

## Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches: Past, present and... future?

**H**ow are Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) relevant to current and future development challenges?

What has been learnt from the experience of using SLAs to date? A series of six seminars, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from 2008-11, brought together practitioners, policymakers and researchers to reflect on the development and adaptation of SLAs, and debate their value in addressing current development challenges. The final 'synthesis' seminar in January 2011, hosted at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), in the UK, drew on findings from the previous seminars and also explored the future of SLAs.

The seminar series demonstrated a continuing enthusiasm for SLAs, notably amongst practitioners. One of their key features is the multi-sectoral 'lens' – SLAs' ability to be used in, and across, sectors. Speakers and participants shared how SLAs are being applied and adapted to different development challenges – particularly community-driven development, making markets work for the poor, food security, climate change and disaster-risk reduction.

As **Robert Chambers** commented at the seminar 'The range of applications of SLAs today is really inspiring. 'Livelihoods' is now used instead of employment and is standard now. The language has changed so much in the last 15 years – from thinking about an 'adequate' and 'decent' standard of living to 'livelihoods strengthening', 'livelihoods diversification' and beyond that

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linking to discourses on climate change, resilience, and power – these all present big steps forward'.

The use of SLAs in the late 1990s grew exponentially. Many organisations used its principles and developed their own SLA frameworks. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) made enormous investment in this area from 1997-2002 and significantly influenced the wider community. However as DFID, and other donors, turned their attention to national policy processes and frameworks, the use of SLAs (more closely associated with smaller scale approaches) waned – and to the wider community, SLAs appeared to have lost their key advocate.

Many perceived limitations of SLAs are acknowledged in the literature – including inadequate attention to policy and economic processes, power and gender relations, and environmental sustainability. **Terry Cannon** (IDS) stated in the seminar, 'despite the many (often valid) criticisms of SLAs, it is worth acknowledging how much better it is than what went on before'. It offers a people-centred approach, embodying principles of best practice that provide an

alternative viewpoint to other, more-top down, paradigms. In his seminar presentation, **Simon Batterbury** of the University of Melbourne drew upon the findings of the initial seminar of the series, reflecting on the history of SLAs and their contribution to development.

Other speakers shared how SLAs are currently being applied across different levels, sectors and communities of practice. **Sam Chimbuya** from Khanya-aicdd explored the application of SLAs within community-driven development, including key governance issues. He highlighted the unequal power relations between development practitioners and communities, and how these can be bridged.

In the area of markets and enterprise, SLAs have been used as a tool to link with broader thinking around market systems. **Luis Osorio** from Practical Action discussed the practical synergies between SLAs and pro-poor market approaches, pointing out the links between market facilitation, and the social, natural, human, physical and financial assets available to poor people to transform their livelihoods.



Women waiting for fishermen to land a fresh catch in Worli Koliwada, one of the last Koli or fisherman's communities in Mumbai. Koli villages are situated on prime commercial real estate and they are under pressure to leave their homes. Due to pollution, land reclamation, destruction of mangroves and construction, fishermen of Worli are catching fewer fish and their livelihood is endangered. © Dieter Telemans, 2009

Combining approaches was a running theme of the seminar. **Anna Mdee** shared insights about how sustainable livelihoods approaches have analytical and practical value in addressing where and how social protection might be directed in order to build the necessary assets to ensure local food security. **Hilary Warburton** from Practical Action explored how livelihoods thinking is critical to understanding disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, to help people move from a

position of vulnerability to resilience. **Terry Cannon** provided another perspective on how to SLA thinking can be integrated within climate change adaptation.

So, the question is clearly 'what is the future for SLAs?' rather than 'do they have a future?'. With practitioners still applying the principles and tools, and new modifications being integrated with complementary development approaches, it seems that SLAs have multiple sources of momentum and will

continue along their path of being 'evolutionary, rather than revolutionary'.

