

Improving access to natural resources for the rural poor

A critical analysis of central concepts and emerging trends from a sustainable livelihoods perspective



Pari Baumann

July 2002



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Livelihood Support Programme (LSP)

An inter-departmental programme for improving support for enhancing livelihoods of the rural poor.

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The Livelihood Support Programme

The Livelihood Support Programme (LSP) evolved from the belief that FAO could have a greater impact on reducing poverty and food insecurity, if its wealth of talent and experience were integrated into a more flexible and demand-responsive team approach.

The LSP, which is executed by FAO with funding provided by DfID, works through teams of FAO staff members who are attracted to specific themes being worked on in a sustainable livelihoods context. These cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary teams act to integrate sustainable livelihoods principles in FAO's work, at headquarters and in the field. These approaches build on experiences within FAO and other development agencies.

The programme is functioning as a testing ground for both team approaches and sustainable livelihoods principles.

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Access to natural resources sub-programme

Access by the poor to natural resources (land, forests, water, fisheries, pastures, etc.), is essential for sustainable poverty reduction. The livelihoods of rural people without access, or with very limited access to natural resources are vulnerable because they have difficulty in obtaining food, accumulating other assets, and recuperating after natural or market shocks or misfortunes.

The main goal of this sub-programme is to build stakeholder capacity to improve poor people's access to natural resources through the application of sustainable livelihood approaches. The sub-programme is working in the following thematic areas:

1. *Sustainable livelihood approaches in the context of access to different natural resources*
2. *Access to natural resources and making rights real*
3. *Livelihoods and access to natural resources in a rapidly changing world*

This paper serves to provide a base for work in these three thematic areas by presenting an analysis of concepts and trends associated with sustainable livelihoods approaches and improving access by the poor to natural resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Access to natural resources has been a constant theme in debates on poverty alleviation strategies. In the last decade, with the renewed international commitment to poverty reduction, there have been significant theoretical and practical advances in the way poverty-environment linkages are considered in mainstream development policy. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) emerged partly as a result of this rethinking of poverty-environment linkages and has since become a driving force in its evolution. The SLA has become a shared point of reference and organising framework for many development agencies. It is therefore important to evaluate what the SLA has contributed to an understanding of poverty, vulnerability and livelihood issues related to access to natural resources. That is the objective of this paper.

The SL approach was developed within research institutes (eg. the Institute of Development Studies), NGOs (eg. CARE and Oxfam) and donors (Department for International Development and the United Nations Development Program). Whilst the SL framework is constantly evolving, experimental in nature and the product of institutional collaboration, it is already widely used in a number of influential international development agencies, informing program content, assessment parameters and goal formation (Carney *et al*, 1999). It has been used by FAO in its strategic framework (Altarelli and Carloni 1999), by CARE in its 'household livelihood security' program (Drinkwater and Rusinow, 1999), by the UNDP and Oxfam (Neefjes, 1999). In the UK, the Department for International Development (DfID) increasingly uses SL approaches in the context of the commitment made in the Government White Papers on International Development (DfID 1997; DfID, 2000) to work towards the International Development Target of eliminating poverty by 2015.

The SLA does not claim to be a new development paradigm or even a new approach to development. The favored terms by those involved in the evolution of the SLA is 'Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches' – meaning a set of principles, backed up with a set of tools; the plural (approaches) is used deliberately to indicate that there is no single way forward that might conflict with other development approaches (Ashley and Carney 1999:9). The evolution of the SLA has been a self-conscious process with much review amongst SLA practitioners to examine whether or not the SLA is in fact contributing towards an improved understanding and targeting of development problems. Evidence of the benefits of SLA and an evaluation of its contribution are difficult for several reasons. First, it is hard to draw a line between the SLA and other approaches to development because the SLA is an evolutionary collection of best practice principles. Secondly, it is hard to maintain clarity between the contribution of SLA as an approach to development practice, an analytical framework and a development objective. Finally, because 'sustainable livelihoods' has been a development objective for so long it is difficult to distinguish the difference that the – for this purpose not helpfully named – SLA has made.

These difficulties in the evaluation of SLA are particularly pronounced in considering the SLA contribution towards the issue of the rural poor and access to natural resources. This issue is closest to the heart and evolution of the SLA and the terms and concepts used are hard to distinguish from those used in the last few decades of development debate. Nevertheless, precisely because the concepts surrounding access

to natural resources have been so considered in SLA, the framework also has the potential to make a significant contribution to the debate.

This paper assumes some basic knowledge of the SLA and familiarity with key documents. Readers totally unfamiliar with SLA might like to consult the following documents:

- € *The Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets* (DfID 2000); available on-line these papers provide the most accessible overview of SL.
- € *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: What Contribution Can We Make?* (ed. Carney 1999); a collection of papers from the DfID Natural Resources Advisors Conference which played a key role in forming the SLA.
- € *Sustainable Rural Livelihood: Lessons from Early Experience* (Ashley and Carney 1999).

Section 1 will examine current debates around poverty, vulnerability and livelihood issues related to access to natural resources. Section 2 will describe the main features of the sustainable livelihoods approaches and relate them to current thinking about access to natural resources. Section 3 will describe and categorise the different types of problems and opportunities that the rural poor face with respect to access to natural resources. Section 4 will assess the extent to which an 'SLA perspective' can assist in better understanding the problems and opportunities described in 3 and in developing strategies for addressing them. Concrete examples of strategies that have been tried or proposed in which the goal of enhancing access to natural resources has explicitly been linked to supporting sustainable livelihoods are given in sections 3 and 4.

1. POVERTY, VULNERABILITY AND LIVELIHOOD ISSUES RELATED TO ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

1.1 Definitions and concepts

International development policy has come to a consensus that environment-poverty linkages are critical in determining development outcomes. Poor people in developing countries are particularly dependent on natural resources and ecosystem services for their livelihoods. Increasingly the poor live in areas of high ecological vulnerability and relatively low levels of resource productivity. The position of the poor at such ecological margins, as well as a low level of access and rights over productive natural resources, is a major factor contributing to rural poverty. Much of the extensive debate over poverty in the last decade has in fact turned around the question of how poverty, vulnerability, livelihoods and access to resources are linked. The following concepts and definitions have become widely accepted points of reference in these debates about development.

Poverty

There continues to be much debate about how poverty should be defined, but it is increasingly accepted that poverty is not just a lack of material necessities, assets and income. The notion of poverty has been broadened to include a deprivation in capabilities, voice and power that contribute towards a lack of well-being.

Livelihoods

‘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 stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base’ (Chambers and Conway, 1992).

Vulnerability

Vulnerability refers to the external environment in which people pursue their livelihoods and their exposure (risk) to the negative effects of the external environment, as well as their resilience in resisting and recovering from external shocks and trends.

Access to resources

Vulnerability is closely linked to access to resources (capital assets) because these are a principal means by which people reduce their vulnerability. It is the access to resources, assets and entitlements that together give people the capabilities to pursue livelihood strategies that may have direct material as well as more individually subjective objectives.

Concerns over the sustainability of natural resource use are not new; however the last decade has seen significant changes in the approach to questions of access to resources and its links to poverty. Central to the changed approach – as the concepts described above suggest – is a people-centered focus and a dynamic view of well-being based on a recognition of the vulnerability dimension of deprivation and poverty. Both in theory and practice approaches to the issue of poverty-environment linkages now tend to start with a consideration of how people themselves define

poverty and the assets they draw on in pursuing their livelihood strategies. Questions of what role access to natural capital plays in local livelihood strategies now tend to be seen in dynamic interrelation with how other capital assets, such as social, physical, human and financial assets are used.

