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Exploring the Association between Poverty, Livelihoods, Institutions, and Sustainable Community Development. A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The **aim** of this paper is to assess the links or interfaces between poverty, livelihoods, institutions, and sustainable community development through a literature review. To realize this objective, the study used the Department for International Development's (United Kingdom) Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as an overarching theoretical foundation. A **descriptive method** of data analysis using secondary data and a qualitative research approach were followed. The current state of the problem has been explored by means of a deductive approach. The **results** of the conceptual analysis show that the interactions between poverty, livelihoods, institutions, and community development are significant. The study also revealed that institutions are crucial for the formation of livelihood possibilities and strategies for the poor and marginalized groups, and they play a significant role in sustainable development. Existing empirical evidence demonstrates that livelihood outcomes may be positive or negative based on vulnerability contexts, the nature of livelihood, institutional frameworks, and livelihood strategies followed. The study **concludes** that institutional influence is pivotal since it directly or indirectly affects the access to livelihood, determines livelihood strategies and outcomes. Policymakers are therefore expected to consider and comprehend the relationship between these notions before formulating policies, plans or programs to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development effectively.

Keywords: poverty; livelihoods; institutions; livelihood strategies; community development; sustainable development

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Исследование взаимосвязи между бедностью, средствами к существованию, институтами и устойчивым развитием сообществ. Концептуальный анализ

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель этой статьи — оценить зависимости и взаимосвязи между бедностью, средствами к существованию, общественными институтами и устойчивым развитием сообщества с помощью обзора научной литературы. Для достижения этой цели в качестве теоретической основы исследования выбран подход министерства международного развития Великобритании к обеспечению устойчивых средств к существованию (Sustainable Livelihoods Approach). Результаты представлены с помощью описательного **метода** анализа вторичных данных и качественного исследовательского подхода. Текущее состояние проблемы

было исследовано с использованием дедуктивного подхода. **Результаты** концептуального анализа показывают, что взаимосвязи между бедностью, средствами к существованию, общественными институтами и развитием сообщества являются значительными. Исследование также продемонстрировало, что институциональное влияние играет важную роль в устойчивом развитии при формировании возможностей и стратегий получения средств к существованию для бедных и маргинализированных групп населения. Существующие эмпирические данные свидетельствуют о том, что результаты получения средств к существованию могут быть положительными или отрицательными в зависимости от контекста уязвимости, характера средств к существованию, институциональных подходов и стратегий обеспечения средств к существованию. В исследовании сделан **вывод** о том, что институциональное влияние имеет решающее значение, поскольку оно прямо или косвенно влияет на доступ к средствам к существованию, определяет стратегии и результаты обеспечения средствами к существованию. Авторы полагают, что политические деятели осмысливают взаимосвязь между этими понятиями при разработке планов или программ по сокращению бедности и эффективному содействию устойчивому развитию.

Ключевые слова: бедность; средства к существованию; институты; стратегии обеспечения средств к существованию; развитие сообщества; устойчивое развитие

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1. Introduction

The conventional measure of poverty, which is income, i.e., a consumption-based indicator, is now diminishing as most scholars have come to understand the multidimensional nature of poverty. Researchers and development policymakers now recognize that poverty is beyond a lack of financial resources but rather includes a wide range of issues other than a lack of income, such as vulnerability context, a lack of livelihood assets, institutional influence, and other dimensions of well-being [1]. In the capability approach, as explained in [2], poverty is viewed as the deprivation of the capability to generate income, rather than as low income. The conventional strategy to reduce poverty has been losing ground to the sustainable livelihood approach recently since it is thought to be too narrowly focused [3]. As a result, an examination of the interconnections between various attributes is required.

