

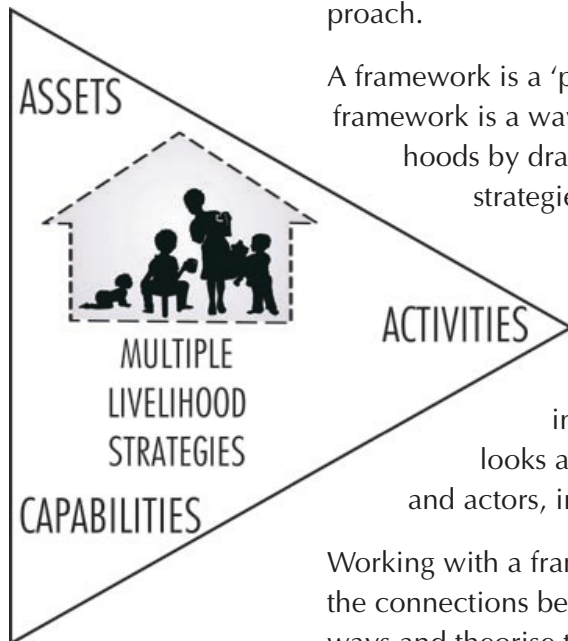
Chapter 1: Introduction to the livelihoods framework



This chapter provides a basic introduction to the livelihoods framework. After comparing the basic features of various livelihoods models in use, it describes the main features of the livelihoods approach, and what its strengths and its weaknesses are. It then explores how the approach can be put into practice through appreciative enquiry and participatory problem analysis. The chapter ends with answers to a number of questions which might be asked by programme managers.

Understanding the terminology

To navigate your way through this book, you will need to understand a few basic terms and concepts. In particular you need to be clear about the difference between a conceptual framework and a methodological approach.



A framework is a 'particular way of viewing the world'.¹ The livelihoods framework is a way of understanding how households derive their livelihoods by drawing on *capabilities* and *assets* to develop livelihood strategies composed of a range of *activities*.

The framework defines and categorises the different types of assets and entitlements which households have access to. The framework examines the different factors in the local and wider environment that influence household livelihood security. The framework looks at the connections between the local or micro situation and actors, institutions and processes at work in the wider world.

Working with a framework requires understanding its different elements and the connections between them. Because people view the world in different ways and theorise the relations between things differently, frameworks are constantly contested, adapted and refined. Even where people agree on fundamental core concepts, they may use different terms to describe them. They may emphasise different elements, or think about the interactions between the elements in different ways. In this book we use a model that uses common livelihoods concepts.

A number of variations of the basic livelihoods framework have been described by different development actors. They use different terms to describe similar things. Sometimes the language or concepts are so complex that only academics and policy developers are likely to use them. In this book we have tried to simply explain the core components of livelihoods frameworks. We have tried to create a bridge between different livelihoods models and the thinking about how to put livelihoods analysis into practice.

It can be argued that the livelihoods framework does not require participatory or appreciative planning approaches to put it into practice. Others like Diana Carney² say that the framework is built on a participatory paradigm. The authors of this book place a high value on participatory research and planning methods,³ appreciative enquiry and participatory problem analysis as appropriate tools to examine different aspects of the framework. The precise mix of tools and methods used to investigate elements of the livelihoods framework will vary from practitioner to practitioner and situation to situation.



The concept of sustainable livelihoods

The concept of sustainable livelihoods is a reference point for a wide range of people involved in different aspects of development policy formulation and planning. As analysts point out, there are two broad approaches to defining livelihoods. One has a narrower economic focus on production, employment and household income. The other:

*takes a more holistic view which unites concepts of economic development, reduced vulnerability and environmental sustainability while building on the strengths of the rural poor.*⁴

The livelihoods concepts and methodological approaches in this book are rooted in this more holistic view. The livelihoods framework is not restricted to analysing rural livelihoods. It has important applications in understanding urban livelihoods and vulnerability and the linkages between rural and urban areas.

Although there are differences of interpretation and different variations of the livelihoods framework, they all build on earlier development theory. These include aspects of the integrated rural development planning (IRDP) approaches of the 1970s;⁵ food security initiatives during the 1980s; rapid rural appraisal (RRA); participatory rural appraisal (PRA); farming systems research; gender analysis; new understandings of poverty and well-being; risk and vulnerability assessment; and agrarian reform.

Many earlier development approaches assumed that rural society was homogenous (in other words, that there was no differentiation between households in rural areas) and that households had single-purpose economies (in other words, that they only had one way of making a living). As a result, development agencies tended to focus on narrow, sectoral, production-orientated strategies that often bypassed those most at risk and failed to recognise that poor households have multiple economic strategies.⁶ One of the key findings that flowed from participatory research and appraisal was a much more subtle understanding of livelihoods and the different elements that they combine.

The work of Chambers and Conway in the early 1990s built on participatory research practices and ideas put forward by the World Commission on Environment and Development. They developed a definition of livelihoods and the factors that make them sustainable which underpins all of the livelihoods frameworks currently being used:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain and 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 in the long and short term.*⁷

The Chambers and Conway definition was modified by DFID in 1999, a definition that is widely used:

*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 shocks and stresses and maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, whilst not undermining the natural resource base.*⁸

Other livelihoods definitions make people more central and are less concerned with precise terminology for different kinds of assets. They highlight issues of ownership, access and decision making. One of these definitions of livelihoods states:

*People's capacity to generate and maintain their means of living, enhance their well-being and that of future generations. These capacities are contingent upon the availability and accessibility of options which are ecological, economic and political and which are predicated on equity, ownership of resources and participatory decision making.*⁹

Despite differences in emphasis by different practitioners, the livelihoods framework helps us to:

- identify (and value) what people are already doing to cope with risk and uncertainty
- make the connections between factors that constrain or enhance their livelihoods on the one hand, and policies and institutions in the wider environment
- identify measures that can strengthen assets, enhance capabilities and reduce vulnerability.

Livelihoods frameworks compared¹⁰

The DFID framework

One of the most widely used frameworks is the one used by the UK Department for International Development.

