



Mini Review

Sustainable Livelihood Framework: Monitoring and Evaluation

Sabin Karki*

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science,
Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

Article Information

Received: 19 December 2020
Revised version received: 19 January 2021
Accepted: 21 January 2021
Published: 25 January 2021

Cite this article as:

S. Karki (2021) *Int. J. Soc. Sc. Manage.* 8(1): 266-271. DOI: [10.3126/ijssm.v8i1.33570](https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v8i1.33570)

*Corresponding author

Sabin Karki,
Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal
Email: sawveenkarki@gmail.com

Peer reviewed under authority of IJSSM
© 2021 IJSSM, Permits unrestricted use under the CC-BY-NC license.

OPEN ACCESS



This is an open access article & it is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license.
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Keywords: Indicators; Livelihood analysis; Monitoring; Evaluation

Abstract

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. And The Framework used can be understood as a tool or checklist to understand poverty in responding to poor people's views and their own understanding of poverty. In this context, a research was designed to study the sustainable livelihood framework: monitoring and evaluation. Different related of published and unpublished materials like books, research articles and other materials like package manuals were reviewed and the paper was prepared. The paper showed that, livelihood approaches are conceptual frameworks that promote people centered development. They are responsive and participatory, and they favor multidisciplinary and multilevel development interactions. Monitoring and evaluation must look beyond activity-based indicators of progress and resource-based definitions of change to measure achievements from the perspective of partners and beneficiaries. Livelihoods analysis helps us to address these assumptions as part of the project design. Assumptions can be 'internalized' either by including complementary activities (to cover 'horizontal' assumptions) or by linking projects up-stream and down-stream to ensure an appropriate enabling environment.

Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Livelihood (SL) is an attempt to go beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty eradication. These had been found to be too narrow because they focused only on certain aspects or manifestations of poverty, such as low income, or did not consider other vital aspects of poverty such as vulnerability and social exclusion. It is now recognized that more attention must be paid to the various factors and processes which either constrain or enhance poor people's ability to

make a living in an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable manner. The SL concept offers the prospects of a more coherent and integrated approach to poverty. One of the most critical issues of concern today is the growing poverty gap between the North and the South. Globalization and deepening economic inequity have resulted in an inordinate share of poverty, insecurity, homeless and vulnerability being concentrated in the South. (Knowles and Materu, 1999). Three poverty trends are especially notable:

the feminization of poverty, the urbanization of poverty and the africanization of poverty.

Indeed, the urbanization of poverty is one of the new millennium's greatest challenges. While Africa presents the lowest rates of urbanization and urban poverty worldwide in statistical terms, it is the region where the pace and extent of urban poverty growth is the highest (Rabinovitch, 1997). Urban poverty is significantly influenced by what city or municipalities do or do not do as well as by what they can or cannot do.

What Is Meant by Sustainable Livelihoods?

The sustainable livelihoods idea was first introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development as a way of linking socioeconomic and ecological considerations in a cohesive, policy-relevant structure. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) expanded the concept, especially in the context of Agenda 21, and advocated for the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as a broad goal for poverty eradication. It stated that sustainable livelihoods could serve as '*an integrating factor that allows policies to address 'development, sustainable resource management, and poverty eradication simultaneously*'.

Poverty has most commonly been assessed against income or consumption criteria. In this interpretation, a person is poor only if his/her income level is below the defined poverty line, or if consumption falls below a stipulated minimum. However, when the poor themselves are asked what poverty means to them, income is only one of a range of aspects which they highlight (Chambers, 1987). Others include: a sense of insecurity or vulnerability; lack of a sense of voice vis-à-vis other members of their household, community or government; and levels of health, literacy, education, and access to assets, many of which are influenced by the scope and quality of service delivery.

Conceptually, 'Livelihood' denotes the means, activities, entitlements and assets by which people make a living. Making a living determines the existence of a person in society. The movable and immovable things can also be included in this category. The term 'sustainable' suggests lasting or enduring. A sustainable livelihood provides lasting security to a person and keeps him free from tension.