In development studies, the concept of “livelihoods” has grown in complexity as a means to conceptualize the entire range of economic activities that impoverished and non-impoverished people engage in [4]. The concept of livelihoods is best explained within the notion of sustainable livelihood, which presents the possibility of a comprehensive and integrated strategy for reducing poverty. The sustainable livelihood approach draws attention to the intrinsic potential of people in terms of their knowledge, social connections, access to materials and money, and

capacity to have an impact on key organizations [5]. On the other hand, community development is an attempt to initiate capacity building for improving the institutional role, resilience power, skills and knowledge, culture, social capital, etc. of the society [6]. Therefore, in order to identify important issues for the interface where an intervention could be strategically important for effective poverty reduction, it is crucial to analyze how poverty, livelihood, institutions, and community development interrelate and influence one another. This will help better understand the complex and diverse processes through which livelihoods are constructed.

This study contributes to depicting the junction between poverty, livelihoods, institutions and community development for policy intervention. Thus, it contributes to the current academic literature by providing evidence regarding the interface. Further, this paper provides evidence for the pivotal role of institutions in guiding livelihood outcomes (whether positive or negative). The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 deals with methodology, Section 3 provides a literature review, Section 4 presents results and discussion, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Methodology

This study adapted the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) as the overarching theoretical framework (with a minor modification) that directs the discussion on the relationship or interfaces between poverty, livelihoods, institutions,

and community development. The theoretical and empirical academic literature deemed pertinent to this study underwent a thorough assessment. In order to accomplish its goal, this study reviewed the concepts related to poverty, livelihood, institutions, community growth, tools and techniques. A descriptive analysis and qualitative research approach were followed to depict the interface. The descriptive design is employed to describe how poverty, livelihoods, institutions, and community development affect one another.

3. Literature review and conceptual analysis

Concepts of Poverty

Despite its universality and the vast amount of literature on it, there is no agreement among experts over the definition and method of measuring poverty [7]. For instance, poverty is a word used in three different ways in literature. The first concept is applied to low-paid workers and people out of work to reflect hardship, misery and destitute conditions. The second refers to incomes, wealth and real living standards of different kinds of people, although this concept still may not measure what poverty is. The third usage raises questions about inequality, exclusion, discrimination, injustice and relative poverty, which call for a new morality [8, 9].

Poverty can be described using multidimensional approaches such as structural or institutional, socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects. According to [10], poverty can also be described as deprivation of political power or empowerment, access to resources (including human and material), socio-cultural wellbeing, as well as the quality of institutional structures. Generally, poverty is the lack or loss of a sustainable livelihood. Different attempts were made to identify methods of measuring poverty. Some of these are income level, level of expenditure, and quantity of caloric intake, termed "absolute poverty measures". Others are the quality of housing, the value of assets, access to physical, financial, social, natural and human capital, etc., which are considered measures of relative poverty [11].

To understand poverty, the concept of a certain society's socio-cultural wellbeing, tangible and intangible resources and assets, as well as institutional and political conditions, is required [5]. Thus, poverty is not only the gaining of low or

insufficient income, but also a multi-dimensional concept. It includes the deprivation of an individual or a group from economic, social, psychological and political capabilities. This may manifest in a lack of entitlements and access to a variety of resources such as human, political, social or natural capital, that enable individuals to satisfy their basic needs [10]. The recent understanding of the concept of poverty helps us understand that well-being is not only about increased income. Food insecurity, social inferiority, exclusion, a lack of physical assets, and vulnerability are other dimensions of poverty that need to be addressed [1]. Factors such as access to assets and the influence of policies and institutions significantly determine household poverty [12].

As explained by A. Sen [2], households or individuals are said to be poor when they fall into deprivation of political power, access to livelihood assets (including human and material), and socio-cultural wellbeing. The value of goods and services that are purchased, self-produced or gifted can be expressed in terms of monetary value, which is an income-based measurement of poverty. However, poverty-line analysis ignored the dynamics of poverty and failed to distinguish between temporary and persistent poverty [13]. Reducing the number of poor is a common global concern of governments, international agencies and civil society. Though effective ways to pursue the achievement of this objective are debatable, current policies tend to focus on enabling institutional environments rather than direct initiatives to reduce poverty [14].