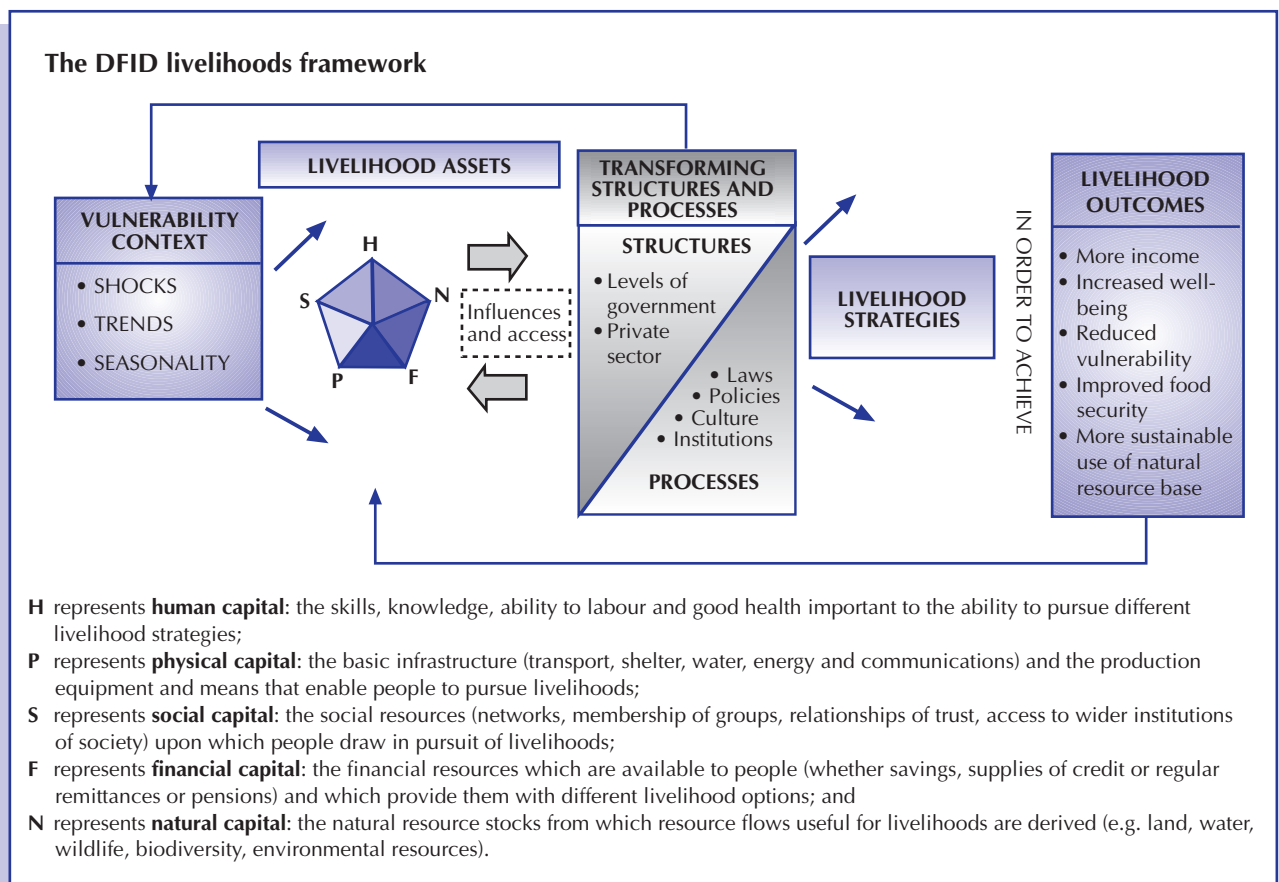
The DFID framework sets out to conceptualise:



- how people operate within a vulnerability context that is shaped by different factors – shifting seasonal constraints (and opportunities), economic shocks and longer-term trends
- how they draw on different types of livelihood assets or capital in different combinations which are influenced by:
 - the vulnerability context
 - a range of institutions and processes
 - how they use their asset base to develop a range of livelihood strategies to achieve desired livelihood outcomes.

The arrows in the framework try to show how the different elements ‘all of which are highly dynamic’¹¹ interrelate and influence one another. The framework is informed by certain core concepts:

- It is *people-centred* in the sense that it advocates that:
 - development policy and practice should flow from an understanding of the poor and their livelihoods strategies
 - the poor should directly contribute to determining development priorities and be able to influence the institutions and process that impact on their lives.

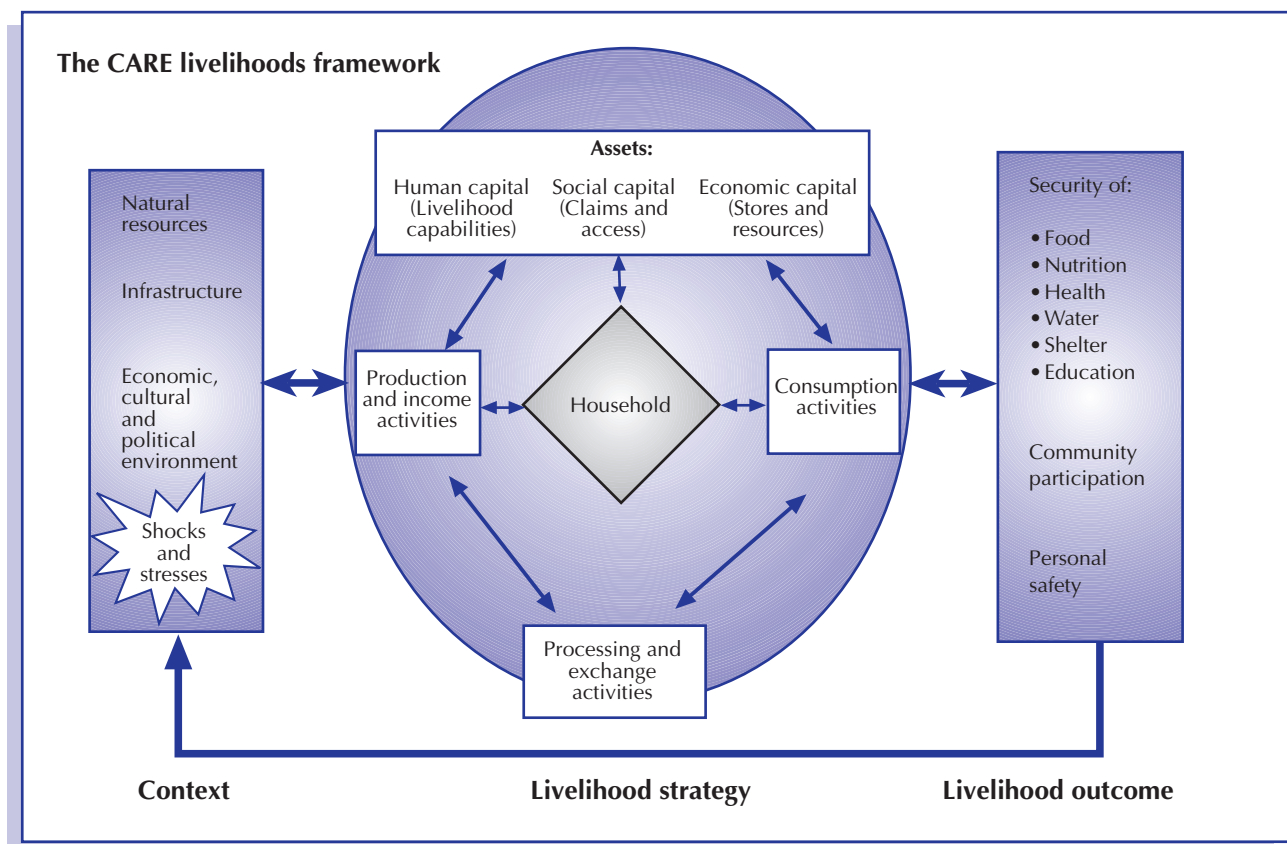


- It is *holistic* in that the framework encourages analysis that cuts across different sectors and recognises a range of actors and influences as well as multiple livelihood strategies and outcomes.
- It is *dynamic* in that it tries to understand change over time and the complex interplay between different factors.
- It starts from an analysis of *strengths* rather than needs and problems.
- It looks for and makes the linkages between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ levels.
- It is concerned with sustainability in all its dimensions – social, economic, institutional and ecological.