This change in the conceptualization of poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods in relation to access to natural resources can be partly attributed to:

- ∄ Emerging empirical evidence on the nature of poverty-environment linkages and the types of livelihood strategies adopted by the poor.
- ∄ Related changes in theories on poverty-environment linkages
- ∄ The international policy environment and the new poverty reduction agenda

1.2 Empirical evidence on poverty-environment linkages

Rural poverty has been accepted as both a major cause and result of degraded soils, vegetation, forests, water and natural habitats. The importance of environment-poverty links for the natural resource, health and vulnerability dimensions of the livelihoods of the poor is evident in empirical research (refs). Environmental factors are responsible for almost a quarter of the entire disease burden of developing countries; unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and waste disposal, and air pollution are a major problem for the poor (DfiD, 2001). Rapid deforestation and biodiversity losses are depriving people of valuable forest resources, such as fuelwood, food and medicine. Soil degradation is a major threat to the livelihoods of 1 billion people, mostly the poor who are more likely to live in degraded or fragile areas. Projections of rural population growth, agricultural expansion and intensification and poverty in the next few decades suggest a potentially serious conflict between natural resource sustainability and poverty in rural areas (Pinstrup-Andersen *et al.*, 1997; Scherr, 1997).

Research has made clear that not only do the rural poor rely heavily on natural resources; they also increasingly live in areas of high ecological vulnerability and relatively low levels of resource productivity such as subtropical drylands or steel mountain slopes. Estimates indicate that if current trends persist, by 2020 more than 800 million people could be living on marginal lands (Hazell and Garrett, 1996). Insecurity, risk and vulnerability to environmental stresses and shocks are thus one of the key concerns of poor people. The Red Cross estimates that 1998 was the first year in which the number of refugees from environmental disasters exceeded those displaced as a result of war (ICRC, 1999). Direct conflict – including wars – over natural resources also contribute to the livelihood insecurity of the rural poor as they have the least resources to cope with loss and recover from conflict.

The important role that natural resources play in the livelihood strategies of the rural poor has been confirmed in a number of participatory poverty assessments that set out to consider the issue from the perspective of the poor themselves. ‘Well-being was strongly related to the environment in terms of health, security, peace of mind; pleasant and hygienic physical surroundings; safe and clean energy supplies appropriate to the climate and seasons; decent low density housing free from overcrowding and built on safe ground free from flooding and other environmental hazards. People in rural areas placed emphasis on access and control over natural

resources particularly in relation to food security and agricultural production' (DfID 2001:16).

There is nothing particularly novel in this broad picture on poverty-environment linkages. However there are some new trends in these linkages captured in both quantitative research and the accounts people themselves provide of their experience. These trends are of increasing globalization; insecurity and risk; diversification of livelihood strategies; a shifting network of social capital that it is difficult to continue to label as 'community'; and a mediation of livelihood strategies by a complex and varied institutional environment. Section 3 will consider in more detail the evidence as it relates to various natural resource sectors and socio-economic circumstances. The following is a brief overview of the character of these trends in poverty-environment linkages.

Globalization and localization

The rural poor have, almost by definition, always been exposed to a certain amount of risk and employed complex livelihood strategies in anticipation of ecological and seasonal variation and environmentally risk-prone environments. These strategies are increasingly being caught up with global processes of change over which the rural poor have neither control nor the information necessary to anticipate how they will be affected. International trade and related agreements now link the rural poor with markets and natural resources are linked to international commodity chains and global capital flows. Rapid technological change – for instance in biotechnology and natural resource extraction - has gone hand in hand with both the spread of environmental risk and unprecedented social upheaval. Programs of structural economic reform, privatization and decentralization – now often in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – interact with the local processes that shape people's lives.

Environmental resource management is becoming increasingly globalised as international conventions, laws and structures seek to regulate the terms on which people access natural resources. New regulations on intellectual property rights, protocols for biosafety and genetically modified foods as well as earlier initiatives on forests, desertification, biodiversity etc., constitute a complex globalised institutional environment for natural resource management. Harmonization of these environmental standards and agreements has become a major preoccupation of international agencies; these global measures have trickled down into national action plans and poverty reduction strategies. Global initiatives for environmental resource management have also led to widespread programs for the devolution of natural resource management arrangements to local communities. These initiatives are based on the belief that community based natural resource management can build on traditional practices and knowledge in providing sustainable and locally specific management. They are also founded in the global trend towards privatization and the transfer of funds and responsibilities out of large state machineries.

These trends towards both globalization and localization have contributed towards the uncertainty with which people exercise their livelihood strategies. The evidence on devolution of control over natural resources – although not conclusive – indicates that such programs in fact often increase local insecurity as newly devolved structures and power relations are added to existing local arrangements. 'Increasingly the

institutional arrangements mediating access to resources for poor people must be understood as part of a complex set of arrangements linking local and global arenas' (Mehta *et al.*, 2000:9). The result is that conventional theoretical divides between local and global, formal and informal, have become somewhat redundant in providing an explanation of the institutional arrangements through which people make and sustain their livelihoods (Mehta *et al.*, 2000:10).

Diversification of Livelihood Strategies

Recent studies have drawn attention to the enormous diversity of livelihood strategies at every level – within geographic regions, across sectors, within households and over time. Amidst high levels of material uncertainty and risk, rural populations have become more occupationally flexible, spatially mobile and increasingly dependent on non-agricultural income generating activities. Although farming is still an important activity it is increasingly unable to provide a sufficient means of survival in rural areas. The diversification of livelihood strategies is a rapid process and shows no signs of abating. In the late 1980s and early 1990s research in Southern Africa estimated that 40% of rural household income was derived from non-farm sources (Ellis, 1998; Reardon 1998). Research in the late 1990s has estimated that this figure now lies between 55-80% and is proceeding apace. In South Asia roughly 60% of rural household income is from non-farm sources (Ellis, 1999).

Diversification is, by definition, a complex process and there is still much research to be done to understand why it is happening and what affect it is having on rural poverty and natural resource management. 'Livelihood diversity results in complex interactions with poverty, income distribution, farm productivity, environmental conservation and gender relations that are not straightforward and sometimes counter-intuitive and be contradictory between alternative pieces of case study evidence' (Ellis 1999:2). In general, it is clear that the international economic environment and structural adjustment programs have hastened de-agrarianization, implicit in the market's search for optimised returns on investment (Bryceson 2000:3). The declining productivity of natural resources has also been isolated as a key factor pushing people out of agriculture and into non-farm based activities. Further trends that can be isolated for a thumb-nail sketch are that it is often the very poor and the relatively rich who for different reasons are most prone to diversify their livelihood strategies.

The details of the diversification process will be returned to in section 3. What is important for this overview of the links between poverty, vulnerability, livelihoods and access to natural resources is that diversification is recognised as central to these linkages. Diversification has moved from being a footnote in rural development – a process that happened at the boundaries – to being acknowledged as a mainstream process. Bebbington has argued that the problem of rural development strategies is that they are always behind the times and 'continue to crunch rural livelihoods into the category of agricultural and natural resource based strategies'

Further, it is acknowledged, for the first time in fifty years of debate over rural development that agriculture will not be able to support the rural population and that diversification is therefore inevitable. In that sense diversification is positive and evidence shows that it is not necessarily a survival strategy but also one that can lead to accumulation of capital assets and conservation of natural resources.