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## Sustainable Livelihoods: arrival, departure, and persistence

**S**imon Batterbury drew upon the findings of the first seminar held at the Institute of Development Studies in October 2008, and gives his own perspective of the history of SLAs.

Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) were identified with British development research and policy from the mid-1990s. Building on the thinking of Sen, Chambers, Conway, Bebbington, Scoones and others, research was linked directly to policy. SLAs were integral to the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) revitalised aid agenda from 1997-2002, attracting spending of about £200 million (Scoones and Wolmer 2003). The subsequent demise of the approach within DFID is well known.

From 2002, DFID adopted a new focus on programme-based aid, budget support, and national capacity building to support good governance. SLAs, which were associated (not necessarily correctly) with a project approach, fell out of favour. Concerns included whether SLAs could contribute to higher level policy dialogue and formulation, or address the MDGs. Some government ministries found collaboration over livelihoods support difficult, although NGOs had fewer problems (Carney and Clark, 2008). SLAs ran counter to some neo-liberal economic development arguments, by focusing on rural poor people, their vulnerability, and their constrained responses.

However, this major policy shift was premature, because:

- rural poverty has persisted, worsened by food price rises and supply problems, and alienation from productive assets
- national poverty reduction strategies, and the MDGs, still need to address local complexities
- the environment (and climate change) matters for every sector and for every livelihood, and threats to poor people are growing
- market-driven economic agendas and some policies developed nationally often affect poor livelihoods negatively.

Despite this, SLAs have 'gone global' because DFIDs' work kick-started many other initiatives. Monitoring of these livelihood project outcomes has largely been positive. If the new challenges for international aid are 'finance, food, fuel and climate', as the Institute of Development Studies suggests, then these issues are addressed head-on by SLAs. Since the 1990s, work on SLAs has:

- shown how livelihood responses and their environmental dimensions are made to financial downturns and climatic threats (Batterbury 2008)
- shown how poor national governance imperils livelihoods and needs to be reformed in parallel to SLAs support (for instance, governance aid to independent Timor Leste since 1999 has left rural people marginalised and lacking direct support)
- provided data that 'place' and local assets still hold significance as livelihoods diversify away from primary production (i.e. prioritisation of economic development/employment is not always an option)
- focussed a debate on how securing world food production cannot ignore rural households. In particular, land grabs for food production and biofuels wipe out some place-based livelihoods, and create more inequality.

These are all issues 'rooted' in place, but extending into networks and traversing scales, landscapes, nations and livelihoods. SLAs help us to understand environments, politics, economics, adaptive capacity and complex institutions, all deemed core to sound development policy (Batterbury 2008).

SLAs help researchers interrogate vulnerabilities, and human capabilities, in rural development situations, while working across the social and natural sciences. For practitioners, SLAs offer a more informed and holistic approach to implementation, identifying entry points for livelihood support and improving local resilience. For rural people there is the promise of targeted assistance, better communication channels, and new possibilities.

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**Meenakshi Diwan tends to maintenance works in the solar village Tinginapu, in India. She is one of four women in the village who has been trained in solar powered engineering by the Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme, an organisation funded by DFID and run with the state government.**

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### See also

'Revitalising sustainable livelihoods approaches', id21 Sustainable livelihoods highlights, February 2009  
<http://bit.ly/muofRk>

'Sustainable livelihoods: still being sought, ten years on' In the workshop proceedings, *Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: ten years of researching the poor*, African Environments Programme, Oxford University Centre for the Environment, Simon PJ Batterbury, 2008 (PDF)  
<http://bit.ly/glhh2R>

'A review of DFID's experience with sustainable livelihoods', ESRC Sustainable Livelihoods Seminar Series Paper, Eldis Document Store, Jane Clark and Diana Carney, 2008  
<http://bit.ly/fiQj0B>

'Introduction: Livelihoods in Crisis: Challenges for Rural Development in Southern Africa', IDS Bulletin Vol 34 No 3 1-14, by Ian Scoones and Will Wolmer, 2003  
<http://bit.ly/gKJEGc>

