dependency. As work evolved, a new emphasis here was on the role of village level workers, and how they could be made more effective and responsive.

- **Local service provider level** – where local needs can meet government policy and services. How can legitimate local government link with technical departments to provide responsive, effective and efficient services to rural people?
- **The meso-level** – how can this role be strengthened to support self-sustaining development?
- **The centre** – and its role in strategy, redistribution and coordination to support a poverty-focused agenda. The policy areas highlighted included poverty, rural development, decentralisation and public sector reform.

Initial policy analysis

The initial policy analysis at the centre included interviews with senior policy makers to understand the main policy issues, and to obtain key documents and contacts. This was particularly oriented towards the relationship of their policy to the needs of poor people, both in terms of targeting, and in terms of their capacity to support rural people.

Participatory research

The following factors underpinned the selection of study districts:

- In Zimbabwe and Zambia, they were typical of poorer parts of the country, but were also areas where previous institutional development projects had operated that were interesting in terms of institutional support for SLs.
- In Eastern Cape, the area chosen was typical of the poor rural parts of the province, but was also an area where the Department wanted to do follow-up work.
- In the Free State the provincial cabinet selected a variety of sites, with one researched in some depth. PRA and SL training was subsequently conducted for the Department of Social Welfare who then studied a further three locations so that a variety of locations typical of the Province were investigated.

The participatory methodology evolved during the course of the study but essentially comprised the following elements:

- A community meeting where a Venn diagram was drawn up showing relevant organisations and projects.
- Some social analysis to define groups with different resources in the community (typically women, with widows sometimes differentiated, youth, elderly, farmers with livestock, farmers without livestock, government

Box 1 Identifying institutional partners in the region

- In the Free State, South Africa, the Department of Social Welfare had been asked by the provincial government to produce a Poverty Eradication Strategy for the province. Khanya had assisted with planning the development of the strategy, and suggested that the SL work could contribute towards that, which is what happened.
- In the Eastern Cape, the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs was considering how best it could provide services in the province. This provided a way in which the SL approach could assist them in doing this.
- In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing is seeking to promote decentralisation, and was interested to see how the SL approach could give a wider perspective on their work⁹.
- In Zambia there was interest from both the Ministries of Local Government and Community Development. A change of Permanent Secretary in the former led to some confusion, and Community Development supplied the team member.

workers, business/trades people).

- A timeline to plot the major events in the lives of the community, and especially where policies and vulnerability such as drought had had an impact on their lives.
- Meetings using structured checklists with different social groups. This checklist covered the assets of the group, their vulnerabilities, preferred outcomes and strategies, and the institutions working with them. This was used in a discursive way to generate substantive debate. Where data (e.g. on landholdings) were collected for a sub-sample, the wider sample also engaged in the discussion of them.
- In some cases transects and mapping.
- Meetings with key informants, e.g. business people, community health workers.
- A community report back meeting, to discuss conclusions.

District level

At district level the main elements of the methodology were:

- Triangulating what had been said by the community, and trying to understand sequence and causality.
- Interviews with key service providers covering the different asset areas, using a structured checklist.
- A workshop with district service providers, and in some cases with councillors, to see what could be done to improve the effectiveness and linkage of service delivery with clients.

At regional/provincial level

The issues arising from the village and district were then followed up to regional/provincial level. The discussion here focused on how the province could support and supervise the district in the design and implementation of policies, including institutional issues such as monitoring and coordination.

And back to the centre

The team then returned to the centre to follow up on policy areas that had been missed and cross-cutting issues such as coordination and planning. Before leaving, the main conclusions were brainstormed and a national workshop held to check these conclusions and bring in any other relevant issues that had been missed. At the workshops, break-out groups discussed issues in relation to the four levels of the analysis. These workshops were very frank, with participants keen to understand how problems identified could be addressed through the SL approach. On the whole the conclusions were validated and were not significantly changed.

Writing the report

The report was mainly written by the Khanya team, with partners providing a key chapter on national policy and its evolution. In the case of the Free State, which was a very comprehensive study as it needed to address all areas for the Poverty Eradication Strategy, additional authors were brought in to strengthen the group, and to build wider ownership. Once written, the report was first of all checked by the partner institution, and then circulated to other departments for comments on the sectoral sections in particular.

Follow-up

It is still too early to know what will happen as a result of these studies, as in some cases the reports have only recently been submitted. However progress to date is:

- In the Free State, the final workshop has been held, and the report approved by the Provincial cabinet. A team of four people has been appointed to take the strategy forward.
- In Zimbabwe a presentation is being made to the interdepartmental Capacity-Building Coordinating Committee with a view to prioritising the recommendations

and taking them forward.

- In Eastern Cape the final workshop will be held soon, and priority areas for action selected. It will be used as a basis for developing some projects in the province, both in agriculture and with the wider provincial government.
- In Zambia the report has not yet been circulated. It is hoped to hold the final workshop in early 2000.

Conclusions

The study has provided a holistic overview of policies and practices that support or hinder SLs in the region. An innovative and participatory methodology has been developed for doing this, which has been refined over the period of the study. Care has been taken to ensure local ownership, and this seems to be bearing fruit, since the strategies that have been proposed are being taken forward.

The SL framework has proved a useful analytical device and helped to generate a wide range of recommendations to improve the lives of poor rural people. The challenge for each region is now to build these into a plan of action which effects change at the macro and micro levels.

References

- Carney, D. (ed) (1998) 'Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: what contribution can we make?' London: DFID.
- Khanya (1999a) 'Institutional Support for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Zimbabwe'. Harare: Ministry of Local Government and National Housing/*Khanya – managing rural change*.
- Khanya (1999b) 'Poverty Eradication Strategy for the Free State'. Bloemfontein: Department of Social Welfare/*Khanya – managing rural change*.
- Khanya (1999c) 'Institutional Support for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Eastern Cape'. Bisho: Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs/*Khanya – managing rural change*.
- Khanya (1999d) 'Institutional Support for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Zambia'. Bloemfontein, *Khanya – managing rural change*.
- Khanya (2000) 'Institutional Support for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Southern Africa: Final Report'. Bloemfontein, *Khanya – managing rural change*.

Endnotes

- ¹ Of *Khanya – managing rural change*. Email: goldman@khanya-mrc.co.za
- ² The Ministry of Local Government and National Housing, Zimbabwe, the local partner.
- ³ The Department of Social Welfare in the Free State, South Africa – the partner in the Free State.
- ⁴ Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Eastern Cape, South Africa – the partner in the Eastern Cape.
- ⁵ From MicroProjects Unit, Zambia.
- ⁶ In Zambia this link was not strong and there may be less likelihood of follow-up as a result.
- ⁷ Although the emphasis is on the rural context, for simplicity sustainable livelihoods (SL) is used throughout.
- ⁸ Village, district, meso (usually region or province) and centre.
- ⁹ They posted the top government official from one of the provinces as their team member.

The authors are indebted to DFID for financial support, but the views expressed here are theirs alone.

ISSN: 1356-9228

© Overseas Development Institute 2000

See www.oneworld.org/odi/nrp/ for more papers in this series.

Natural Resource Perspectives present accessible information on current development issues. Readers are encouraged to quote from them or duplicate them, but as copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement. The Editor welcomes manuscripts for this series.

Series Editor: John Farrington Administrative Editor: Melanie Woodland