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**SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH  
IN THE ESCWA REGION**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) is a comprehensive approach that emphasises placing people at the center of development rather than focusing primarily on natural resource productivity. In confronting poverty, a key component of the approach is the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) that aims to incorporate people's own understanding of their predicament.

By its nature, SLA is a holistic approach that factors in the variety of assets that people make use of when constructing their livelihoods. This variety of assets is reflected in SLA's consideration of the various types of capital; Human (skills and knowledge), Social (familial and communal networks), Natural (resource stocks), Physical (goods and infrastructure systems), and Financial (flows of money). SLA is thus better adapted at assessing the direct and indirect effects on people's livelihood than One-Dimensional factors such as productivity measures or income criteria. This focus encompasses the variety of factors at different levels that directly or indirectly determine people's access to resources, and thus facilitates an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty.

However, the implementation of SLA struggles to take into consideration power relations, which can influence the distribution of resources and thus affect livelihood opportunities. Successful implementation potentially faces challenges from Politics, Bureaucracy, Finance. In each case, however, the challenges can be met. Politicians, who tend to be suspicious of community-based organizations (CBO) which may weaken their own support base, may come to favour supporting and working with CBOs in case risks of "political capture" are properly addressed. By formalizing some key aspects of government-community collaboration, SLA can be made to accommodate the formal structures of state bureaucracies. This will also facilitate financial flows by providing clear funding links to Community Development Councils (CDC), as well as implementing formal accounting mechanisms.

The implementation of Sustainable Livelihood Approaches (SLA) is therefore far from being a "one size fits all" strategy, as it depends on a host of factors. Assimilating lessons from previous implementation is therefore crucial to properly benefit the experience gained and thus optimally leverage SLA's strength. The case histories presented in this document aim to do just that, and can serve as the background to inform potential recommendations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets 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” (Kollmair and Gamper, 2002)*

Livelihood thinking emerged in the mid-1980s, when humankind was facing an enormous population pressure. In 1983, the world commission on environment and development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland commission, was the first to introduce the idea of “Sustainable Livelihoods”. In 1985, the idea was discussed in the international institute for environment and development (IIED). In the following year, Gordon Conway established the IIED’s sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods program and Richard Sandbrook, the Director of IIED, included sustainable livelihoods as part of the large “Only One Earth Conference on Sustainable Development” that occurred in 1987. In 1992, the United Nations conference on environment and development (UNCED) or the earth summit expanded the concept promoting it for poverty eradication. Relatively in the same period, Robert Chambers developed the idea to enhance the efficiency of conventional development cooperation and published with Conway the Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century paper (Chambers, 2005). In 1997, the British department for international development (DFID) developed Chamber’s concepts about the basics for sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) to achieve the elimination of poverty and promote use of SLA especially in natural resources management (NRM) (Box 1). The institute for development studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex in England and the DFID have been putting into operation the SLA and its concept.

### Box 1: What formulates SLA?

**People-centered:** People are the priority concern in the livelihood approach. Sustainable poverty reduction can entail success only if development agents work with people on their choices of livelihood strategies, social environment and capabilities to adapt. At a practical level this implies a detailed analysis of people's livelihoods and their dynamics over time.

**Holistic:** A view that aims to understand the stakeholder's livelihoods as a whole.

**Dynamic:** Livelihoods and institutions are highly dynamic, so is the approach in order to learn from changes and help mitigating negative impacts.

**Building on strengths:** A central issue of the approach is the recognition of everyone's inherent potential for his/her removal of constraints and realization of potentials. This will contribute to the stakeholders' ability to achieve their own objectives.

**Partnerships:** A coordinated effort and involvement of a range of stakeholders and service providers should be involved with the community to face the complex and diverse issues of the poor.

**Macro-micro links:** SLA strengthens the links between the two levels. As people are often affected from decisions at the macro policy level and vice-versa, this relation needs to be considered in order to achieve sustainable development.

**Sustainability:** A livelihood can be classified as sustainable, when it is resilient in the face of external shocks and stresses, not dependent upon external support, able to maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources and does not undermine the livelihood options of others.

**Source:** Carnegie, 2002; Kollmair and Gamper, 2002

The origins of livelihoods approaches are linked to the evolution of NRM thinking. Together with more participatory approaches in NRM, livelihoods approaches have changed the emphasis from focusing primarily on natural resource productivity to placing people at the center of development. In the past, development initiatives in NRM focused on building natural capital.

There is no unified way in the application of SLA; however the usage leads to poverty alleviation (Krantz, 2001). Different organisations adopted SLA and they include the international non-governmental organization (NGO) OXFAM in 1993 followed by CARE, the international institute for sustainable

development (IISD) in Canada, the multilateral United Nations development program (UNDP), the bilateral donor DFID in 1997 and the World Bank (Carnegie, 2002 and Chambers, 2005). Depending on the agency, SLA can be used as either;

- A tool; an analytical framework;
- A method for planning and assessment;
- A program.

Across these various methodologies and approaches, three basic features are common:

- 1) Focus is on the livelihoods of the poor;
  - 2) No special focus on the agriculture, water and health sectors, which are usually used as an entry point by conventional approaches;
  - 3) Emphasis on involving people in both the identification and the implementation of activities.
- Some of the dissimilarities between the approaches of a selection of agencies were identified (Table 1).

**Table 1. Dissimilarities of the Agencies' Approaches (Krantz, 2001)**

Agency	Objective	Analysis vs. Planning Tool	Local vs. National Tool
UNDP	Improve the sustainability of livelihoods by strengthening the resilience of strategies	Used to facilitate the planning of projects and programs	Used at community level but calls for policy, macro-economy and legislation reform at national level
CARE	Strengthen the capability of poor people in order to secure their livelihood	Similar to that of UNDP	Used solely at community level
DFID	Facilitate the understanding of the factors that constrain or enhance livelihood opportunities	Used as a basic framework for analysis and not as a procedure for programming	Similar to that of UNDP

SLA is composed of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) tool used to understand poverty in responding to poor people's views and their own understanding of poverty. However, diversity and richness of livelihoods can only be understood by qualitative and participatory analysis at the local level. Weaknesses and strengths of SLA and SLF are recognized (Tables 2 and 3).

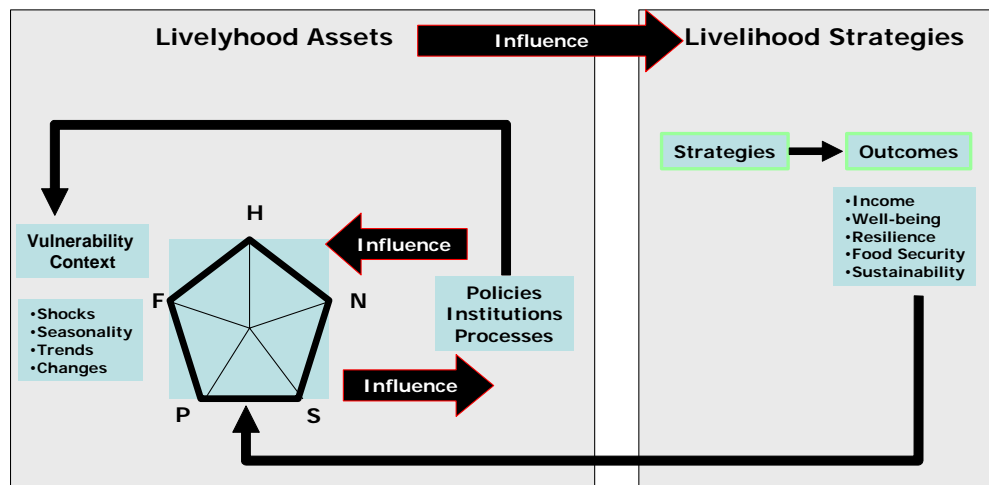
**Table 2. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (Krantz, 2001)**

Strength	Weakness
Variety of assets that people make use of when constructing their livelihoods, thereby providing a holistic view on what resources are important to the poor	Weak technique when it comes to social classification
Facilitates an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty by focusing on the variety of factors at different levels that directly or indirectly determine or constrain poor people's access to resources and thus their livelihoods	The distribution of resources and other livelihood opportunities at local level is often influenced by informal structures of social dominance and power within communities but this is rarely addressed except by the DFID approach which includes power relations as one aspect to be examined
Provides a more realistic framework for assessing the direct and indirect effects on people's living conditions than one dimensional productivity or income criteria	Gender is recognized in social relations by all approaches but the difficulty of genuinely giving the appropriate time and space to women is not really addressed in neither

**Table 3. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Serrat, 2008)**

Strength	Weakness
Seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context	Underplays elements of the vulnerability context, such as macroeconomic trends and conflict
Explicitly advocates a creative tension between different levels of analysis and emphasizes the importance of macro and micro linkages	Assumes that capital assets can be expanded in generalized and incremental fashion
Acknowledges the need to move beyond narrow sectoral perspectives and emphasizes seeing the linkages between sectors	Does not pay enough attention to inequalities of power
Calls for investigation of the relationships between different activities that constitute livelihoods and draws attention to social relations	Underplays the fact that enhancing the livelihoods of one group can undermine those of another

SLF illustrates stakeholders as operating in a context of vulnerability or external environment (comprising trends -demographic, resource, governance-, shocks -social, natural, economical- and seasonality -prices, products, employment opportunities-), within which they have access to certain peoples' strengths, assets or capitals (Figure 1). This context influences the livelihood strategies which are accessible by people in quest of their beneficial livelihood outcomes.