Diversification can assist households to insulate themselves from environmental and economic shocks, trends and seasonality; in other words to be less vulnerable. Access to natural resources remains critical, sometimes even more so as a result; but the linkages between access to natural resources and livelihoods are more complex than had previously been taken into account.

The nature of the community and institutions

The environmental discourse has for long appreciated the importance of institutions in mediating the relations between society and the environment. Recent work on poverty-environment linkages has pointed to the importance of understanding both communities and institutions as embedded in site-specific social and political relations. An understanding of natural resource management dynamics in a particular location, it is argued, requires an appreciation that institutions governing access to natural resources are sites of social interaction, negotiation and contestation. Bebbington points out that in fact there should be no distinction between *access* and the *resources* themselves because access is the most important resource determining the capacity of people to build sustainable poverty alleviating rural livelihoods. 'Indeed access to other actors is conceptually prior to access to material resources in the determination of livelihood strategies, for such relationships become sine qua non mechanisms through which resources are distributed and claimed, and through which the broader social, political and market logics governing the control, use and transformation of resources are either reproduced or changed' (Bebbington 1999:6).

Whilst institutions, in their broadest sense, have become a central starting point in the exploration of poverty-environment linkages; the notion of communities has declined in importance. The community has for long been at the core of development planning as a justification, mechanism and objective. The link between communities and natural resource management has been seen in a generally positive light; it was assumed that given some adjustment and negotiation, communities were the ideal unit to which to devolve control over natural resources. These assumptions are now being held up to the light again. Whilst it has for long been appreciated that communities are heterogenous and characterised by unequal power relations, it was considered that these did not compromise the essential unity of the community. The emphasis is now arguably the reverse; that the existence of a community in relation to a particular natural resource cannot be assumed but should first be established.

1.3 Changing perspectives on access to natural resources

New empirical evidence on the nature of poverty-environment linkages, as described above, has contributed towards changing perspectives on poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods. Previously accepted starting points in the poverty-environment discourse are now being dismissed as 'environmental myths' and viewpoints that have dominated the discourse have been labeled 'environmental wisdoms' (Leach et al.,1998) and 'development narratives' (Roe, 1991). In other words, the facts and theories that have dominated the discourse on access to natural resources for the previous two decades have been largely jettisoned as either factually inaccurate or not helpful for a consideration of future rural development strategies.

Two environmental narratives in particular occupied polar extremes of the debate over poverty-environment linkages. One position was centrally concerned with demographic issues and the carrying capacity of the resource base and argued that there was a mutually reinforcing negative vicious circle between environmental degradation and poverty for which state intervention was required. The other polar extreme agreed that whilst there was a negative association between poverty and environmental degradation, this was caused by state interference in local resource management practices. Sustainable development had in fact been a past reality and could only be achieved again if local communities were given back rights and control over natural resources.

It is now more generally accepted that the conditions under which the poor can manage natural resources are contingent on internal and wider institutional structures, as well as on the specific character of the natural resources themselves. Perhaps for the first time in modern development planning there are no dominant environmental narratives. Environmental facts are treated with caution and it is appreciated that data on the environment can be flawed and based on dubious scholarship. Ekbom and Bojo (1999) reviewed the literature in relation to nine common hypothesis about poverty-environment linkages and found that they were not well supported by empirical evidence. There is in general a heightened awareness about the political process through which particular environmental 'problems' become issues of social concern and policy development. The exposure of environmental wisdoms – which used to be an intellectual pursuit on the fringe – has now become an accepted part of mainstream thinking on natural resources (DfID 2001); DfID, EC, UNDP, World Bank 2002).

1.4 The new poverty agenda

The final change in the conceptualization of poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods in relation to access to natural resources can be attributed to the international policy environment and the new poverty reduction agenda. The new agenda is characterised by a lack of direction and the lack of a narrative for rural development. It is generally accepted that agriculture alone does not have the capacity to be the engine of rural growth; a position that represents a turn-around from the paradigm since the 1950s. Donors have appreciated the challenges to development planning posed by forces such as diversification and globalization. The consensus is that a broader multi-sectoral approach to rural development is needed that builds on local empowerment, risk mitigation and social protection. The environment – and access to natural resources for the rural poor – is recognised as being of central importance in the new poverty agenda. Planning mechanisms for national development strategies such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), Medium-Terms Expenditure Frameworks (MTEFs) and Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) have all made concerted efforts to mainstream environmental issues.

Despite these concerted efforts serious obstacles continue to impede the integration of environmental issues into the new poverty agenda. On a conceptual level, the rapid pace of globalization, diversification and natural resource degradation has left national governments and donors uncertain of what is actually happening. The lack of a narrative, whilst perhaps enabling an unbiased approach to each 'development situation', makes planning difficult at a strategic level. On a practical level, it is difficult to reconcile the participatory processes and broad, multi-level approaches

that have been isolated as important with respect to the environment, with the logistical details of planned development interventions (Farrington and Lomax 2002).

1.5 Summary and significance

Inevitably there is a connection between the perception of rural development issues and the policies and methodologies employed to address these issues. So it is that SLA emerged in the context of an increasingly complex rural reality and has evolved with the objective of providing a practical and effective means to make sense of this complexity and a pragmatic and people-centered means to identify development interventions. The SLA directly acknowledges the issues in current thinking on poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods raised in this section. To recap, the main points are:

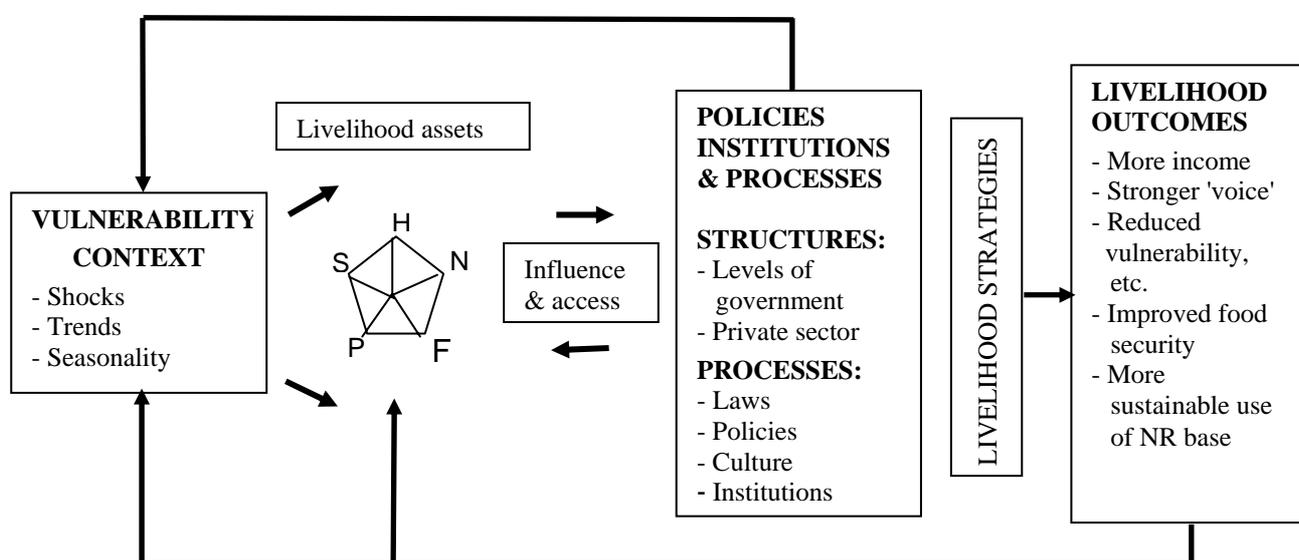
- Ø Recognition of an increasingly complex rural reality with globalization, localization and diversification affecting the livelihood strategies of the rural poor and their ANR on an unprecedented scale.
- Ø An understanding that institutions – including those involved in ANR – are more complex, multi-sited and open to political negotiation and social contestation than had previously been appreciated. Recognition that these complexities also pertain to the community which had previously been considered a relatively discrete entity.
- Ø Previous explanations of poverty-environment linkages and livelihood strategies are now considered either factually inaccurate or not helpful for a consideration of future development strategies.
- Ø Appreciation of the urgency of the New Poverty Agenda and meeting International Development Targets and the need to find pragmatic solutions for development problems.

