

Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Best Practices
On sustainable Rural Livelihoods in the ESCWA Region
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OVERVIEW, HISTORIC AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH

by
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Overview, Historic and conceptual framework of SLA

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**Expert Group Meeting on "Promoting Best Practices on Sustainable Livelihoods in the ESCWA Region"
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Evolution of the development concepts in the 20th century

- Challenges of the 20th century:
 - Two devastating world wars: casualties and famine problems
 - International solidarity initiatives (UN agencies and programs, NGO's, etc.)
 - Technological advances and increase in agricultural productivity
 - Advances in health sector and expanding world population
 - Expanding cities versus rural exodus
 - Increasing volume of trade and food security dependency
 - Growing disparity between industrial countries and developing countries
- Efforts to bridge the North-South gap through development programs that address:
 - Peace building
 - Famine eradication (later poverty eradication)
 - Sustainable biodiversity and environment
 - Sustainable Livelihood and people-centered approaches to development



First development initiatives

- Green Revolution (with FAO playing a leading role)
 - Countries like India became exporters in few decades while they were under the risk of starvation
 - Rich farmers became richer, yet poor farmers increasingly marginalized
 - Environmental problems were getting more visible and more complex
- Emerging challenges: how to address sustainability and the complexity of rural poverty?



Evolution of the poverty definition

- What is poverty?
 - Is it only about income?
 - Is it about marginalization?
 - Is it about limited access to political decision?
 - Is it limited access to resources?
 - Is it limited access to technology?
 - Is it limited access to governance and decision maker?
 - It is all of them together
 - A sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach draws on this broadened and holistic understanding of poverty (Farrington et al., 1999).

It took time to realize that well-being is not only about increase in income



Emergence of SLA concepts

- Despite stated commitments to poverty reduction, the immediate focus of most donors and government efforts centered on:
 - Managing resources and infrastructure (water, land, clinics) or
 - Establishing service oriented institutions (ministries, livestock services, NGOs)
- Other concerns about development effectiveness include: (Ashley and Cornay, 1999)
 - unsustainable projects and programs (environmental, economic, etc.);
 - isolated sectoral initiatives with limited value vs. complex cross-sectoral programs which are unmanageable
- Success can only be achieved if a good understanding of the household economy is combined with attention to the policy context.
- SL approaches stem from concerns about the effectiveness of previous development paradigm

SL approaches place people firmly at the centre



SLA versus previous Development Concepts

- **IRD (Integrated Rural Development):** is holistic and multi-sectoral:
 - Focusing on areas with multidisciplinary development programs
 - **SL approaches** are also holistic but with focused interventions
 - SLA are non sectoral and cross sectoral
 - support can target particular needs, even within sub-sectors or areas
- **SLA and Natural Resources Initiative for rural areas**
 - Perception that SL is just NRI under a different name remains powerful,
 - SL approaches do not necessarily lead to NR interventions.
- **Macro-micro links: (Farrington et al., 1999).**
 - Targeted interventions in specific areas are micro
 - Gathering information through participatory poverty assessments is micro
 - However, many factors affecting livelihoods are at a macro scale:
 - E.g. natural capital management depends on adapted policies
 - access to finance in rural banking or credit facilities
 - Vulnerability depends on rural development policies



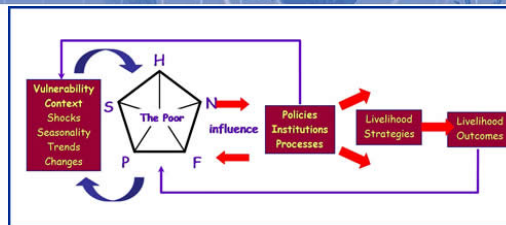
Sustainability dimensions under SLA

- SLA emphasizes the multi-faceted notion of sustainability:
 - In rural areas sustainability is often associated with natural resources
 - Participatory assessment under SLA, indicate that “vulnerability” is a core dimension of poverty
 - Reducing vulnerability can be achieved through helping people to develop resilience to external shocks, as a way to ensure the overall sustainability

The concept of sustainable livelihood has been adopted by many development agencies (UNDP, DFID , Care, Oxfam, IFAD, etc.) since the 1990s.



SLA Principles and Framework



- The essence of SL is captured in a set of solid core principles
- The principles alone are not practical on the ground. They should be backed by a range of tools deriving from the framework
- The framework identifies five types of capital asset which people can build upon: human, natural, financial, social and physical
- The framework is a flexible analytical tool to build the understanding of people's livelihoods strategie and priorities as identified by people
- The livelihoods approach requires the use of various methods (qualitative and quantitative) and considerable triangulation of data.



