GOODBYE TO PROJECTS? – THE INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES ON DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

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OVERVIEW

These briefing papers aim to help policy-makers and practitioners in planning and managing development interventions that respond to evolving methodological approaches (such as sustainable livelihoods approaches) and questions over the effectiveness of different formats of interventions.

We focus on two main themes: the practical trade-offs required between operational and normative principles; and how to ensure that development interventions will have a sustainable impact.

The briefing papers include:
1. An overview,
2. The application of SLA principles,
3. The changing format of interventions,
4. Lessons for community-based planning interventions,
5. Lessons for rural livelihoods interventions,
6. Lessons for HIV/AIDS interventions.

'Goodbye to Projects?' is a collaborative project between the Bradford Centre for International Centre for Development (BCID), University of Bradford, with the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Uganda; Khanya – managing rural change, South Africa; and Mzumbe University, Tanzania.

Project website:
http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/dppc/GTP/goodbye.html

2. The application of the SL principles

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This briefing paper reports on research exploring ten detailed case studies of livelihoods-oriented interventions operating in Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda and Lesotho. As a proxy for best practice, these interventions were analysed through an audit of sustainable livelihood 'principles'. This revealed general lessons about both the practical opportunities and challenges for employing sustainable livelihoods approaches to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions and also about the changing format of development interventions.

Principal Findings

- **People-centred/disaggregated**: All case studies focused on poor people, and most undertook some form of holistic livelihoods analysis to understand the diversity of livelihoods and to inform the design.
- **Responsive and participatory** (for beneficiaries): The more successful initiatives seem to be those which fully institutionalise participation. In general there is a lack of participation in monitoring and evaluation and downward accountability which needs to be addressed
- **Strengths-based:** This is an element unique to the SLA. The focus is on what is there and what people want, not on what is not there.
- **Sustainable**: Interventions were addressing social and environmental sustainability. However financial/economic and institutional sustainability were weak, notably reflecting weak links at meso level (intermediaries such as local government)
- **Multi-level and holistic (micro-macro links)**: This principle is also unique to the SLA. All interventions attempted to link levels, but in general links seemed stronger at national level (macro) than at district (meso) level – there appears to be too often a "missing meso".
- **Conducted in partnership**: all case studies showed partnerships, but frequently these did not give real power to the partners and control remained with the intervention. Where these partnerships were very strong, the sustainability of the initiatives seemed much more likely
- **Long-term and flexible**: the SLA also mainstreams flexibility, learning-by-doing and process approaches. All initiatives showed some responsiveness and learning, in some cases explicitly as part of the design,
- **Value-added –** consistent and explicit consideration of all the SL principles would seem likely to improve the quality of outcomes of interventions, as well as their sustainability

The sustainable livelihoods principles

Briefing paper 1 has described the background to the SLA, and its three elements: as a concept, as a framework and as a set of principles for action (Farrington 2001). Box 1 summarises the principles which formed the basis of the Goodbye to Projects study, and which were used to audit the case study projects. These principles were developed from those put forward by others such as Carney (2002) and Khanya (2002). This paper introduces some of the key learnings, which have emerged against each of these principles. The approach we took was not necessarily only to include interventions that were explicitly using the SLA. Rather we sought to see where application of the principles could be correlated to positive impacts.

Box 1 SLA principles for development interventions

Poor as focus: Interventions start with a complex understanding of poverty and individual livelihoods and ensure that the poor are the central focus of the objectives of intervention.

Participation: Interventions aim to empower stakeholders to play an active role in intervention and service provision. They recognise and try to minimise barriers to participation, but show an awareness of its practical limits.

Partnership: Interventions work in partnership with other development partners but try to minimise the control and influence exerted by more powerful partners.

Holistic Approach: Interventions seek to respond holistically to livelihoods through cross-sectoral synergies but without addressing "everything" through a single integrated intervention.

Policy and Institutional Linkages: Intervention must build on linkages with policy processes and institutions to avoid replication and ensure sustainable impact. Linkages should connect the micro, meso and macro levels and ensure learning and information sharing at all levels.

Building on strengths: Interventions recognise that needs and problems can be tackled through working with existing strengths.

Dynamism and Flexibility (Learning): Interventions need to learn and adapt from their experience. They recognise that time and organisational constraints can decrease effective learning.

Accountability and Responsiveness: Interventions should be accountable and responsive to a wide range of stakeholders, particularly the poor to which they are directed.

Sustainability should be sought on four levels:
- Financial: so that they can continue without support from external funding sources
- Institutional: through integration with existing institutions
- Environmental: to maximise the sustainable use of natural resources and minimise waste and pollution
- Social: to minimise social exclusion and complement the local cultural context.