# Facilitating better partnerships for SLAs

**K**hanya-aicdd, an Africa-based institute, hosted the seminar 'SLAs and Community-Driven Development (CDD)' in Johannesburg in 2009. For Khanya aicdd, community-driven development of Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) interventions should be a process that ensures that communities have a voice and a choice to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

The seminar explored the application of Sustainable Livelihoods programmes in facilitating community-driven development in different communities in Southern Africa and other regions. Some of the lessons included:

- Communities need to be engaged as equal partners in development processes.
- Successful CDD is a co-production phenomenon between communities and development practitioners, so there is co-discovery and co-creation of solutions.
- Social capital is an important element in sustainable CDD processes; the question is how to harness communities' social capital

to make them work for development processes.

- CDD processes take time to show results.

Other key lessons from the seminar included the need to recognise the significance of the power relations between development practitioners on the one hand, and communities on the other, and the implications of these for livelihoods approaches. Practitioners include development experts, consultants, civil service, academia, civil society and donor agency staff. Translating SL principles, such as empowerment, responsiveness and partnerships, into practice requires more prominence in processes. A commitment to sharing power and improving accountability should also feature more. This would entail greater sensitivity and awareness among development practitioners of their own practice.

Control over SL programming and planning needs to show a more distinct shift towards empowering people themselves. More importantly, control over resources needs to be shared

more, with communities being able to truly drive SL interventions. There needs to a greater acknowledgement and acceptance of the assets and capabilities already existing in communities and conscious efforts need to be made to integrate these with external inputs.

Seminar participants observed that there is greater need among development practitioners for:

- a shared understanding of Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) and their implementation
- improved co-ordination and integration between agencies themselves, and between agencies and communities
- an application of SLAs not only to programming but also in organisational processes, ethics and leadership styles
- a shared visioning process co-designed in partnership with the communities.

Control over resources needs to be shared more, with communities being able to truly drive SL interventions.



Some male community members conduct a well-being analysis as part of Khanya-aicdd's training on 'Planning for Community-based economic development' (CBED) in Willowmore (Eastern Cape) for Ikwezi and Bavians Local Municipalities. © Khanya-aicdd, 2010

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## See also

'The myth of 'community ownership'?' id21 Sustainable livelihoods highlights, July 2009 (PDF)  
<http://bit.ly/geYHMm>

SLAs and Community Driven Development (CDD) Seminar outputs  
<http://bit.ly/ISBOda>

# Differences between SLA and Making Markets Work for the Poor: an optical illusion?

The July 2009 sustainable livelihoods (SL) seminar at the University of Bath, in the UK, focused on the question of how sustainable livelihoods approaches relate to pro-poor market development. Luis Osorio-Cortes captures the key lessons here.

Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) and Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approaches have many similarities: both emphasise institutions, make links with macro processes and structures, encourage holistic thinking, consider that things change as we intervene, build on existing strengths and assets, and strive to achieve sustainable outcomes. However, there are also important differences. For example:

SLAs	M4P
are community-centric	is system-centric
emphasise micro-macro links	emphasises meso-macro links
focus on the social, natural, physical, financial and environmental	focuses on the economic and financial
have a wider scope: rural development	has a narrower scope: Sectoral/sub-sectoral development

These differences are constantly being eroded, diluted or contested due to:

- improved understanding by SLAs and M4P practitioners of shared underlying principles and rationales
- new lessons about what works and what doesn't in SLAs and M4P
- pressure from donors, governments and other stakeholders to produce tangible and sustainable impacts for large numbers of extremely poor people in very challenging contexts (for example, post-disaster, post-conflict, marginal land, and so on).

Four examples emphasise the illusory nature of these differences:

- SLAs have never been *exclusively* about poor communities. However, many practitioners have focused on community-related factors and dynamics more often than other equally important ones such as institutions, rules and feedback loops.
- M4P interventions are normally focused on the actors and processes of a specific market system. This has given M4P a reputation of disregarding the poor and focusing too much on the system. However, by nature, M4P cannot get away from the (still unmet) need to assess

its impacts on poor people.

