
Sustaining Livelihoods In Southern Africa

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**Theme: FAO's work on People-Centred Development with a
Livelihoods Perspective (PCD-L)**

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Editor's notes

This month's edition focuses on FAO's work on People-Centred Development with a Livelihoods Perspective, which includes under its umbrella Sustainable Livelihood Approaches. It is written by Siobhan Kelly of FAO's Livelihoods Support Programme (see end for contact details). In November 2004 FAO's Livelihood Support Programme and some of its partners came together in Harare to look at examples of livelihoods projects to understand what works and what doesn't work and how to improve their operations, impact and scaling-up. Three case studies from this workshop are highlighted in the article below which provides the reader with an insight into some of the opportunities and constraints that livelihoods type projects have encountered. What emerges from this is the usefulness of looking at things from a livelihoods perspective in helping to understand the complexities of livelihoods, as well as the importance of then moving towards concrete livelihood interventions. There are examples of methodologies for moving into concrete action, such as the Community-Based Planning methodology outlined in Newsletter 2. The SL principles remain key in helping to guide the "how" of interventions, a linkage which could be strengthened.

(Note that the positions and opinions presented in this article are those of the author alone and are not intended to represent the views of FAO.)

Introduction to FAO's work on People-Centred Development

The promotion of sustainable livelihoods is a key objective in the FAO strategic framework 2000-2015. This has not only led to an increase in projects and programmes with a specific focus on

livelihoods outcomes, but also on the adoption of approaches and tools that offer a systematic understanding of complex households. These approaches allow FAO to respond to the growing emphasis on decentralisation and the devolution of decision-making powers closer to the community-level, ensuring that FAO's work is anchored strongly in local participation, ownership and accountability. It also facilitates understanding and planning for complexity as dynamic livelihoods are a feature of most people lives, including the poorest. The depth of application or adoption of sustainable livelihood approaches varies however within the organization depending on the specific mandates, technical specialization of the various departments and services as well as regional operations and the individual interests and preferences of FAO officers.

In FAO, People-Centred Development is used as an umbrella term to include a wide range of approaches or frameworks used by FAO and other development agencies and their partners. These approaches include the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (see SLSA Newsletter no 1); Farming Systems; Social, Economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA); *Gestion de Terroirs*; Integrated Rural Development; Market Analysis and Development for Community-Based Tree and Forest Product Enterprises; Participatory Development Approach; Farmer Field School, etc. Central to all of these approaches is a focus on the importance of people as both the aim and the means of development, aiming at improvement: improvement of the quality of people's livelihoods and income status, recognising that rural people are the core actors of change in their own development, and that the participation of stakeholders in identifying priorities for better livelihoods strategies is a fundamental tenet for success. Development approaches with these characteristics are being referred to in FAO as **people-centred development** approaches.

People-Centred Development (PCD) is not a new paradigm but an umbrella which can cover not only "approaches", but also best practice principles that build on the belief that centrally or externally mandated development projects and programmes do not result in successful development if they do not respect the priorities of communities' needs and their role in an informed decision-making process. Not only does PCD centre on the primacy of people in development, but moreover that development should include support to the most marginalised – the poor, physically weak, vulnerable, isolated and powerless, and help them to identify and demand what they want and need and assist them to change their conditions. Working within a livelihoods context is complex. Before intervening practitioners need to understand the diversity of rural livelihoods and the social, political and economic interaction between institutions across all levels. The aim is to stimulate social change and improve rural empowerment and well-being, including activities that may fall outside of what might be considered a "livelihoods" scope. It therefore embraces a wide range of people-centred approaches and tools that may not necessarily concentrate directly on livelihoods issues.

The Livelihoods Support Programme in FAO is composed of a group of cross-departmental sub-programmes whose aim is to find ways to operationalise a livelihoods approach in certain thematic areas, while at the same time working to integrate sustainable livelihoods principles into FAO's work, both at headquarters and in the field. These sub-programmes are:

- Improving poor people's access to natural resources (building **natural assets**)
- Participation, Policy, and local governance (addressing policies, institutions and policies - **PIPs**)
- Livelihoods diversification and enterprise development (reducing **vulnerability**)
- Natural resource conflict management (control over **natural assets**; reducing **vulnerability**)
- Institutional learning (about both livelihoods and about institutional ways of learning)
- Capacity building in cultural context (learning what works in the field, then train on priority aspects)

- Mainstreaming sustainable livelihoods approaches in the FAO's field programme (the **approach** as a whole)

The three case studies below, presented and analysed at the Harare workshop, are examples of interventions which have implemented elements of people-centred development in part deliberately and in part unintentionally.