**Figure 1. SLF for implementing SLA (ORASECOM, 2000)**

Institutions, organizations, policies, legislations, culture and power relations determine access to and exchange between different types of capitals. Those various types of capital are;

- “Human capital” represents “the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health that together enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood objectives.” In this definition” (DFID, 2000,);
- ”Social capital” is the social resources upon which people depict in looking for their livelihood outcomes, such as networks, that increase people's trust and ability to cooperate with more formalized groups and their systems of rules, norms and sanctions;
- “Natural capital” constitutes the natural resource stocks from which resource flows and services (land, water and air quality, forests, protection from erosion, biodiversity degree and the like) useful for livelihoods are derived;

- “Physical capital” encloses the goods needed to support livelihoods, namely; affordable transport, secure shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, affordable energy and access to information;
- “Financial capital” denotes the financial resources such as available stocks and regular inflows of money which re used by people to achieve their livelihood objectives and adopt different livelihood strategies.

Through their interaction, institutions, organizations, policies, legislations, culture and power relations are the transforming structures and processes silhouetting livelihoods. Structures can implement policy and legislation and deliver services and trade while processes determine the way structures and individuals operate and interact. Together, they can determine ecological and economical trends through political structures, while alleviating effects of shocks, controlling seasonality by market structures and restricting people's options of livelihood strategies thus impacting the livelihood outcomes.

Livelihoods approaches highlight the importance of understanding how natural resources combine with other assets to sustain and improve poor people’s livelihoods. Such approaches also address resource governance issues through advocating for the need to understand natural resource use in the context of the complex policies, institutions and processes affecting poor people’s lives.

When considering livelihood strategies in relation to the SLA, it is essential to recognize that people compete for assets which render the amelioration of livelihood a complex process. Poor people are a diverse group placing priorities on capital types and transforming structures and processes, a restricted and uncertain environment, thus forcing compromises when applying SLA. Livelihood strategies are a dynamic process in which people combine activities to meet their various needs at different times, geographical and economical levels.

Accomplishments of these livelihood strategies come in many forms:

- 1) More income;
- 2) Increased well-being like health status, access to services and sense of inclusion;
- 3) Reduced vulnerability such as better resilience through an increase in capitals;
- 4) Improved financial capital thus food security;
- 5) Sustainable use of natural resources resembling appropriate property rights.

These livelihood outcomes elucidate how stakeholders are likely to respond to new opportunities and which indicators influence their options in choosing their assets. This analysis helps structures and processes ameliorate their support activities to communities.

The potential for the application of SLA is high since it is adaptable to diverse local settings where it can be associated to development research and projects. Prior to any development activity, SLA will also serve as an analytical tool for the identification of development priorities and new activities in order to understand the way a socially constructed environment works and to find potential beneficiaries in practice. These adoptions and experiences along with the faced constraints, challenges and lessons learned of SLA will be reviewed in the upcoming sections of this paper.

In this respect, we observe the *terroirs*<sup>1</sup> of the ESCWA region through some queries: Did locals try to establish stable ecosystems and how did they do that? Did they achieve resource development and management in a sustainable way? Where did they fail? And are they empowered to take part in decision making?

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<sup>1</sup> The French term “terroir” denotes a concept that encompasses the cultural heritage of a people, place, and the unique or distinctive products that it can produce. In this context, the value of the products lies chiefly in the distinctive qualities that set them apart from similar products that are either mass-produced or are the product of other terroirs.

## II . GLOBAL REVIEW AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ADOPTION OF SLA

*“Poverty is a condition of lack of physical necessities, assets, and income. It includes, but is more than, income poverty” (Helmores and Singh, 2001)*

“Poverty is the greatest shame and scandal of our era” (FEI, 2005). Seventy percent of the world's poor are rural people who depend on their local environments for daily survival. Rural people, especially women, have an ancient symbiotic relationship with their local environment. Many of the people who are considered as economically deprived, a rewarding life is about much more than simply money or goods. It is about their access to and control over natural resources and their involvement in the decision making processes about these resources (FEI, 2005).

The mainstream view of development experts claims that it is “the underprivileged people who are largely responsible for destroying their naturally occurring resources as they sink deeper into poverty” (Jodha, 2003).

However, this may not necessarily be true, since the livelihoods of many of the world's poorest people depend directly on unsoiled, undamaged natural resources, from which they obtain their needs from food, to housing, energy, water, medicine and income. On the other hand, when transnational corporations and international financial institutions promote inappropriate policies and technologies, enormous pressure is put on the environment and natural resources. As a result, more natural resources are sequestered and ecosystems become degraded, less productive and more prone to environmental hazards such as floods, drought and desertification, and thus, decreasingly able to support communities. In most cases, the application of SLA focuses on natural resources and agriculture. Other focus areas benefiting from the application of SLA were researched as well;

- Drinkwater and McEwan, 1994 and Carswell, 1997 provided examples of SLA application for household food security and environmental sustainability in farming systems research;
- IMM et al., 2000 discussed SLA appliance in coastal environments; and Moser and Norton, 2001 demonstrated, through the relationships between sustainable livelihoods and human rights, that its application could also be in “urban” contexts rather than exclusively “rural”;
- Hussein and Nelson, 1998 and Shankland, 2000 discussed SLAs’ implications for policy, as Ahmed with Lipton (1997) related it to structural adjustment;
- Farrington, 2001 to the “rights and the new architecture of aid” and to sectoral policies and Norton and Foster, 2001 with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) (Chambers, 2005).

### **Box 2:** Cases of Successful Global Experiences to the Adoption of SLA

**Ellis, 2000: Area: Tanzania :** through SLA, a detailed livelihood analysis was successful in demonstrating that coffee production (an important cash-crop for the country) contributed only 1% to household incomes.

**Lesson:** The detailed livelihood analysis was key to define future development cooperative efforts.

**Calow, 2001: Area: Ethiopia:** Conventional investigation identified access to water as the most critical factor.

**Lesson:** An SLA-focused livelihood analysis assessed how development activities, in this case the water supply systems, shape the livelihoods of the poor. In parallel, the SLF was used as a “checklist” to help structure ideas; identifying stakeholders with access to water, the amounts they used, and how these factors were related both at the household and regional level.

**Ashley, 2000: Area: Namibia and Kenya:** How rural livelihoods affect and are affected by natural resource management initiatives and what it implies for these programs. **Lesson:** SLA was instrumental in reshaping the program to enhance the livelihoods and focusing the participatory planning with communities and impacting assessment.

**Nicol, 2000:** Adoption of SLA to water projects in order to monitor, evaluate and analyze their efficiency.

**Lesson:** SLA helped sharpen the focus of monitoring and evaluation systems within projects and programs.

**Gibbon 1999: Area: Nepal:** UK Community Forestry Project. **Lesson:** SLA helped refocus/redefine existing projects to better address poverty elimination

**Source:** Kollmair and Gamper, 2002



A review of global experiences with the adoption of SLA demonstrates that the people who depend on the world's resources for their livelihoods are under increasing pressure from the changes and declining availability of the ecosystem services, conflicts over access rights, marginalization from resource access and exclusion. The poorest of these people are often the least able to respond to these changes, and many are becoming isolated from the activities that have been part of their livelihoods and culture for generations.

Although these people may have a role in the changes affecting land resources, they are only part of the problem. Yet in many cases they are being asked to carry an uneven share of the responsibility for the consequences of external forces that have kept them in poverty, degraded their environment, introduced inappropriate technology, pressurized their markets, excluded them from policy making, changed access rights and invested often inappropriately in land development. Many people recognize their dependence on the land resource base and value its sustainable and managed use for the future. Nevertheless, they lack the resources, knowledge and power to ensure that resources are effectively managed in the face of rapid external changes such as climate change, desertification, degradation and other (Campbell, 2008).

Various agencies generally perceived the solution to problems in resource use as imposing resource management measures associated with a social aspect. Initially, these solutions have had some success when measured against environmental criteria. However, on the medium to long run, they have left the poor poorer and the marginalized isolated from the development process. Amongst development agencies, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate livelihood change processes and resource management measures. It is now considered that that such integration appends social development to resource management initiatives.

Decision making recognize the diversity of stakeholders and allows for their meaningful participation instead of solely consulting elites in the community. Changes in planning for the future consider the needs, aspirations and potential of different groups. Awareness is made of the complexity of people's livelihoods. Furthermore, understanding these relationships with the resources is sought and incorporated into the management strategies.