Much certainly needs to be done to rethink the rural development agenda and to consider practical ways forward. The test of the SLA will be in how effective it is not just for responding to these issues but for making sense of the complexity described and enabling the development of practical strategies to address these.

2. MAIN FEATURES OF THE SLA RELATED TO CURRENT THINKING ABOUT ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES¹

Sustainable livelihoods approaches are based upon evolving thinking about poverty reduction and how to change the record of decades of limited success in poverty alleviation policies. The SLA is ‘a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development, in order to enhance progress in poverty elimination’ (Ashley and Carney, 1999:1). It is a development *objective* and an *approach* to poverty eradication based on core principles of people-centered, participatory, sustainable activities. SL is also an *analytical framework* that provides a way of understanding the factors that influence the ability of people to achieve SL in a particular circumstance. This section will consider how the current thinking about access to natural resources as outlined in section 1 relates to the SLA.

Figure 1: DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework



F = Financial capital
 P = Physical capital
 S = Social capital
 H = Human capital
 N = Natural capital

Adapted from: Carney *et al* 1999

¹ This section will use the DFID SL framework for illustration because it is the least organisationally specific of the SL frameworks; however there are no significant differences between the various versions of the SLA and the discussion in this section pertains to all frameworks.

2.1 The role of ANR in the development of the SLA

The SLA has been adopted by donors mainly out of a practical concern about the effectiveness of development activity. There is a concern that despite state commitments to poverty reduction, the immediate focus of much donor activity was either on resources and facilities (water, land, clinics etc), or on structures that provide services (ministries, NGOs etc) rather than the people themselves. SLA in this context provides an approach as well as a set of tools with which to navigate such sectoral and organizational divides and move towards an integrated development policy. The need for such a perspective has been especially keenly felt and expressed in relation to ANR, as section 1 outlines. Decades of experience in natural resource policy and research have made evident the integral importance of the institutional environment at all levels for determining livelihood outcomes.

These issues have been widely acknowledged across disciplines in the development community; however much of the initiative to institutionalise this thinking has come from the natural resources sector. Within DfID, the initiative to develop the SLA was spearheaded by the Natural Resources Policy and Advisory Department; the Natural Resources Advisor Conference in 1998 played a key role in galvanising interest and momentum. In fact, part of the challenge has been to convince other departments that the SLA is not an approach specific to ANR issues or rural environments but one that can be applied to any development circumstance.

2.2 The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The livelihoods framework is first and foremost an *approach* to development based on a set of principles. The *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets* make clear that whilst the livelihoods framework comprises a development objective, as well as a set of tools for analysis, it is the approach to development that is its distinguishing hallmark. The SL principles embody a commitment to poverty eradication based on accumulated best practice policies in development. SL is a people-centred approach that aims to identify means to meet local needs and opportunities to support local capacity that are not dominated by individual sectors or disciplines. In pursuing this objective the framework adopts a responsive and participatory approach that links local perspectives into higher level processes of policy design; builds on partnerships between sectors; and builds local capacity to maintain sustainable livelihoods. The following are the principles underlying the SLA.

- ∄ People-centred: ‘focusing on what matters to people’.
- ∄ Holistic: ‘identify constraints and opportunities regardless of the sector, geographical space or level at which they occur.’
- ∄ Responsive and participatory: ‘poor people themselves must be key actors’.
- ∄ Multi-level: ‘the micro-level informs the development of policy’ and ‘macro-level structures and processes support people’.
- ∄ Conducted in partnership: ‘with both the public and the private sector’.
- ∄ Sustainable: ‘economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability’.
- ∄ Dynamic: ‘recognise dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond flexibly, and develop long-term commitments’.

Discussion: The SL approach and ANR

There are many linkages between current thinking on access to natural resources and the SL framework in its approach to development issues; indeed the two are difficult to separate. The principles of the SLA outlined above both draw from and inform current thinking on access to natural resources. The SL framework draws heavily on the participatory paradigm developed over the last two decades that have taken a subjective and complex view of poverty and livelihoods. The people-centered approach is partly due to the fact that the new poverty reduction agendas have made it necessary to justify and demonstrate development interventions directly in terms of their impact on people. Another reason for the people-centred approach is that the growing complexity of local livelihoods jeopardizes the relevance of any top-down attempt to design development interventions.

This concern is especially true for development strategies and projects that target natural resource management. Current thinking on ANR has established that the natural resources themselves often have meanings that are locally embedded and socially constructed. These associations, which can have significant implications for management strategies, will only be revealed by an approach that starts with people's livelihood strategies and their perceptions of natural resource management. Similarly, it is increasingly accepted that local knowledge of the environment is a critical management resource. Knowledge of the environment is however plural, partial and contested; based on understandings negotiated through local power relations. Again, it can only be accessed through a people-centered approach that considers development opportunities and constraints from what has for long been termed a 'bottom-up' perspective.

The SL approach and its core principles is essentially a change in emphasis rather than a new paradigm. The importance of being holistic and of working in partnerships alone is nothing new, for instance, but the combined principles do provide a new perspective. Similarly with ANR; debates still focus around the same core issues: the resources themselves, property rights and regimes; the community and local institutions; the legal framework and governance systems; and power relations. However, the focus has changed with an appreciation that the nexus of interactions between issues of livelihoods, institutions and governance in a globalised world poses some major challenges for understanding in the field of natural resource management.

The community, once considered a relatively secure starting point for discussions on ANR, is increasingly seen as diffuse, heterogenous, having multiple locations and multiple identities. The property rights themselves are no longer interpreted as a set of rules based on collective action outcomes. Rather property regimes are considered to be essentially practice not rule determined, with overlapping rights, responsibilities and strategies contributing towards ambiguity, inconsistency and flexibility in resource use. Similarly, power relations are still central to ANR concerns, but the focus has shifted from the activities of the elites to an appreciation that power is exercised through differentiated actors and is continuously renegotiated. The holistic approach taken in the SL framework, building on people's own definition of constraints and opportunities, is also a central starting point in current thinking in ANR.