Case study - The Farmer Field School (FFS) Approach to Agricultural Extension, Western Kenya (04/99-12/02)

The **project goal** was to upgrade farming systems by building the capacity of local government, NGOs and the private sector to respond to poor farmers' needs and priorities. The **immediate objectives** were to:

- increase the competence of extension systems to provide farmer education that responds more effectively to local resources and conditions;
- establish a networking capacity for the exchange of FFS experiences within and between countries;
- exchange information on the replicability of FFS as an alternative mechanism for extension delivery.

Challenges

Inadequate training of the facilitators in monitoring and evaluation resulted in poor continuous assessment. The provision of micro-credit to farmers without appropriate training in fund management resulted in the underutilisation of scarce monetary resources. The lack of tools to correctly target and stratify the farmers into social groups made it difficult to address the priorities of the poorest farmers and the limited funding and mainstreaming skills were identified as obstacles to mainstreaming the project's good practices. Insufficient time spent diagnosing and designing the project meant that key stakeholders were left out at important stages in the process. Weak market linkages and knowledge of the commercial sectors limited the impact on farmers' livelihoods.

Good practices

The involvement of farmers in problem analysis highlighted their priority areas, which the project aimed to address. Sustainability was encouraged by: (a) building on the farmers' existing situation, (b) strengthening engagement with the existing Ministry structure and (c) the training of trainers, both extension staff and farmer facilitators. Regular planning and review meetings (pre-season and mid-season) combined with weekly learning sessions and farmer exchange visits meant that problems could be addressed in time allowing flexibility and promoting continuous learning. The official launch of the FFS also resulted in increased motivation for the project.

The following skills contributed to the success of the project; Participatory Rural Appraisals, probing skills, appropriate agricultural technical expertise, and data management skills. The PRA skills and situation analysis provided the project management team with a good understanding of the farmers' situation and the existing institutional framework. The team also applied stakeholder sensitisation and mobilisation skills to involve the Ministry and other relevant stakeholders. Leadership skills and relevant technical agricultural skills also contributed to the quality of the farmers work.

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Case study - Restructuring of water management in Wajir District, Kenya (2001-2004)

Water management is central to the development of the pastoral community of the Wajir District in North-eastern Kenya for domestic and livestock use. The **project objectives** were to strengthen the community's capacity to manage its water resources in an integrated, equitable and sustainable manner.

Challenges

Investing adequate time in building capacity is a challenge for continuity of project ownership. Credibility of the implementing agency and good track record were required for trust of all stakeholders. Participatory monitoring for empowering stakeholders to take responsibility for problems as they arise needs more time and investment as does targeting skills to ensure the more marginalised are involved early in project activities.

Good practices

The project was based on real community needs and problems. The application of PCD approaches assisted in ensuring that it was locally driven and in the identification of a common goal, both of which were key to the success of the project. Community ownership and sustainability was facilitated by the understanding the local practices and preferences, using existing traditional community structures and transparency in the selection of community members for project management.

Community mobilisation, communication and planning skills assisted in the definition of the project's approach and related activities. Transparent and accountable project management resulted in improved stakeholder relationships and the building of a shared vision. Targeting tools were used to identify acute priority areas and the more marginalised groups, helping to integrate them into the overall project strategy.

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Case study - CONASA (Community-Based Natural Resource Management and Sustainable Agriculture) (01/01 to 4/05)

The CONASA project works to improve the livelihoods of communities living in the Game Management Areas (GMAs) of Sichifulo, Mulobezi and Bbilili in Southern Zambia. The GMAs are designated areas which act as a buffer zone between the open areas and the protected national park land. The **objectives** of the project are to: (a) improve the welfare of the people living in the project area and (b) ensure the sustainability of natural resources for future generations.

Challenges

Inadequate investment in design resulted in problems during implementation. For instance, during the diagnosis phase the project did not benefit from the full complement of livelihoods disciplines which became evident only during the implementation stage. Key community stakeholders were absent at the planning stages and so some community priorities were not addressed during the project implementation. The absence of a steering committee at the inception phase meant that initially the project suffered from low momentum as it did not have a cohesive group of stakeholders to drive the activities. The project found that CBO (community based organisation) structures are threatened if they do not have the support of local government as the weak linkages between the CBO (micro level) and local government (meso level) impeded the implementation of some activities. Lack of financial management skills meant

that at certain points access to resources were lacking, which affected the momentum and project flow.