Resources dependent livelihoods are being considered in order to achieve equitably and sustainably the environmental objectives. A multidisciplinary approach, cooperation among multiple agencies, the active engagement of communities and a transfer of power are essential to the success in resource management. Developing ways of successfully integrating social and environmental considerations in resource management and associated livelihood change lies at the heart of the land and livelihoods initiative.

A global overview aiming to bring together some of this global experience and provide guidance on how it might be further developed and used, was translated into the sustainable livelihood enhancement and diversification (SLED) approach. This approach is built on past experiences and lessons from around the world. It is an attempt to outline the subject and bring together both understanding and learning (Cattermoul et al., 2008).

Understanding the links between different approaches is essential to avoid confusion and improve the scope for collaboration with parties who come from a different starting point. Other linking issues, such as decentralization, public sector reform and community-based development are addressed at relevant points (DFID, 1999).

### **Participatory Development Approach (PDA)**

Strong links exist between SLA and participatory poverty Assessments (PPA). PPAs are the instrument that includes the perspectives of the poor in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to deal with it. They contributed to the preparation of the World Bank Country Poverty Assessment and the UN's "Country Human Development Report". The purpose is to build PPAs into ongoing welfare monitoring and policy formulation processes and to use them as a way to build ownership and new relations between various actors in the policy process.

Similarly to livelihoods analysis, PPAs are embedded in participatory research and action. The two approaches commonly share many themes, like the example of emphasis on vulnerability to shocks and trends and on various kinds of assets, and are therefore expected to be complementary. However, since both vary by context, it is not possible to make definitive statements about the links in any given case. SLA will not be effective unless it induce participation from skilled people in social analysis and share an overall commitment to poverty elimination. In particular, the PDA approach:

- Promotes people's achievement of their own livelihood objectives established through participatory activities
- Builds upon people's strengths by establishing who has access to which types of capital and how this is affected by the institutional, social and organizational environment
- Seeks to understand, through participatory analysis, the effects of macro policies upon livelihoods
- Expects that indicators of impact are to be negotiated with local people. This idea of negotiation goes well beyond basic ideas of participation as consultation

### **Sector-Wide Approach**

Livelihoods and sector-wide approaches are complementary with each having its own set of strengths. Livelihoods analysis understands the structures and processes that condition people's access to assets and their choice of livelihood strategies. Sector wide support programs will be highly appropriate in cases where the major constraint is poor performance by government agencies at a sectoral level,. This is especially the case for government-dominated areas such as health and education.

Sector programs will be enriched if they build on the information gathered in livelihoods analysis. This will help those involved perceive the interactions between different sectors and the importance of developing inter-sectoral links in order to maximize impact at a livelihood level. This will also encourage public sector institutions to recognize the many different players in the development process, create pressure within the sector planning process to open up the dialogue beyond government, innovate and incorporate best practice from existing project-level activities (DFID, 1999).

Livelihoods approaches can gain from the lessons learned and the objectives of sector-wide approaches, such as:

- The importance of ensuring domestic government ownership of the development process
- The need to base all support on best-practice public management principles and to stress the importance of developing capacity in areas such as financial management and budgeting
- The value of coordination between different donors

### **Integrated Rural Development (IRD) Approach**

The livelihoods approach was early criticized that it is similar to the failed IRD approach of the 1970s. Comparing SLA to other approaches such as the conventional IRD may reveal in many ways some similarities. The crucial difference is that SLA does not necessarily aim to address all aspects of the livelihoods of the poor. The intention is rather to employ a holistic perspective in the analysis of livelihoods and identify those issues of subject areas where an intervention could be strategically important for effective rural poverty reduction, either at the local or at the policy level. In contrast, IRD was forced to operate within a hostile macro-economic and institutional environment, dominated and often heavily distorted by government (DFID, 1999 and Krantz, 2001) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Comparing the IRD to SLA (Dalal-Clayton et al., 2003).**

	<b><i>IRD (1970s)</i></b>	<b><i>SLA (1990s)</i></b>
<b><i>Starting point</i></b>	Structures, Areas	People and their existing strengths and constraints
<b><i>Conceptions of poverty</i></b>	Multi-dimensional	Holistic, Multi-dimensional, Complex, Local, Embraces concepts of risk, power and availability
<b><i>Problem analysis</i></b>	Undertaken by planning unit in short period of time, viewed as conclusive	Inclusive, iterative process based on holistic livelihood assessment
<b><i>Sectoral scope</i></b>	Multi-sectoral, single plan, sector involvement established at outset	Small number of entry points, multi-sectoral, many plans, sectoral involvement evolves with project
<b><i>Level of operation</i></b>	Local, area-based	Both policy and field level with clear links between the two
<b><i>Time taken to prepare projects for donor support</i></b>	Initial identification rapid, detailed planning time-consuming	Understanding of livelihood options time-consuming. However, projects start as discrete interventions and build on these. Preparation time therefore spread over longer overall project time
<b><i>Time frame</i></b>	5-10 years	Longer Commitment
<b><i>Coordination</i></b>	Often donor-driven, dependent on donor funds to implement	Driven by shared objectives and needs identified by those involved
<b><i>Spatial focus</i></b>	Rural, area-based	Rural areas as part of larger systems
<b><i>Indicators</i></b>	Production changes, uptake	Production/conservation-oriented, people and outcome-oriented, negotiated
<b><i>Sustainability</i></b>	Not explicitly considered	Key aspects of livelihoods. Also at political/fiscal levels
<b><i>Environment</i></b>	Treated as add-on (if at all)	Opportunity to put environment at the heart of livelihood development
<b><i>Capacity-building</i></b>	Minor concern. Relied on idealized conception of capacity	Major concern
<b><i>Supporting research</i></b>	Adaptive technical, socio-economic	Livelihood strategy-based action research

### **III . REVIEW OF THE ESCWA REGION EXPERIENCE WITH THE ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SLA**

In the ESCWA region, local communities' vulnerability to devastation, overexploitation and privatization is increasing, directly jeopardizing the natural resource base and the livelihoods of the poor, and therefore adversely affecting traditional NRM practices (FEI, 2005). There are many elements that are involved;

- Some areas in the ESCWA region are plagued by unemployment and poverty, threatening the socio-economic sustainability and political stability of its member countries.
- Clean water, electricity, basic health and education services are limitedly available especially in rural areas.
- Land degradation and low agriculture productivity are serious threats particularly in rural areas, where there is heavy reliance on natural resources.
- Climate change is pushing rural livelihoods beyond their adaptive capacity.
- Global economic forces including the terms of trade are not conducive to rural development and the growth of small producers.
- The 2008 food crisis triggered a rapid expansion and intensification of agricultural land use and raised the level of pressure on the natural resource base.
- The current financial crisis is also playing its role in promoting unsustainable practices.

All of this is forcing communities in ESCWA region to make their living in a less sustainable way in order to support themselves and their families.

From here, comes the crucial role of natural assets; particularly rangelands, pastures and agroforestry in reducing poverty in rural and mountainous regions where limited accessibility and relative isolation makes peoples' dependency on local resources very high (Jodha, 2003). The challenge is to develop innovative technological solutions that are efficient and inexpensive enough to deploy in underprivileged areas. These innovations can include solar water heating, electricity generation and agricultural and biotechnological solutions. Their role would be enhancing the food productivity and the quality of life thus securing enough food for livelihoods and delivery of basic needs. In this context that the comprehensive nature of the SLA approach to rural development, enables an understanding of the social, economic and natural factors within which rural communities make their decisions regarding natural resource use and livelihood strategies in order to protect both the natural resource base and the livelihoods of the people it is supporting. SLA will place people and their priorities at the center of development and intervene in reducing poverty through empowering the poor to build on their own opportunities, supporting their access to assets, and developing an enabling policy and institutional environment (ESCWA, 2009).

In response to expressed needs for technical assistance from some member countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen) of the ESCWA region, the UNDP drylands development center (DDC) implemented the program of Catalytic Support to Implement the Convention to Combat Desertification in West Asia and North Africa. The purpose of the program is to contribute to the sustainable development of drylands through reducing vulnerability and improving livelihoods throughout establishing long-term implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This was done through capacity building, advocacy, resource mobilization and innovative programming. The goal was to emphasize on the productivity of drylands and ensure its reflection in policy-making processes.

In 2006, a new phase of the program entitled “Promotion of Sustainable Livelihoods in the Drylands of the Middle East and North Africa – in the context of the Millennium Declaration and the UNCCD” was initiated (Box 3). This phase was accompanied with a change of targeted interventions aiming at improving the livelihoods of the dryland poor in the region.

**Box 3: The relevance of SLA to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)**

**MDG 1 “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”.** Drylands occupy 40% of the earth surface and are home to more than 2 billion people, many of whom are poor. When studying the location of poor people in the ESCWA region, there is a **clear correlation** between those **living in degraded areas** and high levels of **impoverishment**. The program aims at promoting sustainable livelihoods for the dryland poor, with the objective of contributing to poverty alleviation efforts.

**MDG 3 “Promote gender equality and empower women”.** The **program supports** rural women groups in a variety of ways including capacity building and networking with relevant stakeholders with the aim to help them help themselves and gain more **economic independence and empowerment**.