Another link and similarity between developments in SL and ANR is a move beyond the participatory paradigm. The SL approach draws heavily on lessons from participatory development, and natural resource management issues were for long approached through a participatory perspective. The approach taken now has however moved on from the simple optimism of the 1980/90s about the capacity of local people to manage resources and the likelihood that the information that they contribute through ‘participating’ has a direct use-value. Rather it is appreciated in both SL and ANR that local livelihood strategies are constrained by macro-structures over which they have little control. Further, the information with which they participate is likely to be strategic and partial and needs to be considered as situated in their particular institutional context. The approach in both SL and ANR is dynamic; addressing macro constraints but also responding flexibly to people’s situations and supporting positive patterns of change where possible.

Finally, the approach in the SL framework and emerging views on ANR are influenced by the practical energy of the current poverty agenda. The focus is on finding ‘win-win’ solutions, as a browse through official target strategies and documents will reveal, and building on local capabilities. Whether this practical focus has had a significant impact or can actually be implemented is another issue that will be considered further in section 4. But certainly the emphasis on working across sectors and through partnerships, and on results based rewards and evaluations, finds resonance and is drawn from current thinking on ANR and the SL approach. The table below summarises some of the current thinking related to ANR.

Table 1: Emerging Views on ANR Themes

Theme	Mainstream Views	Emerging Views
Resources	Material, economic, direct use-value, property	Also as symbolic, with meanings that are locally and historically embedded, and socially constructed
Livelihoods and Resource management	Links between single resource and use (eg. Rangelands, forests, fisheries)	Multiple users; complex and diverse livelihood systems
Community	Local, specific user groups, homogenous, bounded	Multiple locations, diffuse, heterogenous, diverse, multiple social identities
Institutions	Static, rules, functionalist, formal	Social interaction and process, embedded in practice, struggles over meaning, formal and informal; interlinked with knowledge and power
Knowledge	Linear transfer; science as sole source of expertise	Multiple sources; plural and partial knowledges; negotiated understandings
Power and Control	Transaction cost focus; elites; community leaders	Differentiated actors; conflict, bargaining, negotiation and power relations central
Property regimes	Common property resource as set of rules based on collective action outcomes; clear boundaries	Practice not rule-determined; strategic; tactical; overlapping rights and responsibilities; ambiguity; inconsistency; flexibility
Legal systems	Formal legislation	Law in practice; different systems co-existing
Governance	Separated levels – international, national, local	Multi-level governance approaches; fuzzy/messy interactions; local and global interconnected

Source: Mehta *et al.*, (2000)

2.3 The SLA as a framework for analysis and discussion of links to ANR

The key objective of SL as an analytical framework is to provide a means for coming to grips with the complexity of local livelihoods. The SL framework is not intended to be a sophisticated model for theoretical analysis; rather, it is oriented towards a comprehensive, but practically focused understanding of ground realities that could directly or indirectly inform development interventions. The effectiveness of the SL framework for an understanding of issues related to natural resource access should therefore be judged by these standards. The following sections will describe the different components of the framework and then discuss their relevance and linkages to ANR issues.

A The vulnerability context

The vulnerability context describes the trends, shocks and seasonality over which people have limited or no control, but which nevertheless affect people's livelihoods and the wider availability of assets. These factors are important because they have a direct impact on people's asset status and the options that are open to them. The following are the three aspects of the vulnerability context identified in the SL framework:

- € Shocks; such as natural shocks, economic shocks, and conflict;
- € Trends; such as population, resource, economic and technological trends;
- € Seasonality; such as in prices, employment opportunities and food availability.

Discussion of links to ANR issues

The vulnerability context draws attention to the complex of influences that are out of local control yet directly or indirectly responsible for many of the hardships faced by the poor. These forces are often mutually reinforcing in that the vulnerability of livelihood strategies means people are unable to cope with stresses when they occur, unable to manipulate their environment to reduce stress in the future, and unable to benefit from positive trends even when these do occur. As reviewed in section 1, contemporary global trends do appear to have increased the level of insecurity and risk affecting local livelihoods; hence the focus on reducing insecurity as a cornerstone of recent poverty alleviation strategies.

The forces that come into play as a consequence of the vulnerability context are essentially those usually described as forming a 'vicious circle'; particularly in relation to natural resource management. Poverty and environmental degradation has for long been considered as linked in a downward and mutually reinforcing cycle. The starting point attributed to this circle has varied depending on political focus (state interference in traditional systems versus demographic pressure for example); but many observers accepted that poverty causes environmental degradation, which in turn causes poverty. The livelihood strategies adopted by people are so constrained by shocks, trends and stresses that they are forced to maximise short-term returns and risk further vulnerability.

The vulnerability context in the SL framework, whilst giving due importance to external forces, provides a means for deconstructing this vicious circle. The separation of factors in the vulnerability context first of all draws attention to the fact

that whilst some issues are totally outside of local control (such as a hurricane), others are slightly more predictable (economic trends). The links to the PIPs box leads to a consideration of the policies, institutions and processes that contribute to vulnerability (reduction of agricultural subsidies) and also those that, at least in the long-term, can work to protect people from vulnerability (access to insurance and emergency financial services, for instance). The links between the vulnerability context and people's capital assets and livelihood strategies enables a consideration of which assets are most affected by the vulnerability context and how people can be supported to build up their livelihood assets and become more resilient to shocks, stresses and trends.

B. The capital asset pentagon

The livelihood framework identifies five core capital assets (sometimes called livelihood building blocks) upon which livelihoods are built. These are natural, social, human, physical and financial capital. Increasing capital assets is a primary strategy for improving people's livelihood outcomes as people require a range of capitals to pursue their strategies and access to any particular category is likely to be limited for the poor. Core concepts for an understanding of local decision-making are the notions of asset substitution and trade-offs; which enables the framing of strategic questions for development planning such as: to what extent can one type of asset be substituted for another in a particular context? Could increased human capital substitute for a lack of financial capital in particular circumstances? And do those who escape from poverty start with a particular combination of capital assets? The framework posits these capital assets in the 'vulnerability context', thus acknowledging that assets are both destroyed and created as a result of trends, shocks and seasonality. Capital assets are also influenced by, and in turn influence, policies, institutions and processes – represented in the PIPs box of the framework.

Discussion of links to natural resource analysis

Many themes embodied in the asset pentagon are present in recent debates on access to resources (Blaikie, 1989; Bryant 1992), entitlements and capabilities (Sen, 1981; Leach *et al.*1998). One of these themes is the recognition that natural capital is just one asset amongst many and has to be seen in conjunction with other assets in order to understand its importance in an overall livelihood strategy. Related to this is an increasing realization of the rapid diversification of livelihood strategies, as discussed in section 1, and the value of using capital asset trade-off and combination as a means with which to come to grips with this complexity. The focus on how assets are combined under particular vulnerability contexts and in relation to specific policies is well suited for the analysis of diversification. For instance, at times a household may choose to forgo migration (financial capital) in order to protect long-term natural capital prospects (forest management). Most livelihood decisions involve over-consuming a particular capital asset at some point, for example social capital (by drawing on but not reciprocating social relationships based on kinship and trust) and natural capital (intensive agriculture leading to soil degradation). Livelihood strategies are continuous attempts to modify and adjust these asset combinations in the pursuit of better outcomes.

Another link between the capital asset framework and recent thinking in ANR is the appreciation that capitals are not only the resource that people use in building livelihoods; they are assets that give them the *capability* to engage with the world and the capability to change the world – this part being implied in the ‘influence and access’ arrows linking local livelihoods to wider policies, institutions and processes. The framework enables an understanding of issues surrounding access to natural resources in terms of the relationships of power that frame constraints and opportunities. It does so in a way that appreciates that these relationships are subject to re-negotiation depending on the capitals and capabilities that people have at their disposal. The emphasis is therefore on building on local choices and enabling and empowering people to make livelihood decisions. This emphasis is linked to the appreciation that, notwithstanding the primary importance of the material, poverty is also a state of ill-being and livelihood decisions often based on subjective experiences of poverty.