The CARE framework

CARE is an international NGO that uses the livelihoods approach as its primary planning framework.¹² CARE uses the Chambers and Conway livelihoods definition. It identifies three fundamental attributes of livelihoods:

- the possession of human capabilities
- access to tangible and intangible assets
- the existence of economic activities.



(Source: Drinkwater & Rusinow 1999)



CARE's approach is similar to DFID in that it emphasises the dynamic interrelationships between different aspects of the framework. However, rather than looking at using the 'five capitals' approach to assets, it distinguishes between assets, capabilities and activities. The CARE framework does not explicitly identify 'transforming structures and processes' and places less emphasis on macro-micro links within the framework, although these are important in many aspects of its work.

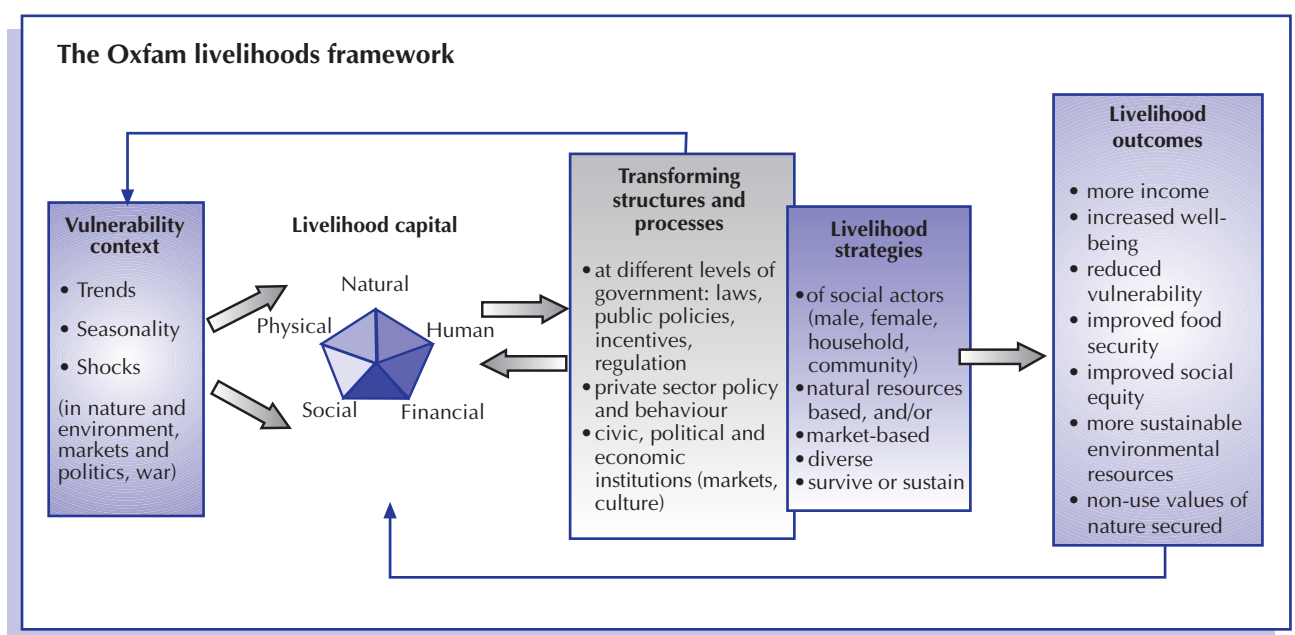
CARE emphasises using a 'light' conceptual framework and tries to include other approaches. It also aims to allow any framework to be adapted as lessons are learnt so that multiple actors contribute to the evolution of the livelihoods framework.

Oxfam's framework

Oxfam uses a livelihoods framework 'semi-officially' that has a lot in common with the DFID framework. However, Oxfam emphasises that there are no 'established rules'. Oxfam says existing frameworks are still too abstract for field-level staff to understand, although they are valuable at programming and policy levels.

Oxfam also draws on Chambers and Conway for its definition of sustainable livelihoods and emphasises that sustainability has different dimensions:

- economic (for example, the functioning of markets and credit supply)
- social (networks of reciprocity, gender equity)



- institutional (capacity building, access to services and technology, political freedom)
- ecological (quality and availability of environmental resources).

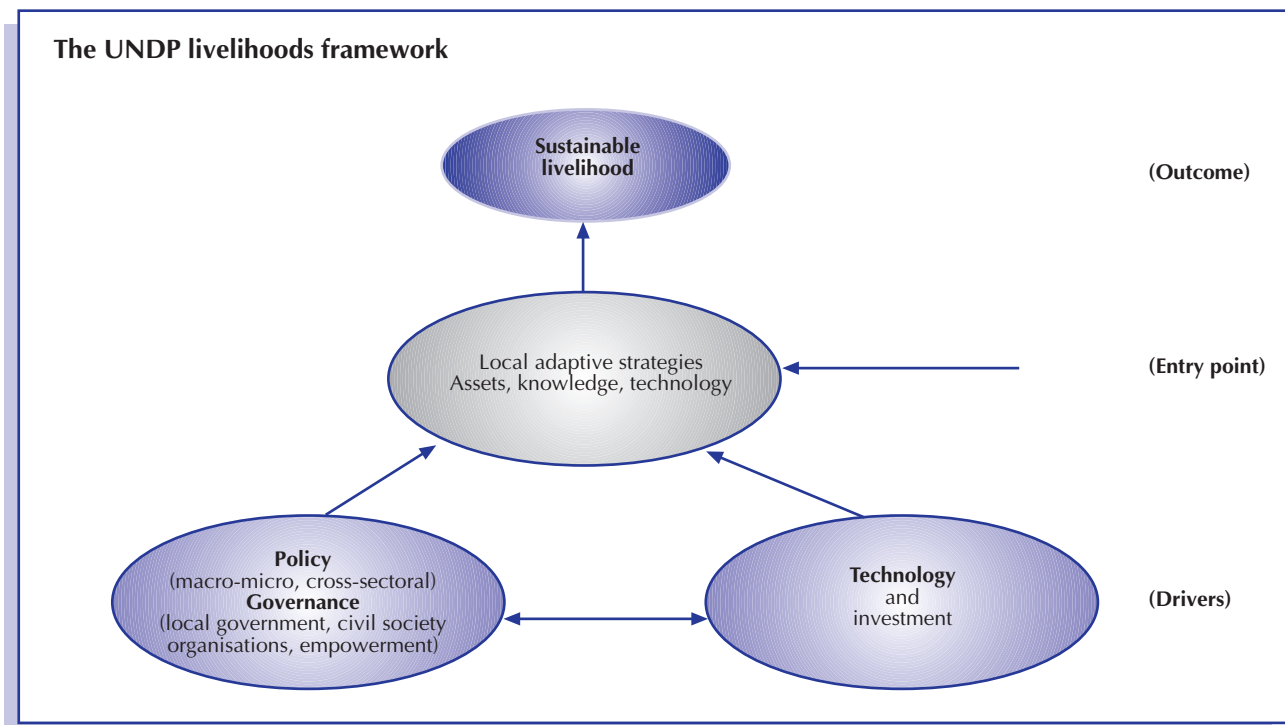
This approach is rights-based – according to Oxfam, everyone has the *right* to a sustainable livelihood.