- With growing pressures to deliver positive impacts for large numbers of ultra-poor people, M4P practitioners are realising the need to improve their understanding of family and community dynamics.
- M4P practitioners are increasingly using Local Economic Development (LED) approaches that consider the territory as the unit of intervention. This stems from a recognition that no value chain exists in a physical or cultural void.

## Future trends

Future trends in SLA and M4P can be identified by looking at three 'tectonic shifts' in policy, thinking and practice:

- Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) behaving less as direct input/service providers and more as **facilitators** of change
- NGOs and donors recognising the importance of **investing in and measuring learning processes**, within NGOs and market systems
- NGOs and donors embracing and promoting the paradigm of **open and complex systems**.



A *Kuapa Kokoo* farmer talks on his mobile phone. *Kuapa Kokoo* is a cocoa farmers' co-operative with 45,000 members in Ghana. The farmers are equal owners of the co-operative, which in turn owns 45 percent of the London-based fair trade company *Divine Chocolate Ltd*.

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## Implications and challenges for policy and practice

The implications and challenges related to these shifts and trends are many and critical for the effectiveness of future poverty-reduction initiatives. For example:

- training of senior and field staff
- building effective organisational learning systems
- finding innovative and cost-effective ways of assessing the impacts of facilitation on the ability of market systems to reduce poverty at scale
- building rules and principles of international aid that do not hamper 'light-touch' and flexible facilitation of market systems.

Recognising that the differences between SLA and M4P are just an optical illusion will bring together two communities of practice who need one another to unleash the power of market systems to reduce poverty at scale.

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## What is M4P?

M4P is used as shorthand for a broad field of practice called pro-poor or inclusive market development. The labels of 'Value Chain Development' and 'Market Systems Development' are also widely used. Variations in emphases within the field are also common. For example: working with lead firms, using participatory techniques, and improving the provision of services or the relationships between actors in the market system.

## See also

'Sustainable Livelihoods and Pro-Poor Market Development', Sustainable Livelihoods Highlights, October 2009 (PDF) <http://bit.ly/kNBUDI>

# Food security, social protection and sustainable livelihoods



Photo at the top: Deep-sea trawlers from the Far East sit at anchor in a customs port. Photo immediately above: Fishermen tend to their fishing boats in Bin Qasim Town. Hundreds of local fishing communities in Pakistan are suffering hardship due to the presence of deep-sea trawlers from the Far East. The Pakistani government's policy of opening up its waters to transnational fleets and the liberalisation of the global fishing trade are depleting stocks and forcing local residents out of their traditional livelihoods.

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**A**nna Mdee shares insights from a seminar held at the University of Bradford in June 2010 which explored the application of Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) within food security and social protection work.

The seminar recognised that most of the global poor are dependent on agriculture for part or all of their livelihoods. Yet, the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 30 percent of the sub-Saharan African population is food insecure. Increasing the sustainability and productivity of smallholder agriculture is key to both reducing global poverty and improving food security.

The underlying question of the seminar was how social protection measures can assist in increasing the sustainability and productivity of smallholder agriculture. Social protection measures refer to the range of policies and interventions that enable people to reduce, mitigate, cope with and recover from risk to ensure their livelihoods become less insecure (Shepherds, 2004).

There are different schools of thought about how increased food production should be achieved. Civil society in particular is encouraging the support of ecologically-positive and community-building systems of food production. The Food Sovereignty movement talks about the 'right to food' and moves us away from a narrow focus on agricultural inputs. Local examples of such initiatives, include the UK-based Incredible Edible project, which also illustrates South-North learning.