The asset pentagon also offers a practical way forward for a question that has for long been at the centre of the debate around access to natural resources: that of community based natural resource management. Research on this subject has been dominated by New Institutional Economics (NIE) and Common Property Resources (CPR) theories; both have had a strong influence on natural resource management policy. Both approaches have helped to advocate the importance of access to natural resources for the rural poor and lent support to the notion of local natural resource management. They have also made significant contributions in focusing attention on the importance of local institutions in natural resource management. However both have been critiqued for providing an inadequate analysis of how local institutions and communities operate. CPR theories take collection action as endogenous to, even inhering in, the community (Kothari *et al*, eds). CPR approaches have been largely negligent in explaining the factors, such as social power, that constitute and reproduce ‘community’ (Sinha *et al* 1997). NIE understands collective action as a series of self-interested trade-offs within given institutional settings (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom *et al* 1994). NIE has also not been able to account for the way in which external factors constitute, reproduce or change relations between resource users (Mosse, 1997). There is little analysis of the relations of power that constitute collective action and conflict and how these relate in different resource use systems (Mehta *et al*, 2000).

The SL framework marks an advance from those positions in that it views the ‘community’ as constituted as an outcome of relations based on capital assets which operate in dynamic relation to wider structures and processes. The framework is able to conceptually isolate one variable, such as social capital, and examine what influence the other capital assets (financial, physical, natural, human) have in constituting this, providing a dynamic and diverse view of causality. The SL framework allows for an analysis of the factors that contribute towards the development of natural capital through the same cross-examination of variables. This local interaction is considered in dynamic interrelation to wider structures and processes, enabling an analysis of how external pressures reproduce and constitute the community in their relation to natural resources. The SLA is therefore in line with much recent thinking in ANR debates that follow a more sociological and anthropological approach to the analysis of local institutions.

C. *Policies, institutions and processes*

One of the key objectives of the SL approach is to bridge the gap between the micro and the macro and to ensure that higher-level policy is informed by insights from the lower level and by the priorities of the poor. As an analytical framework SL appreciates that policies, institutions and processes operate at all levels – from the household to the international arena – and shape the available livelihood options. To illustrate how these operate in the natural resource management context, here is an example of how policies, institutions and processes may influence access to forests.

Access to Forests

Structures

Public Sector	Ability of the public sector to make and enforce legislation
Private commercial	Existence and type of market for forest products
Civil Society	Existence of local resource management organizations able to defend rights and access

Processes

Policy	National Forest Policies Policies on Joint Forest Management
Legislation	De jure and de facto forest legislation and property rights The legislative environment and access of people to legal jurisprudence.
Institutions	Local conventions on forest use – common access rules Informal rules of use and collective action Relations of power in forest access and management
Culture	Intra-household customs and division of labour Symbolism and meaning ascribed to forests

Discussion of policies, institutions and processes and how they relate to ANR

In the literature on ANR, as in SLA, institutions, processes and policies are considered to be key in determining sustainable livelihood outcomes. The definition of institutions used in recent thinking on natural resource management has moved progressively away from mainstream institutional theory that tends to view institutions as rules, regulations and conventions imposing constraints on human behaviour (North, 1990; Ostrom). Mehta *et al.*, (2000) summarise much of the new thinking on institutions as follows ‘rather than mere rules or regulations, institutions are seen to be what people “do” or how people “behave”’; such approaches thus endow actors with a greater agentive role. And, at least in some perspectives, institutions are seen as inseparable from what people know or believe’ (2000:13). With regard to ANR; the importance of norms, routines, conventions, beliefs, age, gender etc in determining livelihood outcomes has become evident after years of policy and research concentration in environmental management.

D. *Livelihood strategies and outcomes*

Livelihood strategies is the overarching term used to denote the range and combination of activities and choices that people make and undertake in order to

achieve their livelihood outcomes. The single most important factor in determining the success of livelihood strategies is probably access to sufficient capital assets, although the vulnerability context and the constraints and opportunities posed by wider institutional processes also play a critical role.

Discussion of livelihood strategies and outcomes in relation to natural resource access

The focus on livelihood strategies and outcomes rather than objectives reflects the SLA perspective that livelihood strategies are complex, subjective and not necessarily related to short-term material gains. It is further recognised in both SLA and ANR that absolute sustainability is not a useful objective and further not necessarily relevant at individual or household levels. Serageldin and Steer (1994) for instance suggest that sustainable development can be thought of as accumulation and substitution of different types of capital. Whilst this type of macro-level capital asset accounting draws heavily on experiences in environmental accounting (Barbier 1994); the implications are also relevant to the more practical and subjective bend in the new poverty agenda as outlined in section 1. That is, an appreciation that development is about trade-offs and choices at all levels and that much of the debate around development is actually related to types of development strategies and the level of sustainability that should be the objective.

2.4 Summary and significance

The SLA has a close link to current thinking on ANR; a focus on people-centered policies and issues but a move beyond simple participatory paradigms. Support for the empowerment of the poor yet recognition that macro-structures in society, economy and polity constrain the livelihood strategies that can be locally developed. Central importance is given in ANR and SLA to assets and entitlements yet in both it is recognized that the ways in which these can be employed have to be seen in a wider context. In essence, both SLA and current thinking on ANR reveal a change in perspective rather than a new focus on issues. For this reason SLA is very well suited to the analysis of ANR issues; especially in providing a means by which to overcome the sectoral divides that inevitably shape both analysis and strategy. As Farrington points out 'part of the value of the SL approach therefore lies in providing an inclusive and non-threatening *process* by which the capacity of development specialists to think beyond conventional sectoral or disciplinary boundaries can be enhanced' (Farrington 2001:1).

The SLA is not a new paradigm but a collection of best practice principles. This point is worth repeating for two reasons. First it is important to give due recognition to other development approaches that have contributed to the development of these best practice principles. As Conway *et al* (2002:1) identify, the entitlements approach, the urban asset vulnerability framework and survival strategy frameworks can all be said to fall within the 'livelihoods' approach in that they share the same broad features. It is important therefore to bear these other approaches in mind and to consider that the SLA may need to further draw on these approaches in order to achieve both its analytical and practical objectives.

Secondly, the value of the SLA is precisely that it incorporates lessons from other approaches in a framework that combines analysis and practice. Although the ideas

are not necessarily new the approach has 'come of age' in a receptive policy environment and has been championed through development organizations. The framework is more practically focused than previous livelihoods approaches and more cross-sectoral than approaches such as farming systems. There is therefore arguably more of a shared starting point and conceptual framework than there has ever been before for development planning. The relevance of the SLA will lie ultimately in how well it manages to achieve its objectives of understanding and then assisting to transform the livelihoods of the rural poor.

3. PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT THE RURAL POOR FACE WITH RESPECT TO ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 1 provided a broad overview of the linkages between poverty and access to natural resources; section 2 considered the conceptual contribution SLA has made to an understanding of these linkages. This section will consider more closely the problems and opportunities that the rural poor face with respect to access to natural resources. Given the enormous volume of literature on this topic this section cannot provide a factual account of ANR or coverage of the related empirical issues. Instead the focus will be on problems and opportunities in ANR from the perspective of SL influenced research, thus demonstrating the SL approach. The following sections will first consider issues connected to access to land and then more briefly access to other natural resources.