**MDG 7 “Ensure environmental sustainability”.** The program promotes integrated approaches to dryland development and **promotes dryland development issues** in economic, social, political and environmental policy. It shows how National Action Plans to **combat desertification** can be **merged with other strategy processes**, such as poverty reduction and decentralization strategies, in order to promote sustainable livelihoods and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

**MDG 8 “Develop a global partnership for development”.** The program contributes to shifting the development thinking to integrated, comprehensive, programmatic forms of development assistance. It gives donors the opportunity to support the UNCCD and dryland development with a new focus on an affirmed intention to raise productivity and bring the drylands into the modern economy. The program promotes increased development cooperation to **enhance market access for dryland products**, and help “incentivize” the **private sector to contribute to dryland development**.

**Source: UNDP, 2009**

The way forward for livelihoods in the ESCWA region is threefold:

- 1) Provide support to dryland development processes and UNCCD implementation with emphasis on mainstreaming land tenure reform and local governance of natural resources;
- 2) Build partnerships and make markets work for the drylands’ poor;
- 3) Promote knowledge management in support of sustainable livelihoods and natural resource management in drylands.

In this paper, we will try to clarify whether these objectives were somehow achieved; understand the local communities of the ESCWA region; and analyze their evolution in protecting their livelihoods and their natural environments by making their own choices and creating opportunities for themselves as well as obstacles to their adoption and implementation by relevant institutions.

Selected experiences from the ESCWA region with achieving SLA adoption in the context of MDGs;

### **1- Networking and Capacity building in Lebanon and Palestine.**

The international Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) has identified a prominent citrus fruit, which should cover whole year-round production worldwide. A UNDP program facilitated networking between the Healthy Basket, a socially responsible organic agriculture business in Lebanon, and FLO. Healthy Basket currently works with 40 farmers all over Lebanon. It has a permanent outlet and a community supported agriculture (CSA) program through which it distributes organic fruits and vegetables to households in Beirut, in addition to a weekly booth in a farmers’ market.

The promotion of products from the region is another experience with the FLO. Kesko, a Finnish whole sales distributor, is looking for Palestinian Fair Trade labeled oranges. The UNDP program will network with Kesko and the Finnish Fair Trade Organization to identify possibilities to open up new marketing outlets for Palestinian oranges. Fair Trade is opening up new marketing channels and enhancing the livelihoods of poor dryland producers (UNDP, 2009).

### **2- Product Development for Lebanon and Jordan.**

The cooperation between the University of Helsinki in Finland and the Initiative for Biodiversity Studies in Arid Regions (IBSAR) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon, National Virtual

Center for Biotechnology (NVCB) in Jordan and Viikki Drug Discovery Technology Center (DDTC) works on specific existing product development initiatives with targeted technology and knowledge provided by the DDTC. It is foreseen that products, concocted from the drylands' biodiversity, for non-medicinal use and or cosmetics will also emerge from the cooperation. The ultimate objective is to produce a marketable product within a short period of time in order to increase the opportunities of work for poor farmers (UNDP, 2009).

### **3- Cooperation between the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for Improved Livelihoods of Small Producers in Iraq.**

Wheat and dates are Iraq's major agricultural production and its key to food security. These agroecologies are facing problems of low productivity, unimproved farming practices, unsustainable resource use and high poverty levels among small-scale farmers. Moreover, wheat and the chickpea food legume systems in the North of Iraq are affected by diseases and date yield and quality in the rainfed and irrigated date palm systems in the center and South of Iraq are affected by insect pests. The project addresses these problems through a farmer participatory approach and solves them using the following technologies and techniques: integrated pest management (IPM), organic fertilization, socio-economic and policy research, capacity building activities targeting farmers, technical staff and extension agents. The aim is to reduce production costs, scale out farming technologies to small-scale farmers and ensure sustainable increases in food production (ICARDA, 2009).

### **4- Experience of CARE in Egypt and Sudan (CARE, 2009).**

CARE is using SLA to:

- Improve agriculture by teaching farmers new farming techniques
- Support small businesses by giving them access to cheap loans
- Strengthen community-based organizations
- Ensure that local communities are able to make their voices heard by government officials and development agencies
- Assist poor communities so that they take part in decision-making when it comes to managing water and other resources
- Distribute seeds and tools to boost agricultural production
- Develop food early warning systems so that emergencies can be responded to before communities run out of food
- Improve water supplies and provide safe access to water, food security and basic healthcare
- Conserve forestry and energy in eastern Sudan

Take emergency relief action due to the ongoing conflict and drought problems in Sudan

### **5- Rural Women's Advisory Organization (RWAO) for ESCWA member countries.**

A UNDP program initiated contact with the RWAO in Finland and agreed that the organization shares its expertise and provides its advisory services to women groups in ESCWA member countries. It is also identifying and mobilizing women groups in partner countries which will benefit from the advisory services of the rural women organization. RWAO can assist women by building their capacity towards the promotion of entrepreneurship and the establishment of small rural businesses. It can also facilitate networking with Finnish organizations to enhance the marketing of drylands products (UNDP, 2009).

## **IV . BEST LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES**

Usage of SLA should be considered when it has been established through a country program strategy process and for all rural or urban development programs and project interventions integrated into ongoing monitoring and evaluation that directly target livelihoods. There is no right way for applying SLA and it does not come with a toolbox. Best methods used in the adoption of SLA are:

### **1-Agroprocessing**

Farming on its own rarely provides a sufficient means of survival in rural areas of low income countries. However, better benefits can be found in small-scale food processing. Agroprocessing businesses play an important role in the economy of all countries. Small-scale agroprocessing is an adequate technology to poverty alleviation as it builds on the indigenous knowledge and skills and local natural resources of poor people and is less dependent on the assets that are in short supply such as finances (Azam-Ali, 2007). Considering the interconnected elements of the SLF, agroprocessing can improve:

- Income generation through increased employment opportunities
- Food security through food availability, accessibility and safety
- Nutrition
- Social and cultural well-being, namely; Cultural significance of food products (All cultures have traditional food products that they value for more than just the nutritional role and small-scale agroprocessing helps to maintain production of these products), and

Reduction of drudgery (Agroprocessing encompasses the development and use of appropriate equipment and technologies designed to save time and to make the processing of foods easier)

### **2-Local Transport**

SLA provides a reasonable organizing framework to the transport sector. Based on information and experience in pilot transport projects, the transport sector has been proved to contribute to sustainable livelihood outcomes. The link between sustainable livelihoods and transport is when transport activities interconnect with people's strategies for daily survival and the opportunities it offers for long term structural improvements in society. Furthermore, it requires looking beyond the traditional products of transport planning (infrastructure and vehicles) to the social products of interaction and access that it facilitates. Transport is part of the physical livelihood and building financial capital is increasingly an important element in poverty reduction especially when commercialization of goods and services is growing. A more holistic interpretation of transport is to see it as the essential link in the utilization and accumulation of other assets. Natural resources (water, energy sources, farmland and the like) and human capital (building services, participation in social networks and political processes) usages are all strongly correlated to ease or difficulty in physical access (Njenga and Fernando, 2007).

Rural transport can catalyze the building of other assets by:

- Easing the burden of women in accessing and using their natural capital (water and energy for domestic use)
- Increasing women transport capacity which results in time saving
- Building network (social capital), acquiring new knowledge on farming (human capital) and generating income (financial capital)
- Strengthening a local women network
- Creating opportunities for market activities among the poor
- Improving access to 1) labor markets thus facilitating the flow of surplus labor to other sectors and areas, 2) product markets which results in stimulating surplus farm production and capital markets, and 3) creating links with sources for farm implements and credit

Additionally, the transport sector can be a direct source of financial capital for the poor mainly through its construction and transport service activities. Development of transport infrastructure aims to enable poor people to earn incomes. Also, local transport services can be provided competently using appropriate transport technologies that are within the financial capacity of the poor to acquire and operate. Agencies linking transport sector in developing countries to poverty reduction are namely; the World Bank, European Union, DFID, SIDA, SDC, NORAD and DANIDA.

### **3- Post Disaster Reconstruction**

Disasters that leave people homeless initiate intense debates about which technologies are appropriate to rebuild homes in a safe and disaster resistant way. Reconstruction focuses on houses as a physical capital rather than a social and economical one. Nevertheless, reconstruction addresses longer-term livelihood vulnerability within poor communities and households to empower the most vulnerable. Support to livelihoods as a response to disaster is still a new approach that is largely confined to support for agriculture and food security (such as distribution of cash, seeds and tools as part of agricultural support packages or to provide food and cash for work). In the context of livelihoods, indigenous building technology is particularly valuable because it uses local skills and labor (self-building and hiring local builders). Hence, reconstruction presents (Twigg, 2007):

- An opportunity to create jobs
- Safe housing initiatives that train local builders for building more hazard-resistant structures and rehabilitating others

Participatory processes, involving vulnerable people and disaster victims, identify livelihood needs and economic factors affecting rebuilding and technology choice and lead to approaches that are based more on livelihoods than on technology. When disaster victims are given a say in rehousing plans, they highlight livelihood related features which are usually invisible to agency planners. Moreover, community participation allows for the choice of building technologies that are appropriate to local needs, resources and cultures.