On the other hand, however, others question whether there is sufficient evidence for us to believe that such systems will be sufficient, particularly in the face of climate change and population growth. Technologies such as genetically-modified seed may be required. The fundamental question remains how the poorest people will gain access to the benefits of such technology and where mechanisms of social protection will be essential.

More evidence is required on the best means of social protection for

food security and how it should be targeted for maximum benefit. Within the seminar, experience of successful social protection measures such as cash transfers in Malawi, and targeted agricultural inputs and knowledge in Ghana led to debate on the appropriate scale, methods and responsibility for providing support to small-scale farmers.

There was consensus that sustainable livelihoods approaches have analytical and practical value in addressing where and how social protection might be directed in order to build the necessary assets to ensure food security. For instance, social protection in the form of cash transfers also enable people to make investments in agricultural inputs. The livelihoods approach can help to identify the most vulnerable households who can then be targeted for support.

Agricultural production has received little attention in recent decades, but as this seminar highlighted, it is a crucial component of reducing poverty and improving food security. Improving the resilience and sustainability of agricultural livelihoods is fundamental and requires substantial global commitments to a more equitable and ecologically sound system of food production, including social protection measures. The roots of sustainable livelihoods approaches lie in rural development and it is perhaps time to re-focus on holistic approaches to food production and food security.

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## See also

'Sustainable Livelihoods and Social Protection in Food Production', A briefing paper from the 5th ESRC Seminar on Sustainable Livelihoods, University of Bradford (Date)  
<http://bit.ly/li4OGz>

*The State of Food Security in the World*, Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2010  
[www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en](http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en)

Sustainable livelihoods approaches have analytical and practical value in addressing where and how social protection might be directed in order to build the necessary assets to ensure food security.

# Integrating sustainable livelihoods with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

In December 2009, Practical Action hosted a seminar exploring how climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction can be integrated with Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches for more effective poverty reduction.

Disasters and climate change influence the attainment of development objectives. These hazards and stresses undermine the livelihoods of poor people, preventing them from moving out of poverty. To achieve effective poverty reduction, integrated approaches that draw on sustainable livelihoods thinking, combined with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, are needed.

In the past, work on sustainable livelihoods, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) was addressed by different communities of practice. Recently, practitioners have investigated the synergies between these areas. The fourth seminar in the series focused on integrating approaches through three questions: what can be learnt from examples of practice on the ground; what is needed for integration to be scaled up; and what frameworks have been developed to aid integration?

## Integrated approaches in practice

Seminar participants presented reviews of three projects: the Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project (WORLP); Livelihoods-centred approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction in Nepal; and Changing climates, changing lives: adaptation strategies among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in Ethiopia and Mali. The projects demonstrated the relevance of livelihoods approaches for strengthening resilience to disasters and climate change. Vulnerable people do not differentiate between their need to secure their livelihoods, and the need to cope with risks or climate impacts. Therefore, tackling disaster risk and climate change impacts effectively requires an understanding of what livelihood options and assets are available to them – taking a livelihoods approach.

The review also highlighted:

- Irrespective of whether the projects were designed to address poverty, DRR or CCA, sustainable livelihoods approaches were key to the projects' success.

- Diversifying livelihood options, rather than focusing solely on increasing incomes was a key factor in building resilience.

## Integration in policy and practice

Integrated approaches in policy and practice can be strengthened through scaling up project experience (bottom-up), and ensuring that policy commitments are translated into practice (top-down). In Nepal, local government has supported integrated planning by communities and scaled-up the outcomes within district development plans.

There is a huge gap between policy and practice, however. Even if integrated policies are promoted at national level (e.g. for DRR), these are rarely translated through middle tiers of government into practice on the ground. There is little evidence of engagement with, and accountability to, vulnerable people.