3.1 Access to cultivable land and agriculture

Access to cultivable land is the most important natural resource for rural development and is key in determining the livelihood strategies of the rural poor. Agriculture accounts for most land use in developing countries and three quarters of the 1.2 billion people surviving on less than one dollar a day live and work in rural areas. The ownership, management and productive use of cultivable land is a key determinant of economic growth and has a direct though complex effect on how other natural resources such as water, forests, pasture and biodiversity are used. The future role of agriculture is one of the key unresolved issues in the current rethinking of poverty-environment-agriculture linkages. The notion that agricultural growth based on small farms would drive rural development is being called into question. Agriculture has declined sharply in relative terms both as an employer and a contributor to GDP and the long-term decline in agricultural commodity prices has weakened both the sector and the case for small farmer development. The agricultural sector is more integrated into the world economy with generally negative consequences for the terms of trade; and evidence that agriculture is pushing against natural resource boundaries is fairly conclusive. These trends have led to what has been termed a ‘loss of confidence in the rural development project’ (Ashley and Maxwell 2002) and funding to the sector and in particular to agriculture has declined despite evidence that poverty is still largely a rural phenomenon.

Table 3.1 Constraints and opportunities in access to cultivable land

Constraints	Opportunities
Limited natural capital and poor NR base; Limited financial capital to invest in conservation; Little information and awareness of rights limited; Property rights to natural resources insecure; Limited political inclusion in decision-making on development; Local institutional capacity to support adaptation to livelihood constraints limited; Lack of opportunities leads to negative diversification and further depletion of capital assets increasing household vulnerability.	Ability to maximise trade-offs and substitution of capital assets; Local awareness of environmental degradation leads to positive action that supports agriculture; Local production can make use of new technology and markets; Household labor deployed to maximum advantage; Social capital networks support adaptation to livelihood constraints; Participatory processes build political capital; Opportunities for positive diversification lead to capital asset accumulation and reduced vulnerability.

Given this broad context, what are the specific constraints and opportunities that the rural poor typically face with respect to access to cultivable land from an SLA perspective?

The balance between the constraints and opportunities faced by the rural poor and the livelihood outcomes that can be achieved are clearly highly context specific. The evidence on poverty and access to land does very broadly point to a mutually reinforcing negative linkage; the poor live in areas of low agricultural potential characterised by a fragile ecology, with little infrastructure and weak market integration and connectivity. Rural diversification has for long been seen in negative terms; as evidence of increasing rural vulnerability and a widening disparity in income between the rich and the poor in rural areas. In fact, the overall finding has been that income disparities in agriculture tend to reproduce themselves in the non-farm rural economy. Further, it was considered that diversification led to a stagnation or decline of agricultural output and the depletion of local social capital; with particularly poor gender effects as women have the least possibility to take advantages of new opportunities.

Despite the negative overall relation between poverty and the environment, the focus in current development policy, and in the SLA, is on people's strengths. Research from a livelihoods perspective has been at the forefront of a reconsideration of the constraints that the rural poor face. In essence, it has been pointed out that rural livelihoods should not be seen as agrarian livelihoods or even natural resource based livelihoods. Although natural resources and access to land remain a predominant source of rural income these have to be seen in wider perspective. In fact the positive effects of diversification have been shown to outweigh the negative ones. They include: the reduction of risk and vulnerability through spreading assets; more complete use of family and household labor; cash generation for investment in human or physical capital, and in some cases improvement in the environment because of reduced pressure on natural resources.

Given this positive experience of diversification the focus has shifted onto the types of livelihood strategies that are emerging and the types of resource access, capability enhancement and political economic factors upon which they have been based, and the conditions under which they make become more sustainable and poverty alleviating. The focus in SL research on access to land issues has been to capture the diversity and heterogeneity of responses rather than to quantify their incidence. Examples of such types of SL research include Brock and Coulibaly (1999) on livelihoods in Mali; Carswell *et al* (1999) on livelihoods in Ethiopia; Batterbury (2002) on livelihoods systems in Niger; Haan *et al* (2000) on migration and livelihoods in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Mali; and Goodrich (2001) with a summary of livelihoods research in Mali and Ethiopia. The findings from this research are too diverse to summarise here. Instead, to demonstrate how the approach has been used, the following are a few sample findings and related policy implications:

Rural proletarianization in the Andes

The presence of non-viable agricultural units has not necessarily led to the end of rural livelihoods. A significant feature of some regional economies has been the growth of a rural proletariat working on capitalist agricultural enterprises; such as non-traditional agri-horti-flori-cultural sectors. Whilst this has some negative effects –

such as low wages and health hazards, the wages enable people to maintain a rural residence. Thus rather than criticising this option, it becomes relevant to ask, under what conditions can this contribute to livelihood security and sustainability; for example through improved legislation on skills training and control of health hazards. (Bebbington 2001).

Migration

Migration has been critical to the viability of rural people's livelihoods and is often merely a survival strategy. But in some cases migration has allowed significant family accumulation. It seems that a successful sustainable rural livelihood strategy that combines migration with subsistence production at home and continued control over land revolves around having the skills to enter higher paid labor markets in urban areas and having the networks to gain access to work opportunities. (Ellis 2000; Swift 1998).

Cultural capital and rural residence

The determination to maintain and / or gain access to land is a feature running through many livelihood strategies for reasons that are not necessarily related to material gain. Bebbington finds that residence appears to be associated with the maintenance of a range of cultural practices from participation in fiestas to volley-ball games. Bryeson finds that an agrarian 'cover' for livelihood strategies is still important to many rural households; in fact so much so that the extent of non-farm diversification is often not at all evident. (Bebbington 2001).

Non-agricultural income sources in Sub-Saharan Africa

Most of the activities are highly opportunistic in nature, involving quick responses to market demand and supply. It was found that initial entry into non-agricultural work was seen as shameful but that such engagement is now seen as normal. In fact African peasants have been extremely responsive to neo-liberalism albeit with unclear implications for the social and economic fabric of society. Bryeson (2000) identifies four tensions in the allocation of assets for diversification:

- € Securing economic survival: market experimentation vs subsistence fallback
- € Marshalling resources: household solidarity vs individual autonomy
- € Identity crisis: agrarian conservatism vs sceptic otherness
- € Strengthening or weakening the economic foundation of rural livelihoods?
Linkages between non-agricultural activities and agriculture.

The combined evidence of SL based research on access to land portrays a complex pattern of asset deployment and a delicate balancing act between land and non-land resources. Rural households have in fact been very effective against the odds and diversification is often a sign of flexibility, resilience and relative stability. SL based analysis of the role of access to land and agriculture in the lives of the poor points to the importance of understanding asset trade-off and substitution. For instance; diversification may lead to the reduction of social capital because of the break-up of community relations and thus the support networks on which people can draw. However they may also enable people to accumulate capital and free them from the obligation of reinvesting social capital. Asset trade-off and substitution should also be

considered in relation to the economic strategies of other actors. For instance a household may lose assets due to ecological processes, but they just as commonly lose land, water and forests as a result of acquisition by other actors.