These principles were adapted by the study team from earlier work by Carney (2002) and others.

The 10 case studies which were audited against these livelihoods principles included:

- *The HIV/AIDS Programme* in Uganda
- *SHARP!*: a CARE SA-Lesotho programme training peer educators on HIV/AIDS.
- *Tanzakesho Programme, Tanzania:* participatory planning for environmentally sustainable village plans.
- *Community-based planning project*: (CBP) a 4-country action-research project funded by DFID, developing an empowering participatory planning process linked with the local government planning system.
- *TEAM (Lesotho):* Implemented by CARE SA-Lesotho to develop an agricultural extension model based on farmer extension facilitators, funded by NORAD and later by DFID.
- *Agricultural Sector Programme Support (ASPS, Tanzania)*: financed by Danida, implemented by government, including institutional support, smallholder irrigation, on-farm seed production, rock-phosphate research, private agriculture sector support and an environmental programme.
- *Magu District Livelihood and Food Security Project (MDLFSP, Tanzania):* A CARE Norge project aiming to decrease the vulnerability of 5000 households in Magu district through agricultural extension and strengthening community groups.
- *PMA (Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture, Uganda:* a multi-sectoral partnership between government, donors and NGOs, seeking to reform all aspects of the exploitation of agriculture and natural resources
- *Sustainable Management of the Usangu Wetland Catchment (SMUWC, Tanzania):* improving the management of water and other natural resources to improve the livelihoods of poor people and downstream users. Funded by DFID.
- *Sustainable Coastal Livelihoods Programme, South Africa*: a programme aiming to stimulated integrated and sectoral approaches to sustain and optimise the allocation of coastal resources

People-centred/disaggregated - focusing on the livelihoods of poor people
Sustainable livelihoods principles argue that effective poverty-focused interventions start from a consideration of people (their livelihoods as defined by assets and vulnerabilities and their perceptions and views) as opposed to starting from specific resources or services. All the case studies were committed (at least on paper) to improving and/or sustaining people's livelihoods. This reflects the widespread recognition in development of the holistic nature of people's lives and the need to engage directly with people rather than focusing on resources or services. All of the interventions stated an intention to work with the poor and attempts were made by most

interventions to disaggregate categories of the poor whom to target specifically. Interventions which successfully have the poor as the focus showed the following characteristics:

- They use livelihoods analysis as a useful means of disaggregating and targeting specific groups of the poor;
- They build on the priorities of these groups in designing the scope and focus of the project;
- They aim for holistic understanding of complex livelihoods as a basis for focused action.

> **Box 2 Institutionalising Participation**
> **PMA** and **CBP** are notable in attempting to fully institutionalise participatory processes. CBP explicitly attempted to find a way out of 'one-off' PRA exercises as a means for people to influence resource allocation in district government. It sought to develop a methodology that could be employed across meso-level government areas. **PMA** operates as a national strategy, one of whose aims is to allow local groups to demand the agricultural services that they need.

Responsive and participatory (by beneficiaries)
One of the most important aspects of the SL principles is how they mainstream participation as a fundamental aspect of development. We used one of the common ladders of participation to disaggregate what was actually meant, differentiating between manipulative, passive, consultative, incentivised, functional, interactive and finally self-mobilising participation. The latter two are the only ones that can be called empowering. Participation proved to be an intrinsic part of all case studies. Participation was often consultative during the design stage, functional or interactive during implementation but limited in its extent in monitoring and evaluation. Participation is by its nature slow and expensive, and it is important to be overt about what is the intention and to design and implement appropriate systems, for each stage of the development intervention (box 2). The CBP Project was one example where participatory planning was explicitly used as a tool for empowerment.

Another aspect of responsiveness is *accountability*, and this research investigated the degrees of accountability in each project. None of the projects showed downwards accountability. In general accountability was upwards to different donors and government departments. The empowerment of communities and local governments requires that accountability is also horizontal and downwards. Traditional forms of upward accountability also need to be strengthened, e.g. training communities in participatory M&E.

Sustainability
The discussion of sustainability in this study focused on the potential sustainability and replicability of the impact of an intervention in relation to the four aspects of sustainability (economic/financial, environmental, institutional and social). There appear to be significant institutional problems in terms of integration with existing structures, and linked with that, the financial sustainability of the systems. These are well-recognised problems, which many interventions in this research have not addressed adequately. For example:

Economic/financial sustainability	Only CBP showed evidence of significant financial sustainability, in that it used existing resources of partners for implementation
Social sustainability	Social sustainability is defined in a variety of ways - several interventions sought to reduce social exclusion but impacts were unknown or anecdotal.
Environmental sustainability	Environmental issues were considered by most interventions but only mainstreamed in Tanzakesho.
Institutional sustainability	This was highly variable, ranging from good use of existing system (e.g. Tanzakesho, SCLP) to the establishment of parallel structures in Magu