From a livelihood perspective, the location of housing is only part of the problem of vulnerability to external shocks and the poor dislike relocation because of its impact on their livelihoods. Poor people choose to remain in a hazardous location because that is where they can earn a living.

### **4-Micro or Small Scale Enterprises (MSE)**

The central role of agriculture in poor peoples' livelihoods is changing. Social and environmental trends (including rural land hunger, declining crop prices, swelling labor forces, migration and urbanization) increase the demand for alternative employment and off-farm livelihood opportunities. Therefore, manufacturing and processing MSEs play an increasingly significant role in poor peoples' lives and are one of the keys to lifting people out of poverty. Poor people depend on earnings from MSEs whether as business owners, employees or self-employed. Processes of technological change and market development are highly significant factors in their livelihoods (Albu and Andrew, 2001):

- Private sector markets play a role in the livelihoods of micro entrepreneurs and small-scale producers
- Technological change (including poor peoples' adaptability) has an effect on livelihood opportunities and outcomes

Women mostly make their living from MSEs. MSE employment is based on diverse crop and food processing or manufacturing activities, fabrication, repair and servicing. Manufacturing or processing MSEs can:

- 1) Make a significant contribution to jobs and economic production;
- 2) Have a role in supplying resilient and flexible infrastructure services;
- 3) Tend to generate relatively good incomes for workers;



- 4) Support a large number of livelihoods per unit of output than the larger-scale firms with whom they compete.

#### *The role of market structure and dynamics in MSE fortunes*

Although they operate in informal and unregulated environments, the fortunes of most MSEs are connected by supply chains through production channels and the influence of competition.. These interrelationships increasingly link MSEs' performance to the behavior of large firms and other actors in economic networks. An effective analysis of market structures and market dynamics is essential to understanding the livelihood strategies and options of poor people who work in MSEs.

#### *The role of technological change in MSE fortunes*

A significant determinant of market dynamics and competitive pressures on MSEs are long-term patterns of technological change. These patterns are associated with innovation in communications, greater trade in technology and goods, and opening up of global markets. In the context of rapid external changes, even small improvements in MSEs' productivity, product quality, organizational methods and support structures can make a significant difference to their economic returns and vulnerability. In principal, poor people stand to gain from technological change (generating easier access to information, higher productivity, lower input costs, less wastage and better environmental management). However, the pace and volatility of change can be a problem, particularly when MSEs are left behind by larger competitors, or forced to take on greater risks in order to compete. As a result, the livelihood outcomes that MSE owners and workers experience in practice, is likely to be increasingly determined by MSEs' capacity to generate and manage technological change. On the long-term, an effective analysis of the factors that influence technological change in and around MSEs is the tool to understand the livelihood strategies and options of poor people who work in them.

### **5-Water and Sanitation Technologies**

Water supply interventions are integrated with those which improve hygiene and sanitation in particular to minimize diarrhea disease. Poor demands for water are related to ensuring maximum returns and minimize opportunity costs in the case of women in particular. A low-cost pump, designed with lightweight and corrosion resistant components can be maintained by women, appropriate for local manufacture and need only simple tools (Barton, 2007).

### **6- Rural Livelihoods**

Two technology models to raise production as a principle behind supporting rural development are visible (Peacocke and Mulvany, 2007):

- 1) **Technology model 1** aims for the intensification of agriculture through the use of new technologies for use in medium and large farms. It centers the power for technology development and control in the hands of private agribusiness. Little consideration is given to subsidiary financial and environmental costs that support the system and or to the social, demographic and cultural disturbances they will lead to. Mass migrations of poor rural communities to a new urban poverty and the privatization of resources are an inevitable consequence of the need to provide food for growing populations through the introduction of new technologies.

- 2) **Technology model 2** also aims towards an intensification of agriculture however, this time, by incorporating elements of both traditional knowledge and modern science into resource conserving practices that achieve long-lasting increases in productivity. While low-input in terms of technology and practices, approaches based on agroecological processes require intensive management in terms of labor, knowledge and skills. This perspective argues that future food security is not just about agricultural productivity but will depend also on allowing farmers and rural communities to take greater control over the management of the land, water and genetic resources from which they derive their livelihoods.

## **7- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)**

ICTs cover the broad spectrum of technologies used for the collection, processing and transmission of information. New communication technologies and existing information systems of small scale-farmers and entrepreneurs in rural communities marginalize disadvantaged communities, to determine what could be done to mitigate those adverse effects. They strengthen and develop the information systems of small-scale farmers and enterprises in developing countries and contribute to poverty reduction (O'Farrell et al., 1999).

Properly leveraged, ICT tools can enhance people's lives:

- Increase access to information relevant to their economic livelihood
- Better access to other information sources, healthcare, transport, distance learning and or the strengthening of relations.

## **8- Enterprise Development and ICTs**

The use of ICTs for the promotion of enterprise development and MSEs interact with a range of actors in their production chains, using a variety of means of communication. They require information about four main aspects of their operations: supply, demand, the operating environment and internal processes, and this information is most likely to be communicated through informal networks or business relationships.

Four functional areas for ICTs and enterprise operations can be identified:

- As an enterprise output
- As a primary processing technology
- As support activities
- As a secondary processing technology

The most important areas of support for ICTs and enterprise development are:

- The policy and regulatory environment, specifically to enable ready adoption of e-commerce
- The development of content relevant to the information needs of MSEs, including development of the institutional arrangements and mechanisms to maintain and update relevant content
- Support for the development of the ICT sector, including national and local ICT technical capability
- Support for increasing awareness of ICTs amongst policy makers, BDS providers, enterprise associations and MSEs
- Integration of ICTs in other small enterprise development (SED) programs.
- Support for networking using ICTs amongst BDS providers and MFIs to exchange good practice
- Support for an authoritative knowledge base of good practice on ICTs and SED

Support for pilot or experimental projects aimed at enabling access to ICTs, in order to obtain sound empirical information.

## **9- Manufacturing Micro and Small-scale Enterprises (MSE)**

*Improving livelihood opportunities from small-scale manufacturing and processing enterprises.*

Manufacturing and processing activities in MSEs play a critical role in the livelihoods of the poorest in developing countries (Albu, 2007):

- Poor people living in rural areas and relying on simple non-farm enterprises to supplement their agricultural opportunities

- Poor people living in urban areas and finding employment in informal workshops and home-based micro-industries
- Many manufacturing MSEs provide a crucial service to poor farmers and householders, by designing, making, servicing and repairing low-cost tools and equipment (capital goods) on which their agricultural livelihoods rely

*Improving livelihoods based on manufacturing MSEs*

Supporting and promoting manufacturing MSEs is crucial in order to improve livelihoods for poor people who either work in these enterprises, or who rely on them to supply, maintain and repair the tools of their trades. In recent times, the field of enterprise development adopts a sustainable livelihoods perspective recognizing that:

- MSE employment is only one of multiple productive activities in which poor people use the assets they have to sustain their livelihoods
- Poor people and their enterprises operate within a context often dominated by external shocks, trends and seasonal factors over which they have little control
- Poor people's operating environment is strongly determined by policies (business regulations, tax and tariff rules), institutions (markets, banks, government and support institutions) and processes (social, cultural and technological change)
- The impact, which these have, is partly determined by poor people's access to these institutions, and degree of influence over policy-makers and change processes
- In response to these contexts, poor people adopt and adapt a range of livelihood strategies and MSE employment that help generate desired livelihood outcomes such as increased income, conservation and accumulation of assets, and resilience to vulnerability

## V . LESSONS LEARNED

### **Case Study 1:** Adaptive Strategies for Sustainable Livelihoods in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) Project (IISD, 2007)

Development policies, concentration on the cash economy and existing trade relations are existing conditions affecting the poor. Responses of the poor come in the form of colonizing common property resources, intensification of agriculture on marginal lands, increasing heads of livestock and shortening fallow periods; migrating to cities, towns, agricultural plantations and to more vulnerable and marginal lands; and having large families in order to diversify sources of income and labour. These responses provided short-term benefits to the poor. Here intervened SLA by considering the poor as agents for their own self improvement guided by their own knowledge base and strategies which lead to sustainable livelihoods.