The UNDP framework

The United Nations Development Programme understands livelihoods as the means, activities, entitlements and assets by which people make a living. Sustainable livelihoods are defined as those that are:

- able to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses such as drought, civil war and policy failure through coping and adaptive strategies
- economically effective
- ecologically sound
- socially equitable.

Like DFID, UNDP focuses on people’s strengths rather than their needs and emphasises the importance of making micro-macro links.





Southern African approaches to livelihoods

The Southern African Drought-Resilient Livelihoods Programme

This initiative was launched under the auspices of the Periperi network of organisations and individuals which was initiated in 1997. Periperi is committed to strengthening disaster mitigation research, training, education and practice in southern Africa. The project has been co-ordinated by the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (DiMP) in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences at the University of Cape Town.

The work to develop the learning package has involved livelihoods practitioners working in Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe interacting to try and create a shared conceptual framework for livelihoods analysis and vulnerability assessment in drought-prone communities. The practitioners set out to draw on the regional experience to construct an accessible framework and a participatory approach to fieldwork practice that would draw on a wide range of tools and methods. The frameworks that have been developed provide a reference point for much of this package.

The PGIEP framework

While the Periperi initiative was in process, another separate initiative was taking place in South Africa with a focus on sustainable livelihoods and land reform. In 1998 the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) in conjunction with the Danish funding agency DANCED started the Policy Guidelines for Integrating Environmental Planning into Land Reform (PGIEP) programme.

Land reform involves a whole range of actors including:

- people applying for restitution of land rights lost under apartheid, increased tenure security on land where they already reside, and access to land under the land redistribution programme
- NGOs
- different government departments responsible for planning and delivery of post transfer support and environmental management
- district municipalities.

Typically each of these actors has different ideas about what land reform should achieve and different assumptions about why people want land and the ways in which access to land will contribute to their livelihoods. The livelihoods framework has provided a focal point to enable the different parties to address key issues:

- it enables planners to better understand how people live and recognise their different livelihood strategies
- it helps to ensure that the people who are obtaining land or tenure security are central to the planning of land reform projects, and that the plans enable people to build on their assets, capabilities and existing livelihood activities so that their lives improve
- it stimulates analysis of the vulnerability context and enables people to think about the different dimensions of sustainability
- it provides opportunities for exploring micro-macro linkages, and the linkages between different sectors.

The macro environment has an impact on the micro household environment. At the same time, households have an impact on the macro environment. When problems are tackled in a narrow, sectoral way, the influence of other sectors is not taken into account. For example, an agricultural development programme might be planned with extension officers and inputs like seed and fertiliser. But if the roads are not good enough to get the product to the market, the programme will fail to generate income for the farmers. Good institutional and land tenure arrangements are crucial to the success or failure of land reform projects.

MICRO AND MACRO ENVIRONMENTS

The *micro environment* refers to the environment at local level, the *macro environment* refers to the environment at all levels above local level – for example, district, provincial, national and international.

The livelihoods framework has been influential in shifting the land reform programme from concerns with quantity – how many households have obtained land and how many hectares have been transferred – to concerns with quality. This approach has stimulated questions about how the land reform programme has contributed to livelihood security and sustainability.

The programme has involved:

- a training and project-based learning programme in two pilot provinces¹³
- the development and publication of a set of policy guidelines for integrating environmental planning into land reform (DLA 2001).

The concept of sustainable livelihoods has been one of the key ideas informing the training and learning approach and the development of planning guidelines. The training programme initially drew on the DFID framework (see page 5). Many participants found it difficult to interpret the framework from the diagram. They said the framework is quite abstract and that, although the approach is specifically defined as being people-centred, an asset pentagon replaces people.



To respond to this feedback, the DLA/DANCED team adapted the framework, incorporating elements from the CARE and Oxfam models.

People are at the centre of the PGIEP livelihoods framework. They use their different capabilities and the tangible and intangible assets and entitlements to which they have access as the basis for different livelihood sources and activities. The relationship between people and the asset base is at the core of the framework.

The household triangle of assets, capabilities and activities lies inside a rectangle which represents earth, the natural resources, and the range of other on- and off-farm resources that people can draw on. People transform their assets and capabilities into livelihood strategies that will meet particular livelihood outcomes. Around the central rectangle is a second rectangle which represents livelihoods outcomes. The more successful the household's livelihood strategies are, the better the livelihoods outcomes will be. These livelihood outcomes may include greater equity, more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security and more sustainable use of the natural resource base. Diversification is part of a good livelihood strategy so that the household does not depend on only a few strategies for its survival. More diversification and more sustainable livelihood activities will result in better and better livelihood outcomes.