Assets, are defined as: natural / biological (i.e., land, water, common-property resources, flora, fauna); social (i.e., community, family, social networks); political (i.e., participation, empowerment-sometimes included in the social category); human (i.e., education, labour, health, nutrition); physical (i.e., roads, clinics, markets, schools, bridges); and economic (i.e., jobs, saving, credit). The sustainability of livelihoods becomes a function of how men and women utilize asset portfolios on both a short and a long-term basis. One can describe a 'livelihood' as a

combination of the capabilities and resources people have (including social, human, financial, natural and material assets) and the activities they undertake in order to make a living and to attain their goals and aspirations (Chambers and Conway, 1992). A livelihood is sustainable when people cope with and recover from shocks and crises (example: seasonal, environmental and economic) and can maintain or enhance their capability and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and recovers from stress and shocks maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the long and short run (Chambers and Conway, 1992). It is about increasing the economic power of people and empowering them. It is facilitating asset creation, capacity building and access to opportunities. It is building securities.

Livelihood Literature (Hussein and Nelson, 1999; Ellis, 2000) suggests that though exogenous trends and shocks play an important role in pushing rural people towards a diversified livelihood strategy, diversification choices are also firmly rooted in the micro-economic logic of farming households. The availability of key assets (such as savings, land, labour, education and/or access to market or employment opportunities, access to CPRs and other public goods) is an evident requisite in making rural households and individuals more or less capable to diversify (Dercon and Krishan, 1996; Abdulai and Crolerees, 2001). The investment of a proper mix of the above endowments is the starting move of any independent activity. Moreover, labour capability and education determine the capability of finding a job and savings are often needed to migrate. Yet diversification may also develop as a coping response to the loss of capital assets needed for undertaking conventional on farm production. The decreased availability of arable land, increased producer/consumer ratio, credit delinquency, and environmental deterioration can be indeed important drives towards diversification. The maximization of return per unit of labour (Ellis, 2000) and risk management is often invoked to explain diversification behaviour (Chambers, 1997; Reardon et al., 1992; Bryceson, 1996; Ellis, 2000; Hussein and Nelson, 1999). Social organization and culture can significantly influence the relative access of diverse gender to household's capital assets (Ellis, 2000; Gladwin et al., 2001; Dolan, 2002) or constraint/promote their mobility. This might result in a different degree of involvement in diversification activities and/or in an unequal distribution of their benefits between genders (Warren, 2001).

Much of the literature specifically on monitoring relates to food security (mainly in emergencies). However, more

broadly, documents on indicators and methodologies are applicable to all aspects of M&E. Reports of findings generally referred to the findings of evaluations or impact assessments.

Stern et al (2012), note that up to now most impact evaluation is based on a narrow range of mainly experimental and statistical methods and designs that are only applicable to a small proportion of DFID's current programme portfolio. This is partially confirmed in the current review. Particularly for larger scale studies or those conducted by or for multilateral agencies, experimental methods are often described as the 'gold standard' and qualitative methods regarded as complementary to quantitative methods. However, due to the nature of this literature search (focus on livelihoods, cross organizational and search for best practice) many approaches focusing on qualitative and mixed have also been found. Several studies also mention a recent intentional shift towards more methodologically diverse and eclectic approaches to impact evaluation (Stern, 2012; Smith et al. 2011; Barrett et al. 2014).

Approach and Framework of Livelihood

There are many approaches and frameworks proposed by scholars related to livelihood. Some of them are given below

1. Capability Approach

The Capability Approach was propounded by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in 1979. The approach developed through inter-disciplinary interaction and the contribution of several scholars. Among whom Martha Nussbaum introduced specificities in the definitions of certain concepts. It gives a scope for expansion through creative interpretation and field application. It has now become the tool for evaluating individual wellbeing and social arrangements. Its influence extends to welfare economics, social policy, political philosophy and development (Sreenivasa, 2006). 'In the evaluation of the society, one must go beyond the all constrains to the actual lives people lead; the people have reason to value their quality of life' (Sen, 1999).

2. Sustainable livelihood Approach

Livelihood approaches are conceptual frameworks that promote people centered development. They are responsive and participatory, and they favour multidisciplinary and multilevel development interactions. Livelihood approaches generate a deeper understanding of the wide range or livelihood strategies pursued by people that poverty alleviation or eradication measures address. The crux of sustainable livelihood approach is that the livelihoods of poor people are at the center of any strategy for poverty reduction. It puts people at the center of development and enables poor people themselves to participate in identifying and addressing their livelihood

priorities. As well as being people- centered, the livelihood approach is holistic as it seeks to identify the various factors which hinder and provide opportunities to people to improve their situation and how these factors relate to each other, including links to macro policies (Chambers and Conway 1992).