Adaptive strategies common or specific to almost all the communities of the member countries in the ESCWA region:

- Several grain cultivation namely sorghum, millet and maize
- Maintenance of the ecosystem's health by application of local regulations: bans on cutting certain types of trees, preservation of certain areas of the forest commons, regulations for the use of water and forest resources
- Adoption of irrigated agriculture where opportunities permit
- Use of modern veterinary services where services are available
- Supplementary feeding of livestock as seasonally required
- Supplementary income sources (gold panning, sale of livestock; seeking employment in neighboring countries) from outside the community
- Management of wells by the community
- Communal decision-making about the movement of livestock and the sale of cattle and camels
- Reliance on new forms of social organizations such as village committees, religious organizations and NGOs

**Lessons Learned:** A clear and detailed documentation of adaptive strategies to ecological, social, political and cultural risks and shocks is needed. The strategies identified should evolve from contemporary scientific and technological innovations, policy issues, indigenous knowledge and experiences. These livelihoods strategies have led to sustainable livelihoods in arid and semi-arid lands and the policy issues that enhance or limit the development and implementation of these strategies. Hence, the initiative sought to capture these synergies with the conditions and processes which produced and reinforced them. IISD recognizes that these problems occur globally in diverse socio-ecological systems. The initiative would focus on agropastoralists in arid and semi-arid areas with the view of using the lessons learned from this experience to develop similar initiatives in other regions and socioecological systems.

### **Case Study 2:** Al Badia Integrated Development Program in Syria and Al Badia Research and Development Program in Jordan (Jamil, 2004)

An integrated policy approach to Dryland development has been adopted in Syria and Jordan. Both interventions adopted a balanced development approach at various levels (livestock and rangeland development, land resources, information technologies and training, and management). Social, environmental and institutional concerns were addressed. These included the creation and training of community based organizations (social level), the rehabilitation of degraded rangelands (environmental level) and catalyzing the involvement of relevant ministries and institutions in the development program (institutional level).

**Lessons learned:** Promotion of sustainable livelihoods in drylands revolves around a number of prominent issues that require systematic clarification and action. These are reducing vulnerability, enhancing integration, promoting good governance and sustainability, enhancing community participation and more effective knowledge management. An integrated policy approach deploys multiple strategies (broad based agricultural development, livestock and rangeland development, improved technologies, farming systems rural infrastructure and strengthened public institutions). It also capitalizes on building stronger linkages between a wide range of stakeholders, including agricultural researchers, local government units, community leaders, farmers, non-governmental organizations, national policy makers and donors.

**Case Study 3: Healthy Basket Project in Lebanon (Jamil, 2004)**

This project sought to support rural livelihoods through enhancing organic farming practices and opportunities. In one year, the project was successful in offering technical support to farmers shifting from conventional farming to organic farming, helping farmers meet quality standards and obtain international certification and distributing produce to markets, which accounted for high revenues from the sales thus benefiting around 40 farmers.

**Lessons Learned:** Long-term sustainability cannot be guaranteed with the closure of the project given the complexity of the chain of activities and the complexity of certification. Therefore, the need to carefully delineate both short and long term implications of different policy interventions in the context of the drylands, with a particular focus on identifying mechanisms and mobilizing resources for ensuring longer-term reliance and independence. Privatization and different public private partnerships as well as assistance from venture capitalists should often be considered at the outset of project interventions to ensure a smooth transition from a pilot-based project structure to long-term sustainable livelihoods and business practices.

**Case Study 5: Using SLF to understand land use dynamic in Arsaal village in Lebanon (Hamadeh et al., 2006)**

SLF was first used in Lebanon in the late 1990s. The livelihood choices of the community of Arsaal were strongly natural resources-based: fruit tree growing, quarrying in addition to the traditional agropastoralism. But there was also a significant off-farm component. Investing in multiple options helps the household to confront various uncertainties coming from sociopolitical, economic or ecological conditions. It was found that local people used the outcome from off-farm employment to invest in land management. Major issues remain unresolved like the fact that the sustainability of rural livelihoods does not necessarily imply the sustainability of all the ecological systems that make up these livelihoods. For example, the rapid increase in quarrying, while being an important contributor to the stabilization of livelihoods, has had a serious negative impact on the natural capital of the community.

**Lessons Learned:** The livelihood analysis showed that, without quarrying, the livelihood of many Arsaali would break down, and so would the agroecological system. In the macro and meso economic systems (national and global), the Arsaal community has a limited number of available options. This brings out the other problem of the SLF, which is the dryland issue in developing countries largely at the micro, sometimes at the meso levels while the macro level remains outside the scope of analysis.

**Case Study 4: Decentralization and Local Development Support Program in Yemen and Local Rural Development Program in Palestine (Jamil, 2004)**

These programs demonstrate the critical importance of creating an effective institutional mechanism for coordinating dryland development plans and activities. In Yemen, this was promoted through the dissemination of the Local Authority Law for decentralization and the empowerment of local councils given their strategic position to promote poverty alleviation initiatives and environmental conservation at the local level. In Palestine, the local rural development program (LRDP) entailed provisions for the creation of micro regional planning committees (MRPC) that are intended to nurture a decentralized planning and financing approach to rural development within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The focus has been on strengthening

these local governance structures, channeling to them essential financial resources and technical assistance, to empower them in turn to play an active role in local economic development.

**Lessons Learned:** Relevant policy lessons suggest that the promotion of sustainable livelihoods in dryland areas will require significant changes in the objectives and operational modalities of local public agencies. Good governance entails functionality, transparent processes, clear goals and coordination. In the pursuit of good governance, both national and local governments have to strive for a proper allocation of roles and responsibilities, less fragmentation, and greater coordination. Effective decentralization and the empowerment of local governance structures are also promising policy interventions given their potential for mobilizing local participation/support and enhancing the credibility of development activities.

**Case Study 6:** Revitalization and empowerment of tribal social organizations (Jamil, 2004)

A systematic effort at understanding the practices and social organization of nomadic pastoralists suggested that herding of animals through the arid and semi arid zones can be productive with good management. Interventions (including participatory training processes, the formation of community funds and the development of partnerships between government entities and nomadic communities) originated at the level of the community and successfully reconciled external prescriptions with local, community level knowledge, realities and needs.

**Lessons Learned:** Community participation is therefore a critical ingredient of any policy intervention that seeks to nurture long-term sustainability and self-determination. Giving dryland populations the opportunity to make choices and exercise judgment nurtures their long-term confidence and ability to act as agents of change within their respective environments. Participation and empowerment are thus essential to guarantee long-term continuity and sustainability. This may take different forms, but essentially entails the negotiation of options with local populations and capitalizing on their input and involvement in the selection, modification and implementation of appropriate intervention strategies.

**Case Study 7:** Implementing the community based regional development program (CBRDP) using SLA in five districts of Yemen (Neely et al., 2004),

**People-centered:** Communities in Yemen lack specific skills which prevented them from becoming active participants in the development process.

**Enhancing good governance and institutions, multi-level linkages, building social and human capital:** Fifty-three community development organizations (CDO) were formed to identify, implement and monitor poverty alleviation interventions, manage a newly-established community credit fund, and create effective linkages with institutions at different levels. The building of assets through community organization, enterprise skills facilitation and access to credit and savings facilities was adopted as a key strategy in addressing rural poverty

**Social inclusion:** Ensuring the representation of the poor and women in all the functions of the CDOs was essential

**Women empowerment:** Gender was a critical factor, with women being exempted from certain training eligibility criteria in order to encourage their participation. Women made up 35% of all trainees and this induced in them self-confidence and self-esteem.

**Focus on enhancing livelihoods, building human and social capital, not strictly sectoral:** In coordination with CDOs, government departments have also expanded and upgraded their coverage of services in project areas. Alongside measures designed to strengthen CDOs, human capacity-building and training activities also took place. Development training was provided to improve technical, organizational, managerial, administrative and financial skills, and vocational training was given in 14 fields ranging from carpentry and plumbing, to perfume and ceramics production

**Lessons Learned:** Communities have gone from passive recipients to active initiators of development interventions. Training in project design and proposal writing skills has allowed CDOs to attract enough money to fund local development activities through the community revolving credit fund. In addition, clear changes occurred in the perception of the community towards women's participation when women were able to become representatives in CDOs. Building the financial capital, with an average household income rising by 26%, was the result of such businesses. Vocational training and the availability of credit has led to the creation of numerous small businesses, which helped diversify household income sources, thus reducing vulnerability to economic shock (Box 4).

**Box 4: General Lessons Learned**

- Remain **focused**, use framework in a simplified manner, and only carry out detailed analysis where the data is of particular interest and importance;
- **Prioritization** of possible **entry points**, start with a few and possibly expand later on;
- Involve **partners** throughout all stages of SL analysis; initially encourage use of the SLA in a simplified manner;
- Carefully select the SLA **team**;
- SLA conducted in the context of **participatory development program** and project planning processes and methods;
- **Data** collection and analysis needs to be undertaken on a **gender disaggregated** basis;
- Take into account **inter and intra household diversity**, including those based on social difference;
- Include **power dynamics** in the analysis of livelihood situations and pathways to improvement.

**Source:** NZAIS, 2006

Tables 5 summarizes lessons learned of some case studies from the ESCWA region and highlights their policy implications.