## Integrated frameworks

Several frameworks and resources to guide practitioners and policymakers towards more integrated practice exist. However:

- Frameworks differ in their treatment of adaptive capacity. Some focus on incorporating climate science and local knowledge; others on building communities' capacity to adapt to an uncertain future. Even if climate predictions become more accurate, future uncertainty will always remain, so a better understanding of the dynamic ability to adapt to unpredictable changes is needed.
- The value of any framework depends on whether people actually use it to help them find better solutions. Within organisations, a process of learning and adapting frameworks to local contexts is needed.

The integration of livelihoods, DRR and CCA approaches has much to offer. The remaining challenge is how to scale up integrated thinking into national planning systems. This requires building understanding, capacity and appropriate structures for adoption within government and other institutions. It also requires willingness on the part of policymakers to look beyond technical solutions for DRR or CCA and tackle the underlying causes of vulnerability.

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## See also

'*Integrating approaches: sustainable livelihoods, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation*', Practice Briefing. Practical Action 2010 (PDF)  
<http://bit.ly/g7Elsu>

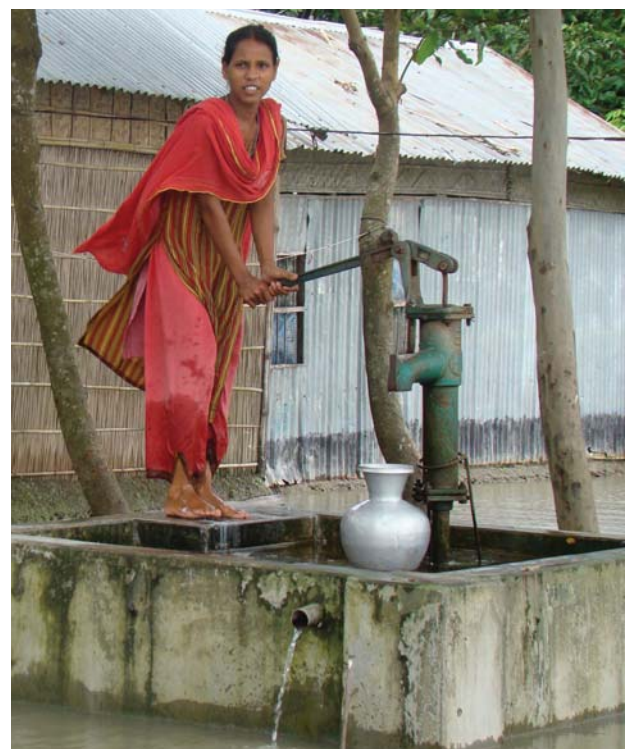
'*From Vulnerability to Resilience: a framework for Analysis and Action to Build Community Resilience*', Practical Action Publishing, by Kath Pasteur, 2011 (PDF), see framework diagram, right  
<http://bit.ly/dZnIVp>

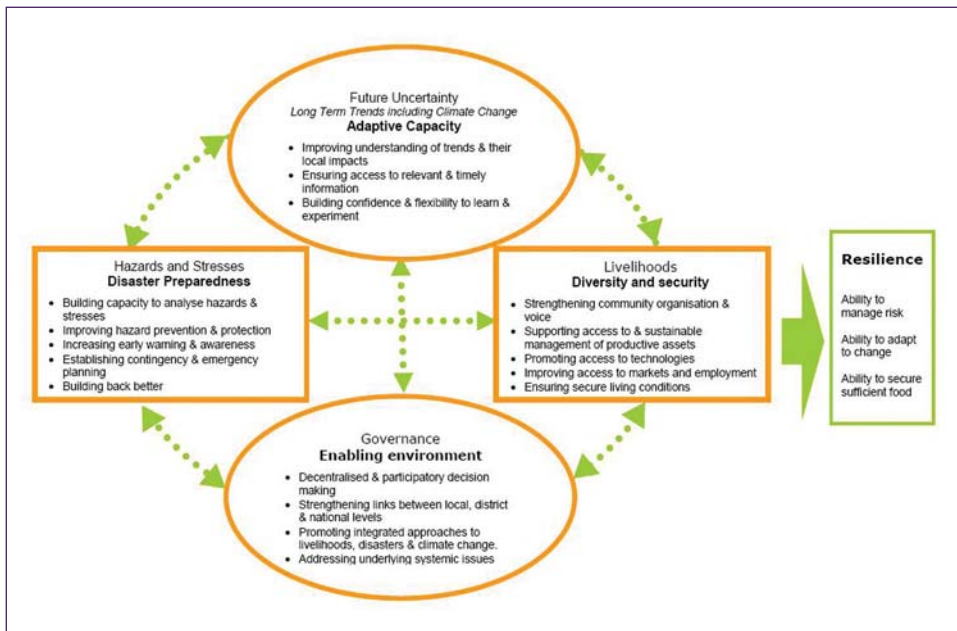
'*Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community: A Guidance Note*', Second Edition by John Twigg, 2010  
<http://bit.ly/is6vK0>