Due to the multifaceted character of poverty, a comprehensive interdependent strategy that addresses both the symptoms and structural causes of poverty is required [7]. There is a need to research additional aspects, such as the influence of institutional structures, that have both positive and negative effects on the outcomes of livelihood. It is necessary to determine how institutions influence the livelihoods of the poor in order to comprehend their situation. The participation of the local community in the process of examining their fate also contributes to our understanding of the means of subsistence for the impoverished. A detailed view of the relationship between livelihoods, poverty, and institutional influences, as well as the outcomes of livelihoods that impact people's lives, is best explained by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework [6].

Livelihood concepts

As discussed in [13], livelihood concepts are best described within a sustainable livelihood framework that was developed based on the recognition that “households construct their livelihoods both on the basis of the assets which are available to them and within a broader socio-economic and physical context underlined in recent attempts to devise a graphic model of the factors that need to be taken into account in analysis and policy”.

Different people may define livelihood referring simply to making a living, supporting a family, having job security, etc. However, the term livelihood is as complex as human struggle for survival. With the assistance of government, civil society, and external organizations, the hidden complexity behind the term got simplified as attempts were made to help people whose means of making a living were endangered. Through various learning and experiences, different definitions were given for the term. As cited in [4, 5], Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway [15] for the first time proposed the following broad definition of a sustainable rural livelihood, which different developmental agencies adopted in framing the sustainable livelihood approach. The definition is as follows:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.

Although this definition can be applied to different hierarchical levels, the authors stressed that it is most commonly used at the household level. The Institute for Development Studies (IDS)¹ at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, first proposed a somewhat modified and more realistic definition of a sustainable livelihood:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its

capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Sustainable Livelihood Approach

The perception of sustainable livelihood was expanded when the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in 1992, advocated the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as a broad goal for poverty eradication. It underlined that sustainable livelihoods could function as an integrating factor that allows policies to address development, sustainable resource management, and poverty eradication at the same time, mostly for rural development.

As illustrated by Krantz [5], the concept of sustainable livelihood, derived from the general definition of livelihood by Chambers and Conway [15], was given a minor modification by IDS:

A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.

To become a recognized principle in development collaboration, this definition also requires a context-related interpretation of sustainability that acknowledges the role of time, space, and culture, since the concept of sustainability of livelihood goes beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty eradication. This manifests that the livelihood is dynamic. The dynamism of livelihood depends on environmental, social, economic, political stresses, technological advancement, etc. Thus, the sustainable livelihood approach aims at promoting development that is suitable for not only ecological but also for perfect positive outcomes through social, economic and institutional engagements [12]. However, the livelihood strategies adopted by rural households may vary greatly based on initial livelihood capital, leading to different outcomes in terms of income growth and poverty alleviation [16].

Theoretical frameworks developed by different agencies in order to better understand how people develop and maintain livelihoods vary. As mentioned above, this paper focuses on the commonly accepted and widely used DFID² model

¹ URL: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/>

² Department for International Development (DFID). Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets. London, UK, 1999. URL: <https://www.livelihoodscentre.org/documents/114097690/114438878/Sustainable+livelihoods+guidance+sheets.pdf/594e5ea6-99a9-2a4e-f288-cbb4ae4bea8b?t=1569512091877> (accessed on 02.06.2023).