SLA methodology

- SL concepts are necessarily flexible in application
- Focusing on people means that practical applications of SL concepts: (Farrington et al., 1999).
 - start with an analysis of people's livelihoods over time
 - fully involve people and support them in achieving their own livelihood goals
 - focus on the impact of different policy and institutional arrangements on people's livelihoods
 - seek to highlight these arrangements so they promote a pro-poor agenda



Area of application of SLA

- Although SL approaches are relatively new, they have been applied with flexibility and can be used for: (Ashley and Cornay, 1999)
 - Identifying and designing new initiatives (projects and programs)
 - Reviewing and re-assessing existing activities and projects,
 - informing strategic thinking for global and sub-sector reform
 - Developing research adapted to the specific needs of specific countries e.g. ESCWA
- SL approaches are practical in bringing together a variety of concepts, lessons learnt and ideas

The core principles can be applied to any type of development activity



SL approaches do not require 'SL projects' or even holistic programs

- Key lessons on SLA: (Ashley and Cornay, 1999)
 - Focus on specific manageable entry points. Do not try to intervene everywhere
 - Keep in mind the contribution that your entry point will make to the whole
 - SL approaches can effectively contribute to poverty elimination through a clearly formulated and focused project addressing livelihood improvement

Holistic analysis does not require holistic intervention



Monitoring and Evaluation

- SL approaches require on-going learning throughout implementation, and therefore highlight the importance of monitoring and evaluation.
- But the strengths of SL approaches pose additional challenges:
 - The focus on **non-income aspects** of livelihoods (reduced vulnerability, access to assets, etc.) is difficult to measure
- Experience indicates that it is important to: (Ashley and Cornay, 1999)
 - Negotiate indicators with the poor and other stakeholders
 - Monitor a range of livelihood impacts, not just the direct objective
 - Monitor assumptions. The SL framework can help clarify which exogenous factors may influence the outcomes of a project/program.
 - Conduct socially differentiated monitoring. It is important to ensure not to neglect the differences within and between households.
 - Combine process and impact indicators of policy change versus the resulting institutional reform.



Finance and management complexity

- SL approaches are being adopted to increase the effectiveness of development activity, but there is also concern that they may increase the costs.
- More time and resources throughout the project cycle, from diagnosis/needs assessment for monitoring and Evaluation.
- A particular worry is that projects informed by SL will become increasingly complex and difficult to manage.
- They need also experienced multi-disciplinary well trained staff


Getting information is only half the story –
analysis is as important and as time-consuming
(Ashley & Hussein, 2000).



Key concerns while applying SLA in the ESCWA Region

Adapted from (Ashley and Cornay, 1999).

- Where do we start? What should the entry point be for the ESCWA countries in the SL framework?
- Can SL approaches be equally applicable at project, program and country level, including for policy reform?
- What tools should be used for SL assessment, planning and review?
- What are the quantitative and qualitative measurable indicators ?
- How can SL approaches coordinate with other disciplines and sectors?
- How to deal with partners, particularly with policy-makers?
- How can SL approaches be mainstreamed, rather than just replicating specific initiatives?
- How to guarantee that SL-guided activities will benefit the poorest?



What is needed in ESCWA countries

- Political endorsement of SLA:
 - By providing a favorable environment in policy thinking for the adoption of more participatory, poverty-focused approaches
 - Financial
 - Research
- Development of the specific SLA priorities in both related research and practice, and through their interaction
- Focus on few core building blocks like agricultural production, income diversification and infrastructure and manage through a bottom-up planning process (Carney, 1999)
 - SLA concept evolves more from open-ended fieldwork than from the closed surveys and statistics' (Chambers and Conway, 1992)
- Learn from the available experience in this field

Environmental sustainability remains a major issue in ESCWA region and should receive adequate attention in SL initiatives.



SLA challenges in ESCWA region

- The approaches can be considered as still recent in our area and subject to acceptance problems and critics (such as IRD under a new name)
 - it is possible to build upon the strengths of IRD without falling into the same traps.
- While SL approaches are implemented, new issues emerge requiring more flexible procedures at three levels:
 - Project/program level decisions (e.g. planning, approval, review)
 - Country level decisions
 - Organization policy level
- The challenge is to develop practical and cost-effective tools for the various linkages

Holistic analysis does not require holistic intervention



Some concerns

- Partner and donors are organized along sectoral lines and budgets:
 - SL approaches need greater flexibility: adapted budget cycle, qualitative indicators..
 - The SL agenda raises several internal issues: awareness, skills, complementarity, cross sectoral collaboration, etc.
- **Managing micro-macro links** Poverty elimination is a combination of local-level initiatives in addition to policy intervention. In practice, however, the opportunity for influencing policy may be transient (Farrington et al., 1999)

Efforts to cross sectoral boundaries may be fruitless: it is not easy to fit a multi-sectoral approach with sectoral institutions



Conclusions 1/2

- SL approaches may help in understanding problems, but they do not necessarily make them easier to change (ex. distorted power relations, restricted access to capital assets, conflicting socio-economic interests, lack of implementation capacity, etc.)
- SL multi-faceted approaches are more realistic in depicting the complexity, but they poses particular difficulties for performance assessment as compared to money-based approaches
- SLA is over-ambitious and offers insufficient practical guidance: how to conduct the initial analysis, level of resources,? types of data, steps from analysis to action)
- SL approaches are considered as evolutionary not revolutionary.

Be modest and realistic: changes in livelihoods take time to become evident.



Conclusions 2/2

- It is important to share information on how SLA is useful. However, it is also essential to learn where the difficulties lie
- There is no single component of sustainability. However, this appealing idea is difficult to translate into action
- Finally, addressing poverty at the scale of more than 1 billion poor people in developing countries is an enormous challenge. It is not likely to be achieved without some broader changes in global trends, such as in the consumption patterns of richer people and in international financial, trade and industrial arrangements and in benefit sharing of natural resources..

Livelihood security is difficult to measure
since it is a matter of perception