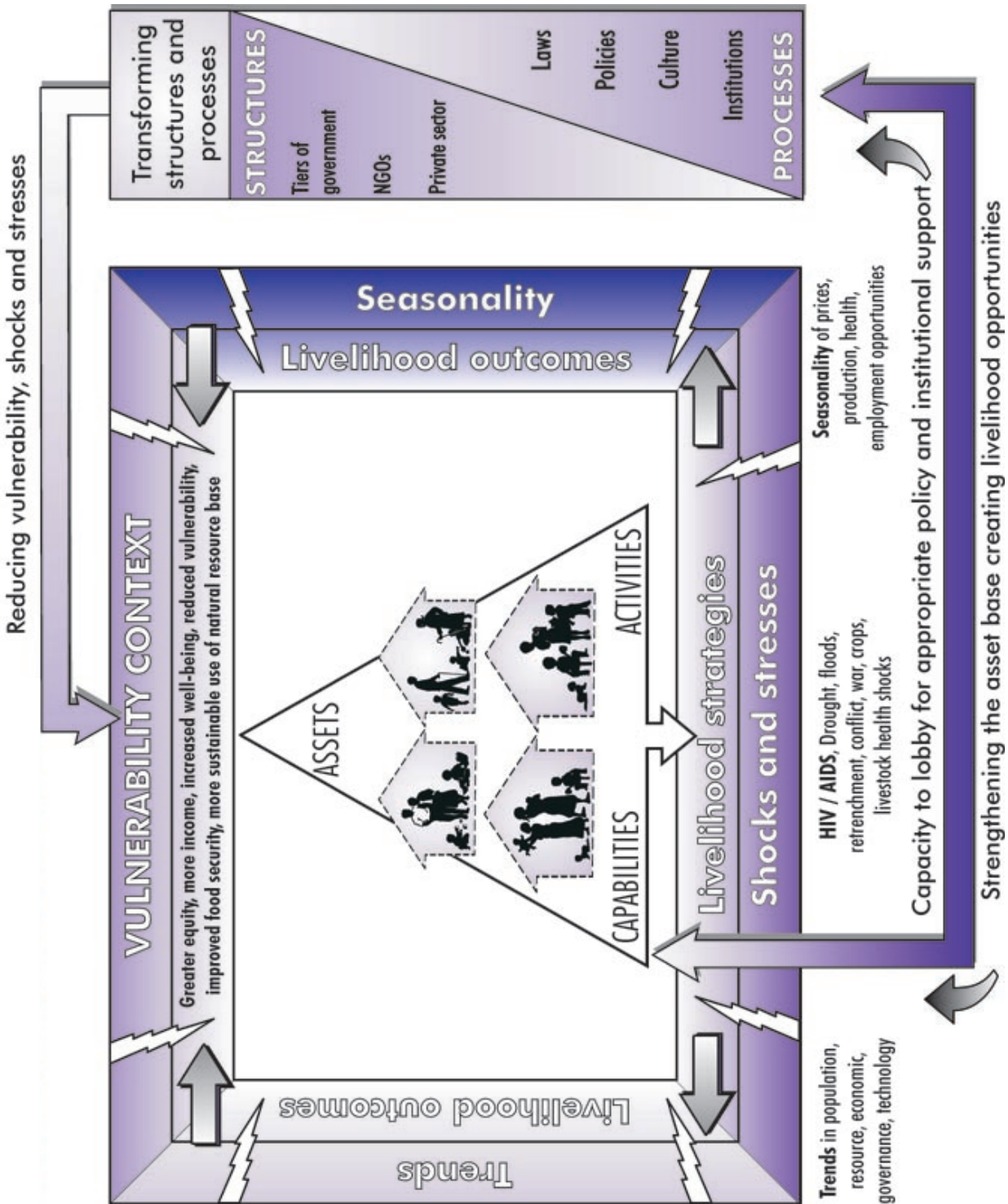
DIVERSIFICATION

Livelihood **diversification** refers to a household's attempt to reduce its vulnerability by having more than one livelihood activity. In a diversified household, if one productive activity does not provide enough, or fails completely, there are other sources of livelihood that the household can fall back on.

How well people can draw on their assets and diversify their livelihood strategies depends on a range of factors in the external environment known as the *vulnerability context*. This is represented by the third rectangle. The vulnerability context brings in shocks, stresses and other trends that diminish the asset base, reduce capabilities or restrict household activities.

There is a dynamic interaction between the asset base, livelihood strategies and vulnerability. Vulnerability comes from several different sources. Assessment of key trends will identify potential sources of vulnerability, as well as sources of opportunity. Trends in the local, national and global economy will highlight the incidence of poverty, unemployment, retrenchment and other factors which increase vulnerability. They will highlight issues like external debt, and how government spends its money. There will be trends that reflect the state of governance, or natural resource management. These trends will not affect everyone in the same way. The trends may be linked to the seasons. They may create opportunities for some and risks for others.

The PGIEP livelihoods framework





The vulnerability context contains shocks that can have sudden and dramatic impacts on livelihoods – examples include HIV/AIDS, retrenchment and floods.

People's lives and livelihoods are affected in different ways by a wide range of structures and processes. These might include local institutions or customs that control the access of people to assets. Not everyone will be affected in the same way. Some institutions may favour men and discriminate against women. Others may favour older people and marginalise youth. They might take the form of policy and law that either enhances or undermines local livelihood strategies – for example, legislation that prevents the subdivision of land or affects the management of natural resources.

Good governance or corruption will affect people's lives and livelihoods. They may be affected by international trade agreements (which, for example, affect the demand for certain crops). People are not passive victims of structures and processes over which they have no control. The way that the livelihoods framework is put into practice through participatory planning and appreciative enquiry can build the capacity of local people to lobby for appropriate policy and institutional support.

However, communities are not homogenous and the planning process will raise conflicts of interest. Priorities will reflect gender and power relations. In places where international agencies, tiers of government, NGOs and others have conscious policies to promote sustainable livelihoods, they will make links between micro and macro levels. They will respond to the priorities of the poor that have been identified through livelihoods analysis. They will look for ways in which to strengthen their asset base and find points of leverage to ensure maximum impact from targeted interventions. A key objective of any intervention must be to create opportunities for people to diversify their livelihoods and broaden their asset base. Finally agencies, governments, NGOs and local people have to develop conscious strategies to reduce risk, vulnerability and cushion shocks and stresses.

At the macro level, policies and institutional arrangements can be analysed to measure the extent to which this is actually happening. Participatory monitoring and evaluation can assess impacts on the ground.

Put very simply the PGIEP livelihoods framework conceptualises processes that:

- enhance the natural asset base represented by the central rectangle (broaden and increase people's access to the asset base)
- grow the outcomes represented by the second rectangle (diversify livelihood opportunities and attain desired livelihood outcomes)
- reduce the impact of the vulnerability context represented by the outside rectangle (limit risk and vulnerability).

The *Learning about livelihoods* (LAL) framework

The framework which we use in this book is developed from the PGIEP model. It also puts people at the centre. Households have capabilities and access to a range of assets which they use to carry out different livelihood activities. There are many different shapes and sizes of household. Households are differentiated by relative well-being and their access to resources and power. The framework also looks at gender and age relations within and outside the household. Gender and age affect access to resources and the kinds of livelihood activities that are possible.

Households use their assets and capabilities to engage in many different strategies to try to secure their livelihoods. The more diversification there is in the livelihood strategies of a household, the more secure it is likely to be.

The different livelihood strategies have different outcomes, and they may be more or less sustainable. More desirable livelihood outcomes vary from household to household but increased well-being is usually a high priority. When a household is able to achieve a desired livelihood outcome, this has a positive impact on its assets and capabilities (its assets and capabilities improve). When livelihood activities have undesirable outcomes, these have a negative influence on a household's assets and capabilities.

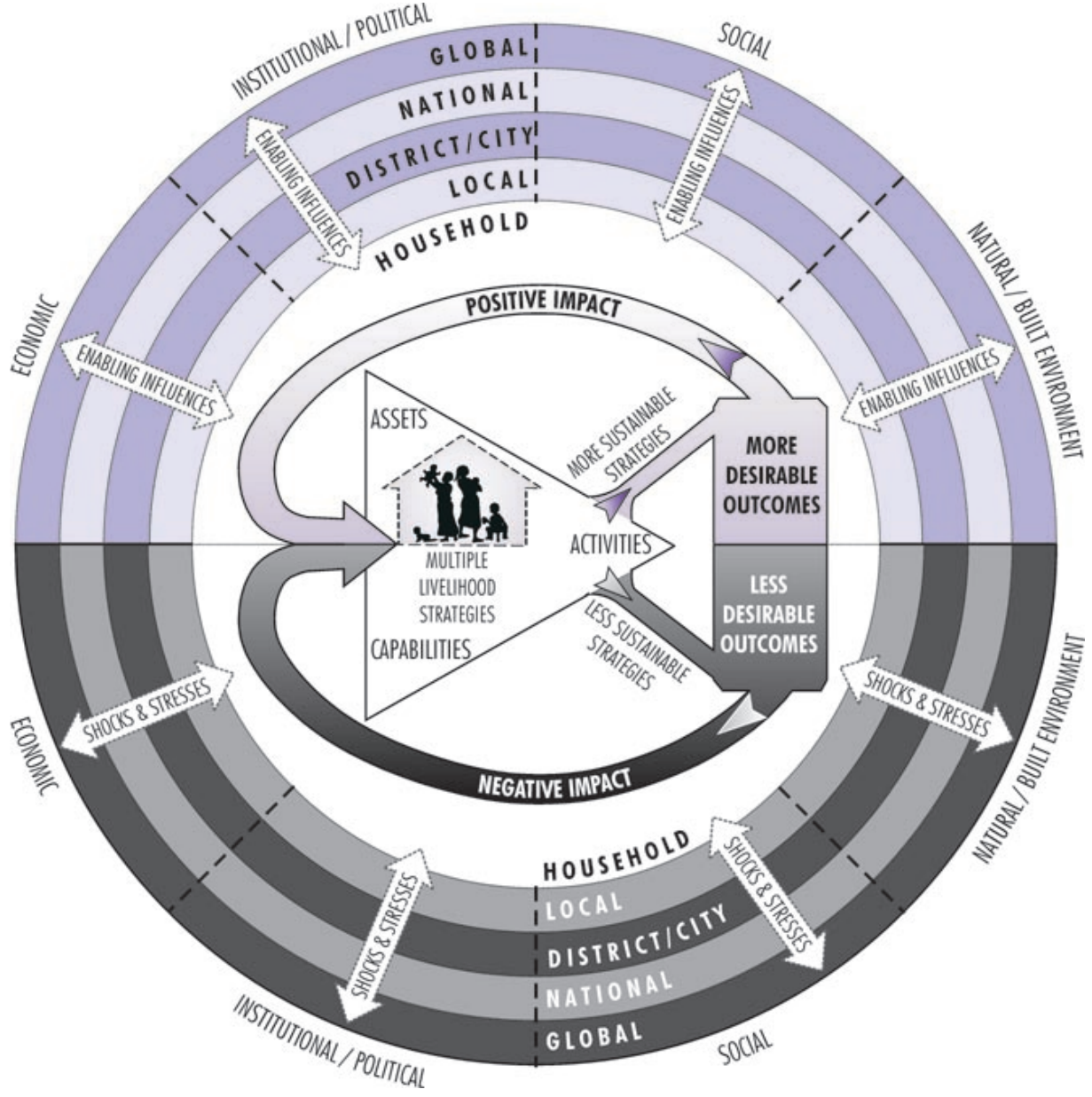
Local livelihood activities are affected by factors in the external (macro) environment on the local, national and international levels. The external environment includes physical environment, the social environment, the political/institutional environment and the economic environment.