Good practices

A comprehensive understanding of local institutions, traditional leadership structures, problems and livelihoods contributed to the project's progress. At inception the project adopted a multi-stakeholder consultative approach including community representatives, line agencies, NGOs etc. The project was therefore able to design an operational plan defining appropriate services to be delivered and avoid duplication of activities with other projects. The creation of a local community extension system led to the creation of a CBO which allowed the project to build on community strengths and promote sustainability.

Community ownership and a shared understanding of local priorities was built using mobilisation and problem analysis skills, as well as participatory tools applied during project diagnosis, design and implementation. Facilitation, management and negotiation skills were also found to be important for conflict management. In addition community members were trained in leadership, planning and financial management. The application of appropriate PRA tools allowed the project managers to tap-in to the traditional structures.

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Challenges for livelihoods and PCD

The case studies above demonstrate some of the advantages of working within a PCD mode to improve rural livelihoods, e.g. enabling a shift in focus to people rather than sector objectives, providing tools for learning about complexities at the household level and promoting participation. However they also indicate that the application of the approach is not without a number of challenges. A common problem is institutional - for example the CONASA example highlights a common problem of not linking effectively with meso-level institutions such as local government, and the FFS indicated that stakeholders were not involved at key stages. They also all indicate problems with social analysis and differentiation of clients to ensure that the marginalised are addressed.

PCD is also faced with the challenge that rural development itself lacks clear solutions to some well-understood problems with much of the debate related to types of development strategies and the level of sustainability, in practice involving trade-offs and choices at all levels.

The following are some of the broader challenges development agencies, including FAO staff and partners, have encountered when applying PCD approaches and tools.

- Although the single most important factor in determining the success of livelihood strategies is probably access to sufficient capital assets, the constraints and opportunities posed by the institutional environment play a critical role in the opportunities available to households as well as addressing people's vulnerability, particularly when related to power relations. DFID's SL framework attempts to diagnose the related constraints and opportunities within its Policies, Institutions and Processes (PIP) box but it does not provide a tool to distinguish between policies and particularly the power reactions that underpin policies. Communities are heterogeneous and are characterised by unequal power relations, but the "classical" SL framework fails to provide guidance on the negotiation of revised livelihoods strategies options and choices that are not dependent on institutional or technical factors but are instead constrained by political factors.

Development practitioners using SL have often found that in the absence of appropriate 'how to' tools they were left with long "wish lists" without clear directions on how to convert these into effective actions in the context of a livelihood strategy. This important and long-recognized problem was in fact the theme of the FAO/ IFAD, WFP, UNDP/ DFID/ CARE Forum in Siena, Italy in 2000, "Operationalizing participatory ways of applying sustainable livelihoods approaches". FAO's Livelihood Support Programme itself was one of the direct outcomes of that meeting. The various sub-programmes of the FAO's Livelihood Support Programme were created in large part to help to evolve effective tools (in their specific thematic livelihood-related areas) which can assist people to take effective choices and subsequent actions regarding their livelihoods activities. There are good examples of systems for practical ways to move ahead on a broad livelihoods approach, such as the Community-Based Planning Approach highlighted in edition 2 of SLSA or FAO's Community-Based Tree and Forest Product Enterprise: Market Analysis and Development.

- Field development practitioners adopting people-centred approaches are often faced with the dilemma that within their personal and professional mandates there is the will to work with chronically poor households however they are continuously troubled by the reality that there is a serious lack of guidance and tools on how to do this. A livelihoods perspective does provide important diagnostic tools which provide for the inclusion and appraisal of asset-poor households at preliminary stages of a project but a livelihoods perspective (even reinforced with the "standard" sustainable livelihoods principles) does not necessarily ensure that members of chronically poor households are proactively engaged in the projects which emerge. There is the danger, too often realised in field interventions, that they end up focussing on the households with more assets available to diversify their strategies, thereby continuing to by-pass the most vulnerable groups. It is this type of impasse that leads to the critique often levelled at livelihoods approaches that - while they are very effective in providing **diagnostic insights** into complex livelihoods - they fail to provide benchmarks for guidance on priority areas for **livelihoods strategies** or indicators for where and when an intervention should begin or end.
- Some also argue that the participatory techniques of projects carrying a "sustainable livelihoods" label are frequently carried out in a vacuum without direct linkages to ongoing development objectives and strategies. While participation is stated as a key principle of sustainable livelihoods approaches, on the ground this has too often translated into mere consultation or a diagnostic process to provide a socio-economic background to a project or programme. It has even happened that the locations where the appraisals have taken place are not included in the final project area. It is therefore not surprising that many communities have become fatigued with participating in interviews, meetings and studies without perceiving any tangible livelihoods benefits – though it should be acknowledged that this is a consequence of faulty (or even "non") application of the full set of basic principles underlying all the people-centred approaches, rather than a fundamental defect of the approaches themselves.