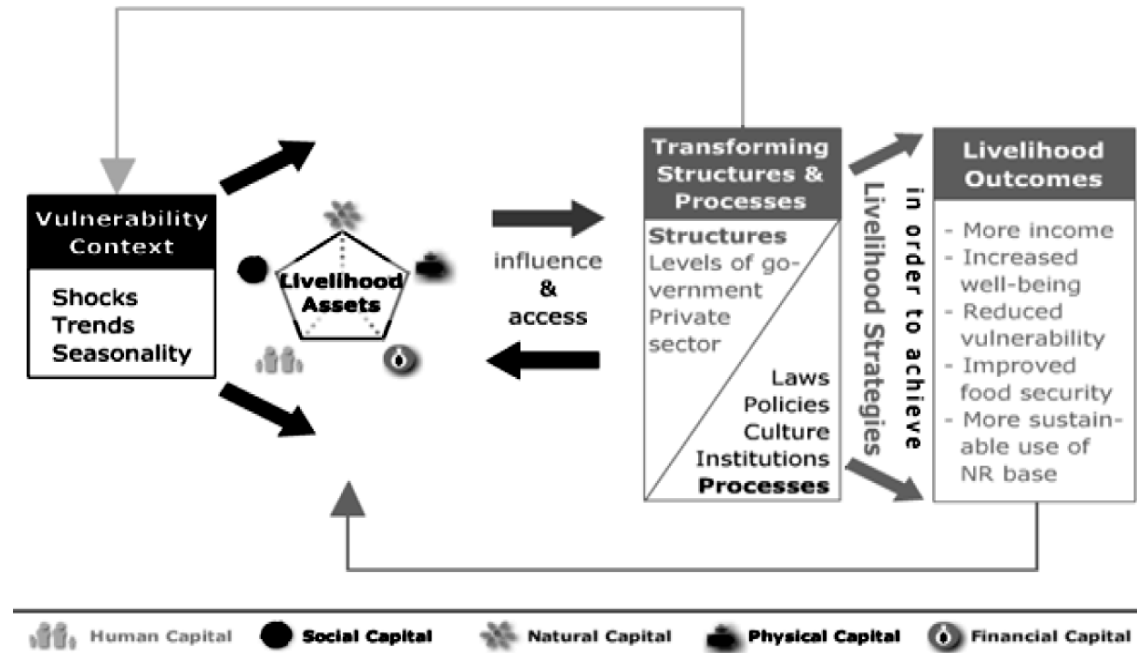


Fig. 1. Sustainable Livelihood Framework

Source: Adopted from DFID Human capital – skills, knowledge, health and ability to work.

(Department for International Development, UK), which adapts a version of Chamber & Conway’s definition of livelihoods. The framework is more holistic in its approach and conceptualizes: vulnerability context, livelihood assets, a range of institutions and processes, a choice of livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes.

Although the framework does not intend to be a perfect model of reality, it provides a systematic arrangement to facilitate a broad and logical understanding of the different factors that constrain or enhance livelihood opportunities, and to show how they relate to each other. However, it may not clearly define what exactly constitutes poverty specifically and still needs further investigation [5].

For better applicability, different development agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the international non-governmental organization (CARE), and the British Department for International Development (DFID) used the concept of sustainable development with certain simplifications. Out of these, the DFID’s concept of sustainable livelihoods is the most commonly acknowledged because of its goal of eradicating poverty in poorer nations, which received recognition after the publication of the UK Government White Paper on International Development in 1997. The IDS working paper published in June 1998 also provided an analytical framework for sustainable rural livelihoods [17].

Thus, the DFID’s definition of sustainable livelihood is in line with the one developed by IDS and is a revised version of the original definition structured by Chambers and Conway [15]:

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

For the convenience of this study, the paper uses DFID’s core concepts of sustainable livelihood approach to systematically understand the nexus between poverty, livelihoods, institutions and community development. Accordingly, the core principles of DFID’s sustainable livelihood approach include people-centered (responsive and participatory), holistic (multi-level), partnership, sustainability, and dynamic approaches [4]. The following framework (Fig. 1) shows the DFID’s sustainable livelihood framework, which was derived in line with the IDS’s framework.

The illustration shows the interconnecting network system of livelihoods, poverty, institutions, and community development. The framework embraces vulnerability conditions and trends, livelihood resources, process and organizational structures, livelihood strategies and outcomes as described below based on [4, 5].

The vulnerability context refers to shocks, seasonal changes and trends. Shocks include natural disasters, wars, and economic downturns. Seasonal changes may affect the availability of resources, income-generating opportunities, and demand for certain products and services. Trends include the nature of politics and governance, technological advancement, and the availability of natural resources.