The physical environment includes the built environment (for example, buildings, roads and water pipes) and the natural environment (for example, earth, water and plants). These factors can help households to engage in sustainable livelihood strategies by having an enabling influence. They can also undermine livelihood sustainability through shocks and stresses. In the same way that the external environment affects households, households affect the external environment. These influences can be positive or negative. It is possible for a household activity to improve the well-being of the household on an individual level, while having a negative impact on the external environment. For example, a household may cut wood to sell for cash income. If this activity is done unsustainably, this will destroy the natural resource base and undermine the livelihoods of many other people.

The LAL livelihoods framework is holistic. It can be used to analyse both the micro and macro environments and the influence that they have on each other. In this way, key trends can be identified which show how households in different categories of well-being are moving towards greater resilience and livelihood sustainability or falling into increased vulnerability. The framework also enables change over time, for example, seasonality and historical changes, to be brought into the analysis.



The LAL livelihoods framework



Main principles of the livelihoods approach

There are five main principles guiding the livelihoods approach that we use in this package.

1. The approach is people-centred and participatory. Livelihoods are about people, so livelihoods analysis is based on understanding how people make their living. It uses participatory methods, and serves as a framework to decide which participatory livelihoods assessment (PLA) methods to use at the appropriate time, and how to frame key questions.

2. The approach assumes differentiation. The livelihoods approach recognises that there are important differences among households in a given community, and among individuals who make up the household. Differentiation may involve relative well-being or it may focus on issues such as gender, age or ethnicity. The approach enables outsiders to better appreciate these differences, and to design processes that can cope with complexity and diversity. Differentiation also enables us to improve our ability to design sensible interventions with our target groups. It can also help us to understand where resistance may develop, if for example activities threaten certain groups within the community.

3. Holistic analysis leads to targeted interventions. The approach encourages holistic analysis, with attention to identifying factors inside and outside households that have beneficial or negative impacts on livelihoods. However, it does not assume that one must address all issues simultaneously. Rather, based on an analysis of the most important influences on livelihoods, one can select specific, focused interventions while understanding how these relate to other issues that are not being addressed. The livelihoods framework can be useful to organisations that focus on specific sectors like health or natural resource management, and it also creates opportunities for organisations that have different sectoral focuses to work together in co-operation or partnership. This helps to increase the impact of development interventions. Holistic diagnosis allows us to identify the most strategic interventions into a situation to achieve the best result.

4. Targeted interventions should result in maximum leverage. Successful poverty reduction strategies must address a whole range of issues. There are many possible interventions, but resources are limited. Therefore, it is crucial to select and target interventions in ways that will have the greatest impact and reduce poverty and vulnerability for the most people.

5. Reflective practice improves the quality of analysis and intervention. The livelihoods framework recognises that households and livelihoods are constantly changing in response to shocks, stresses and seasonality (the impact of the seasons). This highlights the need for ongoing learning and structured reflections on practice. Reflective practice must apply both to the 'implementing agent' and the community/households involved. Engaging the community in an ongoing discussion and analysis of changes in their livelihoods over time helps make people at all levels more aware of potentials and linkages. Livelihoods analysis can provide a useful framework for monitoring the impacts of development initiatives and can pinpoint unintended consequences.



Advantages of the approach

Analysis of livelihoods and assessment of vulnerability contributes to the effectiveness of development interventions in many ways. The key benefits are listed below.

1. It improves internal coherence and analytical strength of programmes.

The livelihoods approach introduces a clear conceptual framework that guides programme design, implementation and monitoring, and impact assessment. The conceptual framework helps development managers and fieldworkers by providing a simple road map to navigate complex situations. It helps us understand relationships and make important connections and linkages. It keeps us from simply forgetting or overlooking things that might be important. At the same time, the framework is not too rigid. There is freedom to focus on aspects within the framework that are particularly relevant and important to your organisation's mission.

The framework helps us to focus on particular aspects of a livelihood and make a real effort to understand what actually constrains livelihood opportunities. The approach improves an organisation's ability to learn from its work. It enables staff to engage with and learn from others working within the livelihoods framework. It provides a shared reference point for analysing different situations.

2. It increases impact through improved understanding, targeting and use of resources.

This is possible when holistic analysis is done and interventions are effectively targeted. By understanding the realities of people's livelihood strategies and addressing their priorities, it becomes clearer which intervention is likely to have the greatest positive impact. This means that improved targeting of scarce resources can yield better benefits, for more people.

3. It supports targeted skills development and specific expertise.

The practical orientation of the livelihoods framework helps managers and staff to determine exactly what sorts of knowledge and skills they need to develop, in line with community needs, and in accordance with the organisation's own vision.

4. It integrates participatory methods.

Many fieldworkers learn a variety of participatory methods, but are often not clear about why they should use a particular tool and what to do with the information they obtain from using it. Often PRA/PLA activities gather large amounts of information that describe situations without providing a framework for analysing and acting on the results.

The livelihoods framework can help to:

- decide what information will be important

- select appropriate tools for gathering and analysing information with communities
 - use this information for analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring purposes which involve not only the implementing agent but communities as well.
- 5. It creates opportunities for collaboration and partnerships.** Not all organisations can or should try to do everything. It is important for an organisation to build up sufficient competence and experience in its own field. However quality development usually requires interventions at several different points at the same time. This can be achieved through effective partnerships based upon an agreed understanding of what the various parties are trying to achieve, and how various interventions could reinforce one another. The livelihoods framework can serve as the basis for an overall analysis on which all parties agree, and thus can facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships and networks.
- 6. It increases access to donor funding.** Donors are increasingly looking for organisations and programmes that can clearly demonstrate impact. Interventions that address livelihoods and vulnerability issues will generally be better targeted and thought through. After project design, the livelihoods framework supports clearer monitoring and impact assessment. This enables development organisations and communities to manage and guide activities in ways that truly reduce poverty. Donors are more likely to support programmes that are well-designed and that include impact monitoring.
- 7. It complements existing approaches.** Many organisations already have adopted frameworks and approaches to livelihoods work. The approach taken to livelihoods analysis in this book aims to add value to these approaches. It does not try to replace them.