**Table 5. Lessons learned in Drylands experience and their policy implications (Jamil, 2004).**

Prominent Issue	Example	Policy Implications
Reducing vulnerability	Revitalization and empowerment of tribal social organizations	Developing a meticulous understanding of the social and economic organization of the dryland community Capitalizing on existing strengths and assets to reduce vulnerability
Enhancing Integration	Al Badia integrated development program in <i>Syria</i> The Badia research and development program in <i>Jordan</i>	The simultaneous use of multiple strategies to enhance development outcomes, i.e. broad based agricultural development, improved technologies and farming systems, improved rural infrastructure, and strengthened institutions  The involvement of multiple stakeholders (including agricultural researchers, local government units, community leaders, farmers, non-governmental organizations, national policy makers and donors) to catalyze systematic dialogue and action
Promoting Governance	Good Decentralization and local development support program in <i>Yemen</i> Local rural development program in <i>Palestine</i>	Reducing institutional fragmentation, improving coordination and allocation of responsibilities between different levels of government  Promoting decentralization and the empowerment of local governance structures for purposes of mobilizing local participation and support and enhancing the credibility of development activities
Promoting Sustainability	The challenge of the Healthy Basket Project in Lebanon	Delineating both short-term and long-term implications of policy interventions Identifying mechanisms and mobilizing resources for ensuring long-term reliance and independence Consideration of different public private partnerships as well as assistance from business enterprises at the beginning of project interventions to ensure a smooth transition from a pilot-based project structure to long-term sustainable business practices
Enhancing Community Participation	All cases including the Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian and Lebanese interventions	Inviting community participation and involvement in the selection, modification and implementation of appropriate intervention and coping strategies Creating opportunities for the Dryland communities concerned to negotiate options, make choices, exercise judgment and mould the interventions as appropriate Deploying the appropriate knowledge- sharing infrastructure and tools to promote knowledge exchange, the cross fertilization of ideas, and the diffusion of best practices Creating new forums and nurturing new relationships and dialogue that break through the traditional lines of communication



## **VI. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FACING THE ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SLA**

SLA uses are diverse and flexibly adaptable to many settings but they are not able to quickly eliminate problems of poverty and SLA is not a revolutionary new idea for development research and cooperation. A major weakness of SLA is that livelihood analysis requires enormous financial, time and personal resources often lacking in practical projects. Moreover, the claim that SLA is holistic leads to a consideration of several aspects, what inevitably delivers a flood of information hardly possible to cope with.

Further problems may arise with the analysis of the livelihood assets such as the difficulties to measure and to compare social capital. The asset status of a person is highly associated with the amount of dependence from a certain resource and varies according to the local context, as for instance some actors might be able to satisfy their needs with a low level of financial capital, whereas others with more financial capital show by far less ability to do so.

Cases in the ESCWA region that have been successful in improving the lives of the rural poor were rarely without constraints which require attention. The main Issues affecting the principles of SLA are explained below (for other issues, see Box 6).

### **Issues related to participation, social inclusivity and enhancing the livelihood strategies of the poor**

Design weaknesses, related to mainstreaming participation throughout the various stages of a project and to addressing the needs and enhance the livelihood strategies of the most vulnerable people, can cause difficulties to the implementation of SLA.

When local stakeholders are not consulted prior to the design, it can cause difficulties when it comes to encourage women's participation in the project. Strict socio-religious codes limit women's mobility and presence in public. This could consume a substantial amount of time particularly when trying to explain the project's goal and strategy and negotiate with their peers, elites and local politicians to satisfy the minimum participation requirement of women in a project. Moreover, women's lack of involvement in project design also has implications for the relevance of the project's activities to their needs.

Some difficulty is experienced in enhancing the living conditions of the poor and landless, including women. Participatory processes are not sufficient on their own to ensure the equitable participation of socially marginalized groups. The reasons for these weaknesses include

- 1) providing greater attention to the nature of the livelihoods strategies of poor and marginalized groups and the fact that the limited range of assets open to them often prevented them from qualifying for project assistance;
- 2) ensuring that project implementers are addressing the demands expressed by women during participatory planning sessions.

### **Issues related to the disaggregation of project interventions**

When targeting the most vulnerable groups, there is a tendency to categorize the poor as a homogenous category. A lack of methodical selection criteria mean that project participants are selected randomly by field trainers.

When access to land is used as a key indicator of poverty, constraints in SLA's successful adoption are faced. Because of the differences in levels of land ownership and access amongst participants, benefits gained from agriculture interventions also differ. Those with greater access to land may gain greater benefits compared to those with a limited access to land that end up with little to no income generation from selling their land related activities. Furthermore, such participants are unable to afford inputs (seeds, seedlings, fencing and irrigation equipment) in order to make their limited land more productive.

### **Issues related to empowerment**

Measures taken to build human and social capital had generally contributed to the empowerment of beneficiary communities. However, the nature and execution of interventions on the field limit the extent to which beneficiaries can be empowered.

The illiteracy of farmers renders them unable to contribute to processes designed to keep track of and illustrate changes that are occurring on their plots. The constraint can lie in the basic literacy training, held prior to the implementation of an intervention, which is simplified to the extent of being almost meaningless. Concerns also exist as to the quality of training women receive which orient them towards recognition and adoption of practices and technologies instead of rendering them experts and knowledgeable about the benefits that could arise from these practices and technologies.

The reason goes back to the field staffs that tends to be unclear as to the objectives and benefits, are usually the ones to decide the nature of farmers' activities and give participants little ownership of the learning process.

### **Issues concerning holistic interventions, increased resilience and ability to withstand shock**

In attempting to increase food security and raise the incomes of impoverished household through the promotion of monoculture production, an increase in households' vulnerability to different other shocks can occur.

An increase in the number of farmers producing a certain type of crop, results in human and financial resources being concentrated on this one production at the expense of other crop productions. This leads to a reduction of crop variety in areas of the ESCWA region because of the higher returns of one specific crop.

These changes can have negative effects in terms of lack of diversity in the diet of the local people and increased vulnerability to natural shock such as pests and drought. In addition, an increase in the amount of stagnant water behind dams for long periods can contribute to an increased incidence of malaria thus increasing households' vulnerability to health related shocks.

### **Issues related to dynamism and flexibility**

Difficulties can arise when work is done in collaboration with government agencies in order to develop responsive and quality service delivery of crop and livestock products. Parties cannot easily interpret this nature of the work and usually do not engage in it. Additionally, suppliers face complexities when working with flexible effort focusing on transforming structures in comparison to substantial products delivery.

### **Issues related to good governance and institutions, and macro-micro linkages**

Despite important contributions to the empowerment of women through supporting women to realize changes in their status, this usually doesn't include the engagement of national government representatives thus weakening the institutionalization of these achievements.

### **Issues related to partnerships**

There are wider constraints when working in partnerships, which is an effective means of addressing the multi-dimensional nature of rural poverty. In order to address multi-sectoral concerns, institutional and policy changes are the core in explaining the weakness of established partnerships and the subsequent lack of significant achievements made despite the numerous development initiatives that are usually undertaken (Table 7).

**Box 5: Other Constraints facing SLA analysis**

- |                                                                               |                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Too big and complex;                                                       | 5) Can be extractive versus empowering;             |
| 2) Identifies too many potential entry points;                                | 6) Overlooks intra-household differences;           |
| 3) Not widely understood by partners;                                         | 7) Overlooks diversity of the poor;                 |
| 4) holistic analysis mitigated by "sector-centered" governance / professions; | 8) Too politically neutral and or too technocratic; |

**Source:** NZAIS, 2006

**Table 6. Challenges to Participatory Policy Making (Lowe and Schilderman, 2001)**

Source of Challenge	Types of Challenge	Overcoming the Challenge
Politics and Politicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Politicians are suspicious of community-based organizations (CBO) which may weaken their own support base</li> <li>- Political capture of CBOs</li> <li>- Destructive party politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raise politicians' awareness of the benefits which they can reap from supporting and working with CBOs</li> <li>- Ban party affiliation of Community Development Councils (CDC) leaders</li> <li>- Partnerships to increase resilience against political capture</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hierarchy and control</li> <li>- Officers' negative attitude and lack of respect for the poor</li> <li>- Irregularity in government-community collaborative projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make housing and community development committee a statutory body for all municipal councils</li> <li>- Training and raising awareness for government officers on the use of community action planning methods and the benefits of partnerships to both sides</li> <li>-Partnerships to improve bargaining power</li> </ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CDCs cannot directly receive funding</li> <li>- CDCs leaders are poor and cannot afford to devote time to community work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accounts and leadership training for CDCs activists</li> <li>- Promote direct funding links between federated CDCs and relevant funding agencies</li> </ul>
Poverty	Social/power inequalities and social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reimbursements to cover CDCs expenses</li> <li>Federate to increase bargaining power and resilience against threats.</li> </ul>

## **VII- CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SLA ADOPTION IN THE ESCWA REGION**

Adopting a sustainable livelihoods approach for improving the well-being of the rural poor is a complex and challenging objective to achieve. It requires the acquisition by a broad group of stakeholders of the skills, knowledge and motivation needed to undertake actions targeting specific priority issues through a coordinated approach.

Moreover, and while numerous SLA and non-SLA development initiatives by local and international actors exist in member countries of the ESCWA region, minimal attention has been given to building synergy between these various initiatives through collaborative actions. As a result, there is a lack of project replicability, little attention to cumulative experience, and minimal sharing of experiences and lessons learned.

