The Sustainable Livelihood Approach: Reduce Poverty and Vulnerability

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ABSTRACT

The ‘Sustainable Livelihoods Approach’ (SLA) has been widely used in recent development programmes that aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability in less developed countries. The approach also focuses on policy design and development interventions to reduce poverty in developing countries. It takes into account the poor as the centre of the development process and embraces the complexity of rural livelihoods from the perspective of the poor. People can achieve either a viable, sustainable livelihood outcome or a fragile, unsustainable one due to the availability of assets to them and the impacts of vulnerability factors and transforming structures and processes on the access to and use of assets. In the present study, an attempt has been made to general discuss of the sustainable livelihood approach. It is concluded poor people have improved their socio-economic well being through sustainable livelihood framework.

Key words:

Introduction

The ‘Sustainable Livelihoods Approach’ (SLA) has been widely used in recent development programmes that aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability in less developed countries. The SLA is a way of understanding the needs of the poor and setting the objectives of development so that they respond effectively to these needs (Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project. 2002). The approach also focuses on policy design and development interventions to reduce poverty in developing countries. It takes into account the poor as the centre of the development process and embraces the complexity of rural livelihoods from the perspective of the poor. The SLA approach has been utilized by various multilateral agencies (such as FAO, World Bank and UNDP), donors (in particular, Department for International Development (DFID), UK), NGOs (for example, CARE and OXFAM) and government agencies, in diverse international development efforts (Glavovic and Boonzaier, 2006).

This paper presents a general discussion of sustainable livelihood approach. This paper also shows how the sustainable livelihood framework reduces poverty and vulnerability of the poor people.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework:

The concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ is primarily attributed to both Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway since they presented sustainable livelihoods in their study as a link between capabilities, equity and sustainability (Chambers and Conway, 1992). In the study, Chambers and Conway defined a sustainable livelihood as follows:

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

The SLA aims to make development more effective by putting people (rather than resources, sectors or technology) at the centre of the analysis (Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project, 2002). The core issue of the approach is poor people who are the ‘subjects’ of development. The SLA is typically set out in the form of a framework that brings together assets and activities that are thought to comply with the livelihoods definition and illustrates the interactions between them. There are many different diagrammatic representations of this framework, though all of them demonstrate the interactions between principal components of livelihoods. The ways the different elements in the SLA are linked together is shown in the diagram below (figure1). The various elements of the sustainable livelihood framework are discussed briefly as follows:

Livelihood assets:

The framework looks first at the capital assets (in other words, livelihood assets) owned, controlled, claimed, or by some other means accessed by the household. People combine the capital assets at their disposal in different ways to make a livelihood. The variety of assets to which people gain access can be grouped into five major categories as follows:

a. Human capital:

the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health important to the ability to pursue different livelihood strategies.

b. Physical capital:

the basic infrastructure (transport, shelter, water, energy and communications), the production equipment and means that enable people to pursue livelihoods.

c. Social capital:

the social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to wider institutions of society) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods.

d. Financial capital:

the financial resources which are available to people (whether savings, supplies of credit or regular remittances or pensions) and which provide them with different livelihood options; and

e. Natural capital:

the natural resource stocks from which resource flows useful for livelihoods are derived (e.g. land, water, wildlife, biodiversity and environmental resources), (DFID, 2001).

The capitals mentioned above are often depicted as an ‘asset pentagon’ in the sustainable livelihoods framework. The ‘asset pentagon’ provides schematic information about different levels of households’ access to the various forms of capitals. The centre point of the pentagon represents zero access, whereas maximum access is depicted by the outer perimeter (Glawovic and Boonzaier, 2006). People perform various home-based economic activities such as paddy husking, poultry farming, paddy trading (e.g. grocery), pond aquaculture, animal husbandry, weaving, mini-garments, handicrafts, dairy farming, plant nursery etc. to create livelihoods for their households. They are also growing fruits and vegetables for family consumption and they supplement family’s nutrition and income through raising kitchen garden. They gather various resources at their disposal and utilize them to make a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Transforming Structures and Processes:

Secondly, the framework focuses on various external factors that affect households’ access to the different forms of capital as well as returns associated with the exchange between the capitals. One group of the factors consists of various structures and processes that directly enable or impede the households’ access to both assets and activities they need. These are known as “transforming structures and processes”. The transforming
structures and processes are various institutions and organizations like government (e.g. policies, programmes, laws, rules, regulations imposed by government), wider society (e.g. caste and class systems, religion, traditional norms for resource access), and private sector (which includes markets, investment and NGOs involvement). These structures and processes can either make it easier or more difficult for people to get the assets they need and turn them into livelihood. For example, good policies from government will encourage development, create jobs and make it easier for poor people to have access to the assets they need to stop being poor (Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project, 2002).

**Vulnerability context:**

Another group of factors that affect households’ access to the assets they need for their livelihood is called the “vulnerability context”. This vulnerability context frames the external environment in which people operate, exposing them to various trends as well as shocks and seasonal shifts over which they have little or no control (Glavovic, *et al.*, 2002). Trends might include factors that impact on household such as rising costs of food staples or medicines (Allison and Horemans, 2006). Shocks include natural disasters (such as floods, cyclone, and droughts), sickness or death of a family member and the loss of land because of erosion. Seasonal shifts may have impact on changes in prices of products or availability of food. Shortages of agricultural products or of works associated with them at certain time of the year can mean that the normal food shortages of the poor become critical forcing them in to near starvation (Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project, 2002).

**Livelihood strategies:**

Thirdly, the framework sheds light on livelihood strategies of the households. With the context of prevailing vulnerability and existing transforming structures and processes that affect the access to and use of assets, households combine all the assets available to them to create a livelihood. The ways they combine these various elements are called livelihood strategies. A key Livelihood strategy in all poor groups is the tendency to increase the number of children and to ensure that children were engaged in productive works as early as possible. Other livelihood strategies include diversification of livelihoods, mobility and migration.

**Livelihood outcomes:**

Finally, sustainable livelihoods framework focuses on livelihood outcomes. The livelihood outcomes are what households actually achieve by applying their livelihood strategies. People can achieve either a viable, sustainable livelihood outcome or a fragile, unsustainable one due to the availability of assets to them and the impacts of vulnerability factors and transforming structures and processes on the access to and use of assets. A livelihood outcome is sustainable if people are able to maintain or improve their standard of living related to well-being and income or other human development goals, reduce their vulnerability to external shocks and trends, and ensure their activities are compatible with maintaining the natural resource base (Allison and Horemans, 2006).
Conclusion:

It is clear from the above discussion that sustainable livelihood framework plays a major role to the poor people to undertake income generating activities, increase well-being and empowerment and to develop their socioeconomic status which jointly contribute to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the poor households. The framework also contributes significantly to reduce vulnerability, make sustainable livelihood and improve the quality of life for the poor people and their families.

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Reference