Views from the Frontline, Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction  
<http://bit.ly/issGHn>

To achieve effective poverty reduction, integrated approaches that draw on sustainable livelihoods thinking, combined with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, are needed.

**A woman in Koraibari village, Gaibandha District, Bangladesh pumps water from a raised plinth tube well, surrounded by flood waters during the monsoon.**  
© Practical Action, 2008





From *Vulnerability to Resilience (V2R)* is a framework for analysis and action to reduce vulnerability and strengthen the resilience of individuals, households and communities. It sets out the key factors that contribute to peoples' vulnerability, explains the links between these factors, and includes ideas for action to strengthen resilience.

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## Adapting livelihoods approaches to climate change

During the seminar's plenary discussion Terry Cannon, an IDS Research Fellow presented his views on the future of SLAs. This complemented the findings of the 4th seminar (see page 5). He offers additional thoughts for practitioners of how SLAs can be integrated within climate change adaptation, an example of an increasingly important development challenge that SLAs can help address.

Climate change (CC) involves an additional set of challenges that magnify poor people's existing problems. But we do not need to design new ways of understanding and analysing at the household level – Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) can be integrated into climate change adaptation.

In most poor countries a high proportion of people rely mainly on 'natural' capital – through farming, fishing, forest products or pastoralism. They have a high level of 'climate dependency', meaning they will suffer most from changes in temperature and rainfall. All households can be analysed according to what effects CC will have on their assets and livelihoods. Practitioners can:

- assess how different impacts of CC affect both access to and ownership of key livelihood assets, for instance, through damage by hazards, and the livelihoods that depend on those assets (e.g. reduced crop yields, increased disease, flooded factories, dried-up reservoirs)
- use SLAs to see how CC will, more broadly, affect access to land, how finances are used (including the transfer of adaptation funding from rich countries), and what happens to physical capital (e.g. roads, bridges, schools, electricity supply)

- carry out a 'sensitivity analysis' to identify 'extra' effects of CC over and above existing conditions
- modify the institutional, power (governance) and process components of livelihoods to link in with climate change; understanding power relations is crucial, since these determine the existing distribution of assets and incomes, and the potential livelihoods available to different social and economic groups.

How institutional and power components of livelihoods interact with CC needs to be understood. For example, governments in the South need to know how to respond to the problems of CC, and how to make effective use of the large amounts of adaptation funds that are beginning to flow from rich countries. Institutions – from government organisations to NGOs will themselves have to adapt to CC. A crucial part of their policies and activities will be how they support (or not) the protection of assets and livelihoods, and prevent the damage of these by different CC impacts. SLAs are therefore a good method for linking all significant actors – from households to governments and key institutions of power – with the additional challenges faced especially by poor people in dealing with climate change.

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Farmers in Baulaha Khola, Nawalparasi District, Nepal, rebuild flood protection gabions (flood walls), after traditional irrigation channels were flooded.