Livelihood assets include both tangible (land, cash savings, live stocks, tools, food stores) and intangible assets (claims and access). Livelihood assets or capitals can be categorized into five groups:

- Human capital — skills, knowledge, health and ability to work.
- Social capital — social resources, including informal networks, membership of formalized groups and relationships of trust that facilitate co-operation and economic opportunities.
- Natural capital — natural resources such as land, soil, water, forests, etc.
- Physical capital — basic infrastructure, such as roads, water and sanitation, schools, information and communication technology (ICT), producer goods, etc.
- Financial capital — financial resources including savings, credit, and income from employment, trade and remittances.

Institutions and organizations are social linkages that bring stakeholders together to access assets of different kinds, providing a means of exercising power and the gateways to positive or negative livelihood outcomes. Thus, institutions mediate access to livelihood assets and, in turn, influence the content of a range of livelihood strategies. Institutions determine the encouragement of individuals to invest in and get the skills that lead to success and better well-being in the long run [18]. Therefore, understanding institutions and institutional processes is the input to designing interventions that advance sustainable livelihood outputs.

Livelihood strategies refer to the way in which people access and use the assets explained above, within certain social, economic, political and environmental contexts. This considers capital and labor inputs, active choice to invest in diversification, voluntary and involuntary movement of people that may result in re-investment, respectively. Livelihood strategies are a collection of

activities that people do to ensure their survival and meet their basic needs [19]. Rural residents pursue diversified activities (farm, off-farm, non-farm and combination of all three) in their daily struggle to make a living [20]).

Livelihood outcomes refer to the results of all processes within the framework. They include increased income (e.g., cash), improved well-being (e.g., non-material goods, such as self-esteem, health status, access to services, and a sense of inclusion), decreased vulnerability (e.g., better resilience through increased asset status), improved food security (e.g., increased financial capital to purchase food), and a more sustainable use of natural resources (e.g., appropriate property rights).

Concepts of institution

D. C. North [21] describes institutions as the “rules of the game” in a society. Institutions embody power and form guides and stable structures for whatever the daily life of human interactions involves by reducing uncertainty. Accordingly, institutions comprise manmade formal and informal constraints that shape human interactions. Formal constraints include constitutions, laws, and regulations governing politics and economics, while informal constraints include conventions, customs, codes of behavior, and conduct. Both formal and informal restrictions determine the encouragement of human exchange in political, social, and economic situations. Institutional (organizational) efficiency depends on the capacity of enforcement to punish for deviating from rules [18].

In most of the social science literature, the distinction between institution and policy is not clearly underlined. Conceptually, the two words are used interchangeably. However, they do not necessarily refer to the same meaning. Institutions are comprehensive and serve a collective purpose of complex norms, rules, customs and behaviors. On the other hand, policies function based on structured activities of an organization. Thus, many institutions are organizations, but many organizations are not institutions. Institutions comprise any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape the human interface. Institutions created or evolved over time, like the constitution and common law. Institutional frameworks influence the way organizations come

into existence and how they evolve to achieve the common objectives of institutional dimensions: economic, social, and political aspects of human life [22].

Community development concepts

By its definition, community development came across having different concepts. For instance, from the 1950s up to the early 1970s, community development approach focused on poverty alleviation at the community level largely on top-down decision-making process within the context of existing social and economic structures [23]. However, this approach has shortcomings as it acts on behalf of the poor rather than giving a chance to local people to participate equally in decision-making. Thus, it was top-down and bureaucratic, with goals at the national level. In recent times, however, the concept of community development has been understood as a bottom-up approach directly linked to determining interventions based on the decisions and priorities of local people themselves rather than by outsiders [6]. Thus, by definition, community development involves work at the grass-roots level, not focusing on the policy level only, unlike the sustainable livelihood approach.