Hence, there is need to increase the region's ability to adopt SLA and integrate it into long-term strategies. This requires the development of capacity-building programs to be implemented at different levels targeting various stakeholders: Government, developmental organizations, academic/research institutions, and the community as a whole.

### **Capacity building at the governmental level (including local governments)**

Governments, and notably local governments, need to embrace sustainable livelihood principles to ensure the success of any SLA initiative. An adjustment of management styles, institutional cultures and structures may be required for government institutions in favor of more flexibility, interdisciplinarity, client-driven modes of doing business, beneficiary participation in goal-setting, and dynamic partnerships [FAO, DFID, 2000]. In particular, a shift of focus from the traditional sectoral/national resource management approaches to a central focus on people's livelihoods and the driving forces, structures and processes, which shape livelihood strategies is required. Targeted training highlighting linkages between SLA and these traditional approaches may be useful in facilitating the shift.

### **Capacity building at the development agencies' and civil society level [Dearden et al, 2002]**

Development agencies, NGOs and civil society at large constitute the main driving force for implementing SLA projects. As such, they need to be the first to internalize SL approaches and mainstream it into their activities so that an SL lens is applied to each project at the various stages of planning and implementation.

At the outset, developing a common understanding among these organizations of key SLA principles and concepts is needed in support of coordinating efforts and supporting multidisciplinary. SLA training and experience-sharing workshops for practitioners, which use clear and simplified terms (rather than mystifying jargon) and make heavy use of case studies, can help build SLA capacity. Discussing the relationship and complementarity of SLAs to other development approaches during these workshops may help overcome inertia. Local and regional development networks may be formed among SLA practitioners to help stay up to date on SLA experiences and lessons learned.

### **Capacity building at the research level**

The development research experience of academic institutions in the ESCWA region is generally weak. There is need to initiate participatory, inter-disciplinary and action-centered research to facilitate the production of a local development agenda that responds to local conditions. Development research institutions also have a role in independently assessing the long-term impacts of SLA projects beyond their lifetime. In order to facilitate this, linkages and networks need to be created as forums supporting the flow of information among researchers from different disciplines.

Furthermore, regional SLA centers of excellence may be established in order to highlight achievements in the field and disseminate them through outreach programs in secondary schools, universities and other major learning centers.

Research results then need to be shared with SLA stakeholders, possibly through networks for community development that bring together researchers, policy makers, communities and development actors, donors, the private sector, community-based organizations and NGOs.

### **Capacity building at the community level**

Educating the general public about SLA is a basic step to change public perceptions, assumptions, values and relationships, and allow beneficiaries to take ownership of SLA projects. One entry point for such capacity building may be through cooperatives for marginal groups in society (such as herders, beekeepers, farmers, women involved in food processing and handicrafts production and the like), which constitute a good communication channel between decision makers and the target groups. As such, it is important for member countries to nurture such cooperatives and facilitate their formation and operation.

Women being a major group that is often marginalized in ESCWA rural areas, it is important to empower women and build their capacities to allow them to take part in SLA projects. Training workshops tailored to the specific needs of women in various areas may be needed.

## VII . FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Global and regional experiences with the usage of SLA suggest a number of recommendations in support of improving the livelihoods of the most underprivileged societies of the ESCWA region. While these recommendations are not unique to SLA and may be equally applicable to other approaches, they are in harmony with core SLA principles.

### **Building assets in ESCWA member countries**

- *Human asset* development should be approached through technical, vocational and organizational capacity-building provided to individuals, especially vulnerable/disadvantaged groups (the very poor, landless people, women, etc.), producer groups, and civil society institutions. For example, training in non-traditional farming activities (beekeeping for example) can be provided since it takes minimal or no land space and may constitute a feasible strategy for small landowners as well as landless persons. Training on measures for increasing yields of monoculture activity may also help boost food security and income levels. In addition to investment in education, improving rural health should not be neglected, so as to enable a healthy, skilled workforce.

- *Social assets* should be built through the facilitation of formal and informal network formation. Social capital in the ESCWA countries often takes the form of belonging to tribes or extended families; this is often a major asset for poor and marginalized people.

- While many rural communities in the ESCWA countries rely on remittances from family members working abroad, this source of income has proved to be vulnerable to external shocks. *Financial assets* should be enhanced for the poorer sections of the community through income generation activities as well as access to official development assistance, microfinance and or other credit schemes, which are expected to expand existing livelihoods strategies, and help diversify household income sources and increase household income levels.

- *Physical assets* should be developed through infrastructural support related to sanitation, water supply, roads, communication, shelter and storage facilities, and the provision of farming tools and other equipment that are suitable to the local environment.

- ESCWA member countries are characterized by increasingly limited access to *natural assets*, mainly water and fertile land, which are further threatened by inappropriate and unsustainable agricultural systems. Building water assets in the Region depends heavily on investments in water management infrastructure (also a physical asset) that address upstream and downstream relationships [MoPIC, 2004]. In order to render existing livelihood strategies more sustainable, natural resource recovery measures should be coupled with training in improved agricultural practices. Promoting improved farming, land use and irrigation practices, providing access to and the reclamation of land for agricultural production, and encouraging sustainable land management practices are examples for building land and water assets.

### **Good/democratic governance in ESCWA member countries**

The form and quality of government systems are keys for the success of SLA. ESCWA member countries have - to varying degrees - pursued a government decentralization process, which if properly implemented is expected to speed government response to local needs, decrease corruption, improve delivery of basic services, and increase accountability and transparency. In addition, decentralization motivates local stakeholders by increasing their opportunities for political representation.

Information flows should be enhanced. When data and information are shared by public sector bodies, public capacity to analyze and demand change is improved. For example, information about

government service delivery and expenditure enables citizens to generate pressure for public reform and promotes a more accountable and effective public sector.

At the local government level, it is important to build the service provision capacity and the responsiveness of local government to local priorities, in addition to the capacity for participatory, multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches. Community representation in local government should also be enhanced.

Reform is usually achieved through the effective mobilization of organized civil societies who can pressurize the public sector in favor of change. Grass roots coalitions such as community development councils ensure that successful development is achieved for the poor and by the poor. As such, participation of the community who is the primary stakeholder not only generates local ownership but also ensures that proposed changes effectively address the priorities of the most vulnerable.

### **Community empowerment in ESCWA member countries**

Strong and constant local community leadership improves the development of local capacity to deliver the changes predicted by policy and legislative amendments. It is crucial since it provides vision, can lead change and manage opposition. Such leadership qualities can be found in special task forces, coordinating committees and steering groups that must be empowered to play an effective role.

Vulnerable socio-economic groups within the community including the poorest and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups should be empowered and their capacities built to enable them to initiate and be proactive in development planning and decision making.

Rural women can have a remarkable role as community mobilizers, especially among the young. Particular attention to the empowerment of this group is therefore important. The economic empowerment of women by developing traditional livelihood strategies (for example embroidery, household poultry-raising, sheep rearing, tailoring and fruit and vegetable production), will improve women's position within the household, and give them access to, and shared control of, household income. Achieving economic empowerment of women usually translates into personal and political empowerment, which exhibits itself into higher degree of influence over decisions that affect their lives.

### **Participatory approaches in ESCWA member countries**

In addition to being a human right, community participation through all its groups adds value to SLA projects. Participation of the poor themselves in research and policymaking helps in the identification of priority issues and the elaboration of measures for addressing these priorities. When the right issues are addressed, chances of developing legitimate strategies, policies and programmes to address them are much higher, and so is the level of stakeholder ownership and support.

A participatory approach can be adopted by allowing small-scale farmers' voices to be heard in policy debates, bringing together local government and community-based organizations during problem identification and various project phases including design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation/diagnosis.

To allow this, community development associations should be created taking into account traditional power structures by including local tribe leaders, while at the same time ensuring the participation of the poorest, marginalized community groups and women. These associations should be supported through appropriate training. In addition, local government should be trained in participatory and gender responsive methodologies to enable them to carry out participatory assessments and gender action planning in rural areas.

### **Partnerships and macro-micro linkages for ESCWA member countries**

Policies, institutions and processes operating at various levels - global, national, regional and local - influence poor peoples' lives and determine their livelihood strategies. As such, it is imperative to ensure that these policies, institutions and processes are informed by, and directly linked to, the complex reality of poor people's lives.

One approach to building these macro-micro linkages is through establishing strong cross-sectoral partnerships to ensure widespread participation and geographical coverage in the adoption of project strategies that are self-help-based and demand-driven. This will contribute towards longer-term sustainability of project achievements. For example, a national farmers platform can be established to which local farmer associations are linked, so as to facilitate the representation of local needs at the national level and help communicate a wide ranging set of views and interests. Communications channels from the grassroots to the center are established to enable policy makers to stay informed of and influenced by local realities. As another example, the capacity of government extension staff is built and their way of working with rural communities is transformed through training in participatory approaches.



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