To make up a living, poor women and men incorporate their capabilities, social and material assets and utilize all the opportunities available to them in the milieu, whether urban or rural. A sustainable livelihood is dynamic and therefore has the capability to adapt and respond to continuous change and there by recover from stress and shocks. Livelihood is related to poor people's own priorities interpretations and abilities. People are at the center of the livelihoods framework and are perceived as capable actors and not helpless victims. A livelihood therefore draws on the wealth of knowledge, skills and adaptive strategies of the poor. As it is centered on households and communities, it is location sensitive and household members contribute in different way depending on their various roles, responsibilities and capabilities (Meikle et al., 2001).

3. Sustainable livelihood framework

A number of livelihood approach frameworks have been conceived by practitioners and NGO's to illustrate the central assets and vulnerability analysis, which underpins the approach. The DFID framework uses the concept of capital assets as a central feature and considers how these are affected by the 'vulnerability context' in which they are derived, and by 'transforming structures and process' alternatively labeled policies, institutions and processes, to constitute 'livelihood strategies' which lead to various livelihood outcome (Sojola, 2012).

At the centre of the framework are the assets on which households or individuals draw to build their livelihoods. They are influenced by the vulnerability context, which refers to the sources of insecurity to which poor people and their assets are vulnerable. Access to and use of assets is influenced by policies, organizations and relationships between individuals and organizations and authority. The strategies which individuals and households adopt produce outcomes, which are defined in terms of greater or less wellbeing. Five of the Capital Assets identified by Carney (1998) form the basis to get access to system or resources through which other forms of capital can be produced. The ability to get access to reproduction of capital assets reflects access profile of the household. There are multiple choices or opportunities in order to use the available assets that are known as Livelihood Strategies. It is a continuous decision-making process which vary based on external situations. It may be regular and seasonal, occasional and unexpected. It could also be reactive like selling livestock at abnormal time

and structural decisions that can change whole nature of livelihood like migration.

The DFID livelihood framework does not specify the factors that make all rural households vulnerable while in the livelihood's framework of Lloyd-Jones (2003), the vulnerability context defines stocks, trends and seasons as well as culture. It is notable that the livelihood framework is a tool that defines the scope of and provides the analytical basis for livelihoods analysis, by identifying the main factors affecting livelihoods and the relationships between them (Carney, 1998).

Challenges often arise with experimental techniques as a result of the lack of baseline data, or a comparable, non-project control group to serve as the counterfactual (Smith et al. 2011, Nelems and Lee 2009). Other concerns that are raised in thinking about M&E methods include timing, cost, institutional responsibility and coordination, participation, and accuracy and reliability of data collection and interpretation. Dealing with attribution of impact to the intervention is a further challenge: measuring outputs and outcomes are relatively easy, but measuring and attributing long term impacts is much harder. Evaluators are increasingly being challenged to open their minds to a more balanced view of that constitutes rigor and scientific evidence. Triangulation of results from a variety of methods, including qualitative methods, can increase validity and confidence in the findings of an impact evaluation (Furman and Stern, 2011). Participatory tools and methods open up greater opportunities for people to express their views, communicate impacts and understand the nature of change. To be truly participatory M&E should involve as many stakeholders as possible, including donors, local government officials, local staff, partners and other NGOs at all stages. The communities in which a project or programme is implemented should have a say in how M&E activities are planned and implemented, as well as in decision-making around M&E findings.

Monitoring and Evaluation

SL principles emphasize the importance of learning throughout implementation. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a key step in the learning process. As well as meeting financial accountability requirements, M&E should aim to derive lessons about what is effective in achieving poverty reduction and what is not, and help adapt activities to changing livelihood circumstances. At the same time, the very strengths of SL pose challenges for M&E. How can M&E:

- Embrace SL's people-centred and participatory principles?
- Be holistic, monitoring changes across a wide range of livelihood priorities and influences?
- Support a process, 'learning' approach?