Criticism of the livelihoods framework and its implementation

Although different sustainable livelihoods frameworks have a lot to offer, these approaches have also been criticised. By looking at some of the concerns that have been voiced in southern Africa, you will become more aware of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the frameworks and their implementation.

Colin Murray¹⁴ has written a concise summary of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the DFID framework. His comments on this framework also have relevance for other livelihoods frameworks as well.



FRAMEWORK STRENGTHS	FRAMEWORK WEAKNESSES
It seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context	Elements of the vulnerability context such as rampant inflation, extreme civil conflict and ripples of mass redundancy are much more important than would appear to be allowed for
It explicitly advocates a creative tension between different levels of analysis	It is presumed that it is possible to expand people's 'asset pentagons' in a generalised and incremental fashion
It acknowledges the need to transcend discrete sectors – urban and rural, industrial and agricultural, formal and informal	Inequalities of power and conflicts of interest are not sufficiently acknowledged ¹⁵
It implicitly requires investigation of the relationships between different activities that constitute household livelihoods which in turn requires attention both to intra-household and extra-household social relations	The notion of 'participation' may disguise the fact that in one way or another the enhancement of the livelihoods of one group will undermine the livelihoods of another group
	The inadequate definition of what constitutes livelihood sustainability. What criteria will be used to assess sustainability over what period of time?

The films that accompany this handbook graphically illustrate Murray's first critical point. *Legacies*, which is set in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, highlights how different elements in the vulnerability context can combine and what their effects are on peoples lives. Rural people in northern KwaZulu-Natal must cope with the combined impacts of years of political and civil conflict, land and livestock dispossession, retrenchment and jobless growth in the South African economy and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since this film was made, there have been outbreaks of cholera, flooding and foot-and-mouth disease in the province with devastating effects on the lives of rural people.

Against this backdrop of poverty and inequality, some critics say that the livelihoods framework implicitly accepts the *status quo* of poverty and inequality. They say it focuses only on encouraging the poor to use what they have in a better way:

*At times, the sustainable livelihoods framework conveys a sense of accommodating the way the world works. Even if it is used in an explicitly pro-poor fashion, some have found it scandalous to develop an analysis of poverty that enumerates the 'resources' that characterise that context, labels them 'capital', and proposes – indeed insists – that these constitute the building blocks to overcome that poverty. Such an interpretation would be in grave danger of cordoning off poverty as if it, and its solution, is somehow separate from life and development of the broader community.*¹⁶

Echoing Murray, other critics say that the livelihoods framework may underplay the structural constraints that keep the poor in poverty:

The danger with an emphasis on assets and capabilities is that the constraints are underplayed. In the worst case, it can result in an argument that the poor are 'richer' than they seem, and that action for equity – particularly on the part of the state – is thus less urgent.¹⁷

Some critics go further to allege that the livelihoods framework can romanticise the poor which results in participatory processes that listen uncritically and accept the outcomes of activities at face value:

An emphasis on assets often goes hand in hand with a romanticism that idealises the poor. An implicit danger in approaches which 'listen to the poor' is that the researcher listens uncritically. Neither rich nor poor have the monopoly of knowledge or ignorance. In some cases, the strategies of the poor are appropriate, logical and relatively sustainable in the circumstances. In others they are based on beliefs, values and traditions which result in unsustainable or illegal practices. In some cases they are based on history, including the political history and imposed systems of authority.¹⁸

There are other concerns about the politics of livelihoods enquiry and the quality of fieldwork that is used to operationalise the livelihoods framework:

In theory livelihoods enquiries are supposed to be healthy because they are so very participatory. In practice they can create all kinds of expectations that most projects fail to meet. At the very least cautions should be issued about this sort of problem with livelihood enquiry, which is often the very early stage at which the rot sets in to livelihoods based approaches to development.¹⁹

These concerns about the quality of fieldwork are echoed by leading PRA practitioners.

As Chambers points out:

There is a mass of bad practice. Quality assurance is now a huge concern among practitioners and trainers. Dangers and abuses include

- *using the label without the substance*
- *demanding instant PRA on a large scale*
- *bad training based on lecturing without field experience – focusing on methods and neglecting behaviour and attitudes*
- *rigid routinised applications*
- *taking local people's time without recompense and raising expectations.²⁰*



Listening to the critical voices

The critical points raised above vary from substantive comments on aspects of the livelihoods framework through to the politics and practice of livelihoods enquiry. There are counter-arguments to many of the criticism of the livelihoods framework, but these will not be raised in this book. Whether or not you agree with the points raised by critics, it is important that you as the reader know about them.

The livelihoods framework should not be uncritically or superficially 'mainstreamed' by policy makers, planners and development practitioners. There is a risk that the framework could be used to keep things the way they are and divert attention away from what keeps people poor.

Similarly, if livelihoods planning is badly done, participatory methods are used routinely and for their own sake and expectations are raised that cannot be met, the framework will become discredited.

Although the framework is not the same thing as the methodological approaches that are used to implement it, it is difficult to separate them. How you 'walk the talk' influences the talk itself. As PRA practitioners point out, attitudes and behaviour are very important.

Putting the livelihoods framework into practice

There are a number of methodological approaches that can be used to put the livelihoods framework into practice. The team that has contributed to this book combines a wide range of methods in their practice. These include PRA/PLA methods and tools, problem analysis and appreciative inquiry.

Many readers will be familiar with methods that involve PRA and different types of participatory problem analysis. Appreciative inquiry is a lesser-known approach in southern Africa and has a particular relevance, given the social and political historical context of countries in the region.

More detail on different methodological approaches is contained in Chapter 3.

Appreciative enquiry vs problem-based enquiry

Recent development approaches have focused on identifying local strengths, assets and opportunities as the foundation for development planning. This approach is known as appreciative enquiry²¹ or appreciative planning and action.

Traditionally, development planning is based on activities to identify, analyse and prioritise problems. It produces 'problem trees', tries to isolate 'root problems', looks at the causes and effects of problems, and tries to show constraints on the macro level. Development projects based on this approach are usually based on a package of problem-solving measures.

The problem-based approach for development planning has been criticised for three main reasons:

1. Problem-based enquiry focuses on weaknesses, decay and things that have gone wrong. This makes it very difficult for people to see anything but problems, so they may feel powerless to change anything. People then become dependent on outside 'expert' professionals who come in to 'discover' and name the problems, and take responsibility for finding 'solutions'. Development should put people at the centre of the planning process and assist them to take control of their own lives.
2. The problem-solving approach gives more weight to the knowledge of professionals than local people. Local people often know more about problems, potential solutions and priorities than professionals do. Professionals often make assumptions about what is important which local people do not share. They also usually approach problems from a technical point of view, limiting the enquiry to physical and economic factors. The problem-solving approach is no longer able to mobilise and inspire people.
3. Problem-based enquiry is often focused on only one sector, for example, providing health care or running water. Sectorally-focused programmes do not take into account the complex and constantly changing situation in which poor people use multiple livelihood strategies.