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### See also

'Climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and social protection: complementary roles in agriculture and rural growth?', IDS Working paper, volume 2009, number 320, by Mark Davies et al (2008) (PDF) <http://bit.ly/jGPALr>

'Framework and approach', *Integrating adaptation to climate change into secure livelihoods*, Christian Aid Adaptation Toolkit Series, 2009 <http://bit.ly/jGrceY>

Christian Aid resources on Climate Change <http://bit.ly/ISQWwn>

# The future of SLAs

The case studies and discussions from the seminar series illustrated that Sustainable livelihoods approaches (SLAs) have maintained their importance as a poverty reduction approach but they also emphasised the need for SLAs to chart their future course carefully, if its benefits are to be maximised.

How can SLAs be improved, therefore, to avoid the pitfalls associated with its implementation in the first decade of its existence? What needs to be modified, and how can SLA be applied to current and future development challenges, including:

- **Climate change** and associated resource degradation, which will directly affect the livelihoods of high proportion of people in developing countries. Increased poverty arising from damaged livelihoods will also make many more vulnerable to climate-related hazards. Using a livelihoods approach could help to identify climate impacts on livelihoods.
- The **global economic crisis**, which has exacerbated the persistence of extreme poverty and vulnerability. It is forcing a rethink of market institutions, and how to maximise the power of markets – the ultimate challenge will be reaching the extreme poor and marginalised and facilitating pathways out of poverty.
- **Global food insecurity**, a fundamental global issue, not only due to seasonal risks and vulnerabilities, but in an increasingly volatile and unpredictable world affecting food

availability, control of production and access. Improving the resilience and productivity of smallholder's livelihoods is a priority.

- **Livelihoods in an urbanising context:** livelihoods approaches have been developed in the context of rural development. In a rapidly urbanising world, it is becoming critical to understand the nature of urban livelihoods

In order to meet these and other challenges it is necessary to address certain criticisms that have been levelled against SLAs. This involves a fundamental change in the ways and areas in which development practitioners work, including:

- **a commitment to changing power relations.** These relate to control over assets between: men and women; commercial and political actors; and community organisations and local governance structures. How do we ensure that we are accountable to local populations, not just our donors?
- **Build on work around complementary development approaches.** The seminars showed how complementary approaches are being used to think about certain development issues – the challenge is how to practically apply these concepts and frameworks in tandem
- **A willingness to engage in changing policy** (e.g. on land allocation) rather than just changing outcomes (e.g. education, health). This also requires better linking of micro and macro, including a willingness to engage at the national level
- **Greater emphasis on organisational learning**, as well as on how to maximise our understanding of cultural and social contexts to improve outcomes

- **Getting better at recognising opportunities arising in different sectors**, such as the diffusion of information and communication technologies, and new sources of finance (for instance from climate change adaptation, or the private sector).

Added to these is the realisation that the work of development practitioners must genuinely become less 'top-down'. We need to improve our understanding of how change happens – being facilitators and 'change agents' that know when to intervene and when to stand back.

**Freida M'Cormack** drawing upon the issues raised during the plenary discussion led by **David Bright** (Oxfam), **Terry Cannon** (IDS), **Mike Morris** (WWF-UK) and **Valentine Gandhi** (Livelihoods Network Facilitator).

Visit the Eldis Community page of the final seminar of the series for further information:  
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#### Seminar Presentations

Theory and practice of SLAs  
<http://bit.ly/mEAayq>

Community-driven development  
<http://bit.ly/mQk89P>

Making markets work for the poor  
<http://bit.ly/loi0uf>

Climate change adaptation  
<http://bit.ly/kR4O3Z>

Food security and social protection  
<http://bit.ly/mrhxQq>



**A man checks Arabica coffee berries at the Buginyana Agricultural Research Institute on Mount Elgon. Coffee is Uganda's main cash crop and crucial to local livelihoods but is under threat from rising temperatures.**

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Keywords: SLA, sustainable livelihoods approaches, Making Markets Work for the Poor, M4P, climate change, disaster risk reduction, community-driven development, CDD, food security, social protection, food security

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