A range of M&E tools can be used/ adapted to address these issues. However, having a clear understanding of the objectives of M&E (for whom, by whom and for what purpose is the information collected) is as important as the selection of particular instruments. If livelihood trends are to be monitored over the longer term, formal and informal institutions in recipient countries must assume a greater, long-term M&E role. This implies the need for skills development, adequate resources and – most challenging of all – an institutional environment in which on-going M&E is perceived as a useful input to policy review and resource allocation processes. It also means that proposed monitoring systems should build on, and integrate with, existing monitoring and management information systems within relevant organizations.

How to Make M&E People-Centered?

What matters in an SL approach is changes in people's livelihoods – rather than in resources per se. M&E must therefore look beyond activity-based indicators of progress (e.g. service provision, clinic visits) and resource-based definitions of change (e.g. increased output of energy or crops) to measure achievements from the perspective of partners and beneficiaries. This implies a high degree of participation in the design, monitoring and assessment of performance indicators. There is no single definition of people-centred M&E. Approaches such as beneficiary contact monitoring, stakeholder analysis and participatory M&E commonly include one or more of the following elements:

- Indicators are identified by and negotiated with partners/beneficiaries;
- Partners/beneficiaries are responsible for data collection and analysis;
- People's attitudes to change are highlighted (in addition to physical measures of change);
- Partners/beneficiaries play a key role in judging performance directly (through assessment of indicators and results) and/or indirectly (through periodic 'client satisfaction' surveys).

A wide array of specific tools may also be used (e.g. ranking and scoring, problem trees, mapping, timelines, etc.). These approaches and tools are not, though, inherently people-centred – they only become so when appropriate objectives and processes for M&E are adopted.

How to Monitor Macro–Micro Linkages?

M&E systems should strive to monitor both policy-level and local-level changes, as well as the links between them. Measures of institutional change (e.g. changes in service provision, representation in decision-making processes) should be supplemented by monitoring local perceptions of change, using techniques such as institutional mapping. If possible, changes in local behaviour or conditions resulting from institutional change should also be measured.

However, lags between institutional/policy reform and its wider effects may constrain what can be measured. Another concern is that institutional change rarely affects everyone equally and various groups are likely to have highly divergent opinions about change. Differences in impact between groups – especially negative impacts on particular groups – should therefore be monitored and considered in the context of the overall poverty elimination objective.

How to Accommodate the Dynamism of SL?

The SL approach endeavours to ensure that external support reinforces positive patterns of change and mitigates negative trends. A mix of indicator-types is required to capture dynamic processes. (This is generally true for process-type projects that pose particular challenges for M&E).

- Outcome indicators: these relate to longer-term targets. Measurement indicates what has been achieved (lagged indicators).
- Process indicators: these measure on-going progress towards planned outcomes.
- Leading indicators: these suggest that what will happen, especially over the longer-term (e.g. indicators of behavioural change provide early evidence of progress).

They can usefully feed into subsequent ex post evaluations and impact assessment. Process and leading indicators must include: (a) explicit identification of the cause-and-effect relationships linking them to intended outcomes; and (b) quantity and quality measures that assess adherence to agreed ‘standards’ (e.g. levels of participation, representation of different groups).

Dealing with Multiple Indicators

The SL approach calls for a mix of complementary indicators to assess livelihood change. A single ‘objective’ measure of performance (e.g. Rs./day) is insufficient. However, combining multiple quantitative and qualitative indicators can pose problems.

- Beneficiary-defined, qualitative indicators are often context-specific. It may be difficult to derive from them summary measures of overall project or programme performance. (This tends to be more of a problem when conducting overall impact assessment than in internal project M&E.)
- Indicators used for internal project learning may not fit well with donors’ external obligations (e.g. reporting on agreed targets, accountability). Openness and transparency are required when negotiating which criteria will be used to determine change and progress.
- SL project indicators may not have direct equivalents within national and international development targets (though new poverty

assessment methodologies may help identify links). Even when there are direct equivalents, time lags and slow replication suggest that higher-order indicators will be relatively insensitive to immediate project-level changes. Nevertheless, higher-order indicators can provide a benchmark and/or framework for the design and interpretation of project indicators.

Linkages can be further enhanced through the use of cascading log frames in programme planning. Tensions between quantitative and qualitative indicators should not be exaggerated. Many qualitative techniques use quantitative measures (e.g. ranking and scoring) and in practice the two are complementary. Similarly, ‘abstract’ indicators, such as client satisfaction, can be compared across projects, regardless of context.