In spite of these weaknesses, the problem-based approach has important strengths for sustainable livelihoods planning. Its emphasis on the need to analyse power relations, to understand 'the big picture' and to look at how overarching structures and processes affect communities is very valuable.

Generally speaking, appreciative enquiry is an important tool for working at household and community level. Problem-based planning and analysis is more useful for investigating the wider environment.

Appreciative planning and action

Good livelihoods planning is based on a collaborative enquiry to discover how people live, what resources they have access to, what works, and what has potential to work. It identifies how different people in different households are able to transform their assets and capabilities into livelihood strategies. It explores what people see as desirable livelihood outcomes – these will vary from household to household.



The approach also enables people to imagine what might be, and how their livelihoods could be improved and become more secure and sustainable. The approach recognises that households are not the same. Livelihood strategies and access to assets vary. Power relations are unequal.

From communities to households and categories of well-being

In the past many development planning approaches focused on the ‘community’ and ‘community groups’. It was assumed that communities had common interests, or where there were differences these could be resolved by working with interest groups (for example, women and youth). This meant that individual households within a community often did not get enough attention. The primary focus of the livelihoods framework is on households, and the way that people use their capabilities and assets to undertake a range of activities that make up their livelihood strategy.

The approach shows how different households (and individuals within each household) can become vulnerable to shocks and stresses. The approach enables a clear and subtle understanding of livelihood opportunities and constraints, and helps to identify which interventions are likely to have the most impact.

Moving forward

In writing this book we want to show how the livelihoods framework can strengthen the political voice and influence of the poor and enable them to secure full social and economic rights. At the same time the framework provides a way for government and other development players to develop poverty eradication policies and programmes that work. Finally, the framework enables all to reflect on the issues associated with sustainability and highlights the social, political and economic transformation that must take place to make this a reality.

Frequently asked questions from programme managers

Q: What are the implications of adopting the livelihoods framework for managers of organisations and development programmes? Does the livelihoods approach imply a whole new way of working that will require special skills and training? How well does the framework and approach integrate with existing ways of working?

Many managers are rightly cautious about whole-heartedly accepting new ideas and approaches to development planning. They need to be convinced that the approach will add value to their organisations and programmes. In the section below we give answers to frequently-asked questions from managers.

Q: Will adopting the livelihoods framework involve lots of time and money to get started?

The process does not have to be done as a huge, costly one-off event. Instead, it can be integrated into ongoing work over time. The approach encourages organisations to develop long-term relations with communities, and within this to develop a simple, routine, participatory way of improving practice. It could be helpful at the beginning to set aside a couple of weeks to work on this, perhaps linked to a monitoring or evaluation exercise that has already been planned. This can strengthen the relationships among the community, the organisation, and any other partners, while serving as a key learning and staff development opportunity.

Q: Who will pay for project design that uses the livelihoods approach?

Depending on the relationship between your organisation and the donor, the introduction of the livelihoods framework could be financed as part of programme design, as staff development or organisational capacity building, as development of a monitoring system, or simply as a key monitoring or evaluation event.

Q: The approach seems to assume strong PRA skills. What is the best way for our fieldworkers to acquire these skills?

The livelihoods framework does not by definition require PRA skills. However, the approach that we promote in this book does require people who are experienced in PRA/PLA methods.

The framework should be introduced into the organisation with the support of someone who is experienced in participatory approaches. A facilitator who accompanies staff in the field can help staff develop participatory skills as they carry out realistic and directly useful activities. This learning approach is more effective than a pure 'workshop' training event. However, staff will also benefit from training that clarifies the livelihoods framework and highlights tools and approaches that can be used to put it into practice.

Q: It sounds as if the livelihoods framework is best suited to integrated rural development initiatives. How does it help if we are doing a sectorally-defined project?

The livelihoods approach is different from old-style integrated rural development. The emphasis on holistic analysis does not exclude a sectoral



focus. However, it can help people who undertake sectoral projects to understand and build on links with other sectors. The livelihoods framework enables you to understand how sectoral initiatives affect overall livelihoods of various people, and how people respond to sectoral initiatives. People have a holistic view of their own lives. How they see sectoral initiatives helps us to understand sectoral initiatives better.

Q: How is the livelihoods framework relevant to organisations that specialise in emergency relief?

Major emergency relief organisations are increasingly focusing on development in the midst of emergencies. There is an increasing recognition that even during emergencies, relief aid is a secondary source of support. Most people survive on the basis of inter-household support, and a variety of coping strategies. Livelihoods analysis provides valuable information on how people manage risk and provides insight into how existing coping strategies can be strengthened. This can help to make relief interventions more effective.

Endnotes for Chapter 1

¹ Michael Drinkwater, personal communication.

² Carney 1998.

³ There is a wide range of different participatory planning methods in use. These include PHAST/SARAR tools REFLECT methods, and a host of others.

⁴ Shackleton et al. 2000:36.

⁵ The IRDP approach failed due to over-ambitious large-scale, long-term projects that tried to integrate different sectoral concerns into a single plan. These plans were over-centralised, full of bureaucracy and dominated by technical planners. The IRDP approach was replaced by tight sectorally-focused planning which has often failed to make important connections and understand linkages between sectors, and the micro and macro levels. Livelihoods-focused planning combines some of the holistic thinking that characterised IRDP, but focuses on carefully-targeted interventions rather than big multi-sectoral projects.

⁶ Turner 1998.

⁷ Chambers & Conway 1992:7–8.

⁸ Carney 1999:4.

⁹ Titi & Singh 1994.

¹⁰ This section draws on the DFID *Sustainable livelihood guidance sheets* and a paper on the DFID, CARE, Oxfam and UNDP livelihoods approaches by representatives of those organisations (Carney et al. 1999).

¹¹ DFID. *Sustainable livelihoods guidance sheets*.

¹² For more information on CARE and its livelihoods approach see Drinkwater & Rusinow 1999 and Frankenberger & Drinkwater 1999.

¹³ The Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) in the School of Government, University of the Western Cape, has designed and run this programme in association with the Rural Action Committee (TRAC) and Common Ground Consulting.

¹⁴ Murray 2000.

¹⁵ These gaps are acknowledged by DFID which advocates using other tools to ensure these ‘missing ideas’ are reflected in practice. (Carney et al. 1999:10).

¹⁶ Butler & Greenstein 1999.

¹⁷ Budlender & Dube 1998.

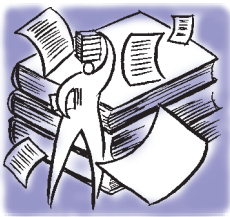
¹⁸ Budlender & Dube 1998.

¹⁹ Stephen Turner, personal communication (comments on the first draft of *Learning about livelihoods*)

²⁰ Chambers 1999.

²¹ This approach has been attributed to David Cooperider, Diana Whitney, Suresh Srivastva, Frank Barrett and others who developed the theory at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio in the 1970s. The approach was originally focused on organisational development in a corporate context but has been adapted and applied to development theory and practice by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and others, including CARE Nepal.

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