The experience of FAO technical staff and partners coming from many different directions, it is not surprising that most assume a flexible approach in their people-centred development work, not adhering strictly to the framework of any one approach, but rather customizing their methodologies by choosing from the rich array of tools offered. Within a pluralist organization such as FAO this flexible approach is encouraged and possible as (a) staff expertise is comprised of a variety of disciplines with different experiences and (b) the organizational culture also generally avoids the mandating of any one specific approach over another.

FAO has long appreciated that it must work in partnership with core stakeholders and where appropriate use people-centred approaches to bridge the micro-macro gap so that higher-level

policy is informed by insights from the priorities of the poor. Livelihoods and other people-centred approaches provide direction to FAO and its partners to move beyond the participatory paradigm, although drawing heavily on its lessons, into an area where local livelihood strategies are more clearly understood within their external environment. An example of this is the changing attitude to diversification as an appropriate livelihood strategy. Research from a livelihoods perspective has revealed that rural livelihoods are complex and many people will successfully reduce their risk and vulnerability by diversifying into variety of livelihood strategies of which agriculture may only be one. Hence, despite the previous negative connotations which some have associated with diversification, livelihoods tools and diagnosis have led to diversification now being accepted and promoted as a potentially viable option for many poor households. It is these types of insights provided by people-centred and livelihoods principles that offer most value to technical agencies such as FAO. FAO's proficient technical know-how in rural development coupled with livelihoods insights has resulted in a better understanding of the livelihoods interventions required, of appropriate entry points, and led to better project designs which, guided by informed expert advice, are leading to improved livelihood outcomes.

Key references

1. Baumann, P., Bruno, M., Cleary, D., Dubois, O. and Flores, X. with contributions from Warren, P., Maffei, T. and Johnson, J. (March 2004) [Applying people centred development approaches within FAO: some practical lessons](#). FAO LSP WP 15, People Centred Approaches in Different Development Contexts Sub-Programme.
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5. Constance Neely, Kirsten Sutherland, and Jan Johnson (2004) [Do sustainable livelihoods approaches have a positive impact on the rural poor? A look at twelve case studies](#). FAO LSP WP 16 Institutional Learning Sub-Programme.
6. Report for the FAO (November 2004) **Lessons and Best Practices from People Centred Development Approaches with a Livelihoods Perspective, East and Southern Africa**, 1-3 November 2004.

Useful internet resources

Publications of FAO's Livelihood Support Programme on internet:
http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_pe4/pe4_040501a_en.htm

Upcoming SL-related activities/programmes

1. International Course on Community-based Integrated Watershed Management. November 28 – December 16, 2005, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Philippines. Course Fee: US\$2,700. Contact: Education&Training@iirr.org

2. Local Market Development, Facilitating Institutional Change for Livelihood Development, International Agricultural Centre (IAC), Date: March 27 - April 7, 2006, Wageningen -The Netherlands. Contact: training.iac@wur.nl

Future topics

Future topics will include Community-Driven Development, and an edition on Community Forestry. We welcome feedback, ideas and contributions for other topics.

Past editions

These are available at www.aicdd.org.

1. 1 May 2001 The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
2. July 2001 Community-based-planning
3. Sept 2001 Corporate Citizenship
4. Dec 2001 Rights-based approach to development
5. March 2002 Social capital and sustainable livelihoods
6. June 2002 HIV/AIDS and sustainable livelihoods
7. Sept 2002 Local Economic Development and sustainable livelihoods
8. Feb 2003 Institutional support for sustainable livelihoods
9. April 2003 Community-based Workers as a model for pro-poor service delivery
10. June 2003 Community-Based Natural Resources Management
11. Oct 2003 Sustainable Livelihoods and Gender
12. Feb 2004 Sustainable Livelihoods and Small Scale Mining
13. June 2004 Learnings about the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
14. Sept 2004 Community-based management
15. July 2005 Shelter and Sustainable Livelihoods

Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa is an initiative of the African Institute for Community-Driven Development (formerly Khanya-managing rural change). The temporary editor is Ian Goldman and he can be contacted at goldman@aicdd.org, tel +27 51 430 0712. Siobhan Kelly on Siobhan.Kelly@fao.org. Previous newsletters are available at the AICDD website, www.aicdd.org. We welcome contributions, of events, relevant documents, comments etc. Next editions will be on community forestry, community-driven development.