Conclusion

The SL approach encourages us to consider (and address) a wide range of factors that shape livelihoods. Many of these issues, in particular those relating to the Vulnerability Context of the poor, and Policy, Institutions and Processes (previously referred to as Transforming Structures and Processes, might previously have appeared in the ‘assumptions’ column of a log frame. Assumptions are issues that are recognized as important but which are considered beyond the scope of the intervention. Too often assumptions have not held true and have greatly compromised the impact of an intervention (i.e. they have turned out to be killer assumptions).

Livelihoods analysis helps us to address these assumptions as part of the project design. Assumptions can be ‘internalized’ either by including complementary activities (to cover ‘horizontal’ assumptions) or by linking projects up-stream and down-stream to ensure an appropriate enabling environment. In the example on the previous page, educational support and credit programmes would be two complementary projects required to enhance pastoral employment opportunities. Where assumptions are not ‘internalized’, log frames may need to include indicators for monitoring change in the assumptions themselves. The project will effectively be monitoring its own external environment so that the project design can be modified if necessary.

References

- Abdulai A and CroleRees A (2001) Determinants of income diversification amongst rural households in Southern Mali. *Food policy* 26(4): 437-452.
- Barrett CB, Reardon T and Webb P (2001) Nonfarm income diversification and household livelihood strategies in rural Africa: concepts, dynamics and policy implications. *Food Policy* 26: 315-331.

- Bryceson DF (1996) Deagrarianization and rural employment in sub-Saharan Africa: a sectoral perspective. *World development* **24**(1): 97-111.
- Chambers R (1987) Sustainable rural livelihoods: a strategy for people. *Environment and Development*.
- Chambers R and Conway G (1992) Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century. *Institute of Development Studies* (UK).
- Dercon S and Krishnan P (1996) Income portfolios in rural Ethiopia and Tanzania: choices and constraints. *The Journal of Development Studies* **32**(6): 850-875.
- Dolan C (2002) Gender and diverse livelihoods in Uganda: University of East Anglia Norwich.
- Ellis F (2000) Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries: Oxford university press.
- Furman JL and Stern S (2011) Climbing atop the shoulders of giants: The impact of institutions on cumulative research. *American Economic Review* **101**(5): 1933-1963.
- Gladwin C H, Thomson AM, Peterson JS and Anderson AS (2001) Addressing food security in Africa via multiple livelihood strategies of women farmers. *Food policy* **26**(2): 177-207.
- Hussein K and Nelson J (1998) Sustainable livelihoods and livelihood diversification. London, *Institute of Development Studies*.
- Hussein K and Nelson J (1999) Sustainable livelihoods and diversification. IDS Worldng Paper, 69.
- Knowles E and Materu J (1999) Partnerships for Sustainable Development: North-south Cooperation Within the Framework of Local Agenda 21. *Guide to Good Practice*, Africa: IULA.
- Lloyd-Jones G (2003) Design and control issues in qualitative case study research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* **2**(2): 33-42.
- Meikle S, Ramasut T and Walker J (2001) Sustainable urban livelihoods: Concepts and implications for policy. DPU Working Paper, London, The Development Planning Unit, University College London.
- Prain G and Lee-Smith D (2010) Urban agriculture in Africa: what has been learned? *African urban harvest* **21**: 13-35.
- Rabinowitz D (1997) Overlooking nazareth: the ethnography of exclusion in Galilee. Cambridge University Press.
- Reardon T, Delgado C and Matlon P (1992) Determinants and effects of income diversification amongst farm households in Burkina Faso. *The Journal of Development Studies* **28**(2): 264-296.
- Scoones I (1998) Sustainable rural livelihoods: a framework for analysis. IDS Working Paper No. 72, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Sen A (1999) Freedom as development: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith DR, Gordon A, Meadows K and Zwick K (2001) Livelihood diversification in Uganda: patterns and determinants of change across two rural districts. *Food policy* **26**(4): 421-435.
- Sojola VT (2012) An evaluation of two poverty alleviation projects in the buffalo city metropolitan municipality. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Stern E, Stame N, Mayne J, Forss K, Davies R and Befani B (2012) Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations.
- Warren P (2001) Distance survey on gender impacts of commercialization. manuscript, ROME: FAO, AGSP.