Community development involves empowering a community by initiating capacity building in improving institutional role, resilience power, skills and knowledge, culture, social capital, etc. Community development was assumed as economic development in earlier times. In fact, economic development at the local level has been an approach for development strategies. This approach recognizes the need for the interconnecting assets, institutions, and strategies to achieve the expected outcomes [6].

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

As mentioned in the previous section, the sustainable livelihood approach is the underpinning theoretical framework for this review. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) is essentially a method for understanding the livelihoods of those who are poor holistically to create strategies for effective poverty intervention. Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the connections between livelihood access, assets, context, and institutions, as well as their consequences on individual, household, or commu-

nity asset accumulation, a livelihoods approach to poverty and livelihood analysis is necessary [16]. The following picture (*Fig. 2*) shows a summarized conceptual framework for the review.

4. Results and discussion

A deep analysis of the literature shows that understanding the linkages between poverty, livelihoods, institutions, and community development requires conceptualizing the notions of vulnerability context, livelihood assets, institutions, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes [6]. Individual or group ability to access and use assets is influenced by institutions, processes and policies, either with a positive or negative outcome. Livelihoods are formed within political, economic and social contexts [5]. As these contexts are interdependent, they create new livelihood opportunities or obstacles that determining one's poverty status. Thus, there is a remarkable linkage between institutions and community development. As presented in the framework (*Fig. 2*), livelihood strategies and outcomes not only depend on access to livelihood assets or are inhibited by the vulnerability context; but they are also transformed by the conditions of structures and processes, i.e., institutional influence.

Institutions exert profound influences on livelihoods, because they help in the implementation of policies and strategies, laws and regulations, functioning social networks, coordinated utilization of resources, promoting accountability, etc. [22]. In the absence of effective institutions and processes, policies may not function to bring about the desired outcome [23]. On the contrary, institutions may otherwise hinder livelihood sustainability and poverty reduction if poorly framed. The fate of a given society to be poor or rich can be determined by its institutional constraints and whether it responds to political and socio-economic activities that encourage productivity or not [24]. When we see that some organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, business associations, etc., are unproductive, it is important to see if the institutional frameworks in which they operate provide them with an incentive to be unproductive. In the case of developing countries, the institutional framework may not support activities that promote productive activity but may favor redistributive behavior. This may create