Policy and institutional linkages (micro-macro links)
Interventions need to understand how they relate to and integrate with existing structures and institutions (institutional sustainability). Sustainable livelihoods thinking argues that the meso level of institutions such as local government needs to be responsive to citizens, providing services to those citizens (micro-meso links), that national government needs to understand the real situation on the ground in terms of livelihoods (micro) and services (meso), and that their policies should be influenced by communities and institutions (e.g. see Khanya, 2000). Micro-macro linkages were highly variable with examples ranging from:

- Good links from community, intermediaries such as local government, to national (e.g. Tanzakesho, CBP, PMA)
- Good links to national policy but not intermediaries, e.g. at local government/district level. For example, TEAM influenced national policy on extension but had poor links with the district agriculture offices

None of the interventions had poor linkages at all levels, but the pattern of poor linkages at meso level was common. This causes major problems of institutional sustainability, as the interventions are not then well embedded in the service providers whose action can actually take such interventions forward. This is an example of the "missing meso".

Partnerships (with and between agencies)

The SLA also makes explicit the necessity of forging effective partnerships of donors, government, civil society and private enterprise in poverty reduction. However, as with participation, it is important to understand the nature of the partnership and the real locus of power. A typology of partnership was created for the Goodbye to Projects study in order to understand this better. This typology ranged from internal control, partnership through funding, legal partnership, coordinated partnership, equivalent (i.e. equal), supportive, enabling oversight through to a multiple agency role. In these the degree of coordination and control were taken as critical factors, again reinforcing the relationship between the SLA and power. Few of the interventions exhibited equal partnerships, reflecting the control remaining with the project or intervention. Examples of those, which involved a real sharing of power, included the PMA, ASPS, Tanzakesho and CBP. Box 3 shows some of the characteristics of interventions with effective partnerships.

Building on strengths

This is not explicitly mentioned in the list of principles, but actually underlies the SLA. The focus on assets (strengths) rather than weaknesses (lack of assets) provides an empowering approach for all those involved. In CBP this was a fundamental part of the design, and built on partners' experience in the use of participatory planning. This did seem to be true in most of the other interventions, with a focus around capacity development. For example in SMUWC institutional analysis revealed local strengths and this changed some elements of the project. In TEAM the use of farmer extension facilitators built on people who already were practising farmers and had expertise in relevant areas. However one of the challenges is potential overloading of people/institutions perceived to have strengths. Interventions which successfully build on strengths of people show the following characteristics:

- They start with an *outcomes*-based rather than *needs or problems*-based analysis in order to build the confidence to succeed
- They identify and build on community/ institutional/ locational strengths (recognising that these may be contested).

Long-term, dynamic and flexible (or learning and responsive)

The majority of case studies show a general level of responsiveness in adapting objectives and processes to changing conditions. For instance ASPS showed a willingness to alter funding cycles in order to satisfy the pace of participatory work. CBP was set up explicitly as an action-learning project, influenced national policy and practice in three of the four countries where it was working, and moved beyond simply focusing on planning, to also look at the funding of the plans that emerge. Several of the case studies show examples of the use of pilots (see box 4), which is a particular area where projects can play a useful role. Pilots can be upscaled so long as they are embedded in institutional realities and are not islands of excellence.

The case studies show the relative ease of altering ground-level activities but the alteration of strategic commitments at policy level is harder to effect, as in PMA, and ASPS. All case studies appear to be quite responsive in terms of scaling-up successful aspects of interventions, but not quite so ready to address weaknesses. ASPS was notably open about the limitations of its first phase. Many other interventions, whilst identifying limitations, do not appear to have strategies for addressing these. This principle identifies above all the importance of process, and of learning-by-doing. For learning-by-doing to happen, interventions need to be designed to be flexible, to incorporate learning, and not to be blueprints.

The value-added of the SL principles

Overall our analysis shows that most of the initiatives covered many of the principles. Where the intervention covered many or most of these, such as CBP, it does seem to have contributed to the success of the initiative. Two new concepts in the SLA are micro-macro links and strengths-based approaches. These were not applied consistently across these initiatives, and it does seem that the explicit application of these would have improved the outcomes of these interventions. A notable feature in several of these initiatives is insufficient attention to the meso-level, with significant implications on institutional sustainability. Others have been applied partially, for example participation in M&E and so downward accountability is weak in many of these initiatives and is an area for strengthening.

Reference

Franks T. et al (2004) *Goodbye to Projects? The Institutional Impact of Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches on Development Interventions.* Bradford Centre for International Development, Bradford University