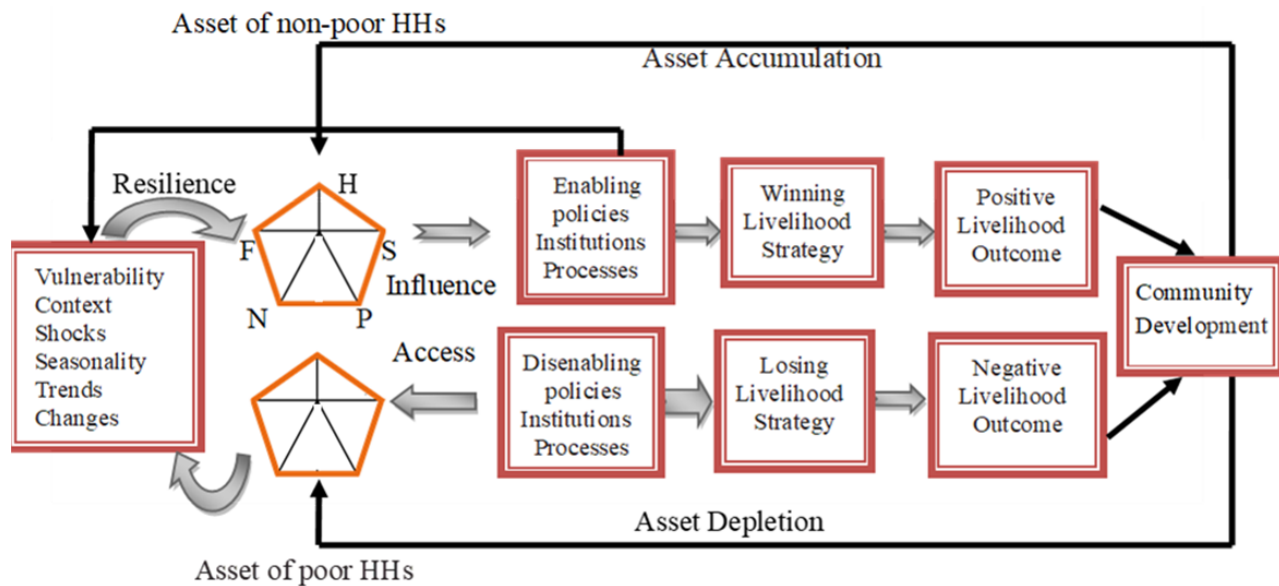


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework of the study

Note: H – Human Capital; N – Natural Capital; F – Financial Capital; S – Social Capital; P – Physical Capital; HHs – Households.

Source: Adapted from [6].

monopolies rather than competitive conditions. With this, institutions may affect the process of wealth formation as well as converting that capital into output. It is true that resilience is not always necessarily positive. Damage to livelihoods is one of the situations in which transformation may become questionable [4].

Among the aspects of sustainable community development, the central point is people. How to plan for community development depends on poverty levels, people's capabilities and local knowledge, and other livelihood assets, institutional models, strategies adopted, etc. [25]. Community development procedures tend to use realistic and attainable participatory projects, which a group of community members carry out themselves through a series of successive learning experiences based on vulnerability contexts, availability of resources, nature of institutions and strategies to achieve the desired outcomes. Such a process can be seen as resilience-building strategies and calls for the integration of livelihood strategies that, in turn, form cohesion when positive outcomes are achieved [26].

A.S. Carloni discussed sustainable livelihood frameworks [6], illustrating both positive and negative outcomes depending on influences and access, institutional nature and livelihood strategies. Accordingly, because of enabling policies, institutions and processes, there would be a strong

livelihood base, which broadens livelihood options and reduces vulnerability. This justifies the application of sound and winning livelihood strategies. Institutions, therefore, play a decisive role, as shown in Fig. 2, enabling policies, institutions and processes to result in resilient livelihoods and create non-poor households and communities. The positive outcomes of sustainable livelihood strategies help the community gain access to assets for making a living.

The livelihood outcome can be positive or negative, as seen from the framework (Fig. 2). Thus, attempts for local community development may fall into either of the two categories based on vulnerability context, assets, the nature of institutional frameworks to form winning or losing strategies to transform the community's livelihood. As posited by O. Serrat [27], one of the key issues that the poor and vulnerable face is that their livelihoods may be systematically restricted or deprived unless the government supports pro-poor policies that, in turn, influence legislation and even less formal processes. Because of disabling policies, institutions and processes, there would be a much more limited livelihood base, which limits livelihood options and enhances vulnerability, as indicated by the framework (see Fig. 2). Due to the inconvenient nature of institutional frameworks, a lack of assets to fall back on in an emergency allows shocks

to occur. In turn, shocks contribute to negative outcomes for livelihood and poverty [6].

Conclusion

This study depicts the interface between poverty, livelihoods, institutions and community development. Based on the sustainable livelihood approach, the study scrutinized the relationship between them and found significant linkages. Although it might be possible to identify the interface using the DFID's sustainable livelihood framework, it is obviously difficult to understand what constitutes the real cause of poverty that needs further investigation. Above all, however, the institutional role is more influential because institutions fully mediate the function to access

livelihood assets and draw strategies to attain the livelihood outcomes. Institutions decide the fate of livelihood outcomes through the analysis of their influence on access to livelihood assets. They directly affect livelihood strategies by determining which activity is right or wrong and determine the livelihood outcomes as an indicator of community development. In general, the interface between livelihood, poverty, institutions, and community development shows the total combination of activities pursued by a given individual or group to make a living. As clearly shown in the theoretical framework of this study, well-managed livelihood strategies result in sustainable community development. In contrast, the ill-managed ones result in poverty.

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