Policy and technical issues

Consideration of access to land issues along these lines is likely to lead to more appropriate development policies. For instance, if it is known that rural households in a particular location depend on migrant remittances rather than agriculture, than a policy for training to enable better job security would be more appropriate than policies on new agricultural technology. Conversely, if in a particular rural context it is found that the capital assets of the rural poor are being undermined by other actors, it may be important to invest in social capital to enable people to act collectively. Bryeson (2001) suggests that in Sub-Saharan Africa the donor tendency to concentrate on social capital building is often misplaced. The social fabric of local communities is changing too fast and donor policies reflect their attempts to make-do with declining physical resource transfers rather than the actual needs of rural dwellers. Instead a consideration of the capital assets reveals that the build-up of human capital is what is fundamentally at issue in view of the labor redundancy African peasantries are currently experiencing.

3.2 Access to natural resources

Despite diversification in livelihood strategies, access to cultivable land and agricultural development is still the main factor affecting rural livelihoods; and also one of the principal determinants of natural resource management and degradation. The constraints and potentials that exist for rural people with regard to access to cultivable land (as given in the table above) are related and similar to those determining access to natural resources. There has been little SL research on the various natural resource sectors (forests, water, pastures etc); partly because by definition SL work has been non-sectoral. There have also been few attempts made to interpret the implications of such broad SL analysis for various sectors.

Most commonly, SL work on natural resource sectors has involved reinterpreting existing studies and knowledge on a particular sector through an SL focus. For example, considering the role that **forests** play in broader livelihood strategies, their role in the overall capital asset composition of the household and the effect of wider policies, institutions and processes in determining forest use and access. The table below illustrates the application of the SL approach to the question of potentials and constraints that the rural poor face in natural resource access, using the example of forests and drawing on work done by Arnold (1999). The scenarios outlined reflect frequently occurring types of forest-related situations important to rural livelihoods as seen from an SL perspective.

As the table suggests the SL can be effectively employed to examine different access to forests scenarios in terms of their contribution to a broader livelihood strategy. Whilst it is evident that access to forests continues to play a vital role in rural livelihoods; SL research suggests that some of these strategies are unlikely to be sustainable whereas others present viable opportunities for sustainable capital accumulation. The general picture is similar to that reached concerning access to land

and agriculture: there is much more innovation and economic mobility at the household level than is often assumed. However ‘community’ forestry is a rarity and many instances of subsistence forest use are not in fact sustainable. Macro-structures have a significant influence on the choices that can be locally pursued. When considering strategies to empower and enable the poor to have access to forests it is therefore vital to consider both the diversity of local strategies; the agency of the poor and their strengths and capacities.

Table 3.2 Rural livelihoods and access to forests

Scenario of forest access	Context: Constraints and opportunities	Policy and technical issues
Forests Continue to be Central to Livelihood Systems	Principally hunter-gatherers / shifting cultivators who use forests as common pool resource. Labor intensive livelihood practices difficult to sustain in face of seasonal migration and little scope for improvement. Possible forest-based options include: expansion of market outlets for NTFPs; transformation into commercial agroforests; employment in forest opportunities.	Policies needed that recognise local rights and provide holders with legal and regulatory support in protecting them. Policies to support trade also important although can expose people to risk as markets in forest products volatile.
Products from forests play important supplementary / safety-net role	Users agriculturalists who draw on forest for inputs that cannot be produced on-farm. Likely to be multiple users with overlapping claims on the resource; internal differentiation of asset endowments among households lead to competing claims and poor find it difficult to benefit from commercialization in this context and in danger of losing resource access to more powerful.	Need for policy and legal framework that legitimises participation by poor; assistance in resource sharing and monitoring mechanisms; projects to rebuild social capital and technical assistance for forest management.
Forest product activity opportunities are increasingly base on agroforest sources	Potential for increased tree-growing on farms due to decline in sources from forests; demand for tree products; and changes in factor availability and allocation. Most farm-level tree management mainly for household needs; capacity of poor to take advantage of market is limited though outgrower schemes have enabled some participation	Tenure conditions have to be clear; policies to improve market access; technical support to small farmers; flexible options appropriate to the incremental niche approach to tree growing.
Opportunities exist to expand artisanal and small enterprise forest product activities	Forest product activities a major source of employment in rural manufacturing. New entrants driven by need to sustain livelihoods; others responding to market opportunities.	Intervention may be necessary to ensure policy environment does not discriminate against informal sector; support services generic to small enterprise sector; means to secure sustainable use of raw material
People need to move out of declining forest product activities	Forest products provide only a marginal and unsustainable existence.	Balanced policies that enable people to exit and find better opportunities as well as supporting the use of forests as an interim support base.

Source: Drawn from Arnold (1999)

With regard to **water**, to further demonstrate the application of the SLA to various sectors, the framework has been progressive in drawing out macro and micro policy issues and analyzing complexity (Soussan 1999; Calow and Nicol 2001). There are

several points to be made here. First, the current global shift towards sustainable financing of water supply brings with it complex questions about the nature of local demand, willingness and capacity to pay and related questions of ownership, power and gender. A livelihoods perspective has been found to be critical for an understanding of the issues involved as water management environments are invariably complex and related directly to food security. Potential water vulnerability further needs to be understood in the policy context of tensions between moves towards decentralization and the need to maintain planning and management functions and the need for an integrated non-sector divided system for drought and famine warning.

Calow and Nicol (2001) have found that on the whole the SLA provided an effective means for both understanding access to water issues and then providing policy guidelines in their work in Ethiopia and Palestine. The approach added value in terms of a greater understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of vulnerability. An understanding of how water is combined with other assets to generate income helped in understanding how water insecurity can affect production and income, as well as direct consumption. In terms of policy development and project planning it suggested the need to broaden indicator sets currently used to warn of drought related problems. It was helpful in exploring different dimensions of sustainability and trade-offs between them and in exploring how these are affected by political interests.

Reviewing a technical **soil and water** conservation project that has been operating in Ethiopia for the last twenty years using the SLA led to a re-evaluation of some basic assumptions. In fact, some of the most successful instances of the application of SLA to ANR issues are in project evaluation and redesign. Perhaps this is because there is 'something to go on'; information and experiences that can be studied and entry-points that have already been made. A case study group at the Siena Conference organized by DfID and FAO (DfID/FAO 2000:17) found that reviewing the project through a SL lens led them to:

- € Question the project's basic assumption that land degradation is the main cause of food insecurity;
- € Look more closely at the relationship between the political context and coping strategies and the implications of mass mobilization, time and labor constraints and the utilization of local knowledge.
- € The re-diagnosis was expected to lead to the following outputs:
- € Knowledge of the main causes of food insecurity for different livelihood typologies at different levels
- € Greater understanding of the influence of policies, markets, tenure rights etc on food insecurity.
- € Greater understanding of the priorities and linkages between these causes.
- € Identification of more appropriate entry-points and a better idea of sequencing

The emphasis on holism in the SLA has led to concerns amongst practitioners that sectoral projects will be abandoned in favor of complex cross-sectoral projects. 'A frequent misconception concerning the livelihoods approach is that holistic analysis must necessarily lead to holistic or multi-disciplinary projects' (CARE:NRAC 99). DELIVERI a **livestock** project in Indonesia is a good illustration of how an approach can be SL guided, yet sectorally-anchored. The DELIVERI project uses livestock

extension services as an entry point to support rural livelihoods and aims to change policies that constrain livelihood strategies though the project structure is anchored in the Ministry of Agriculture.

3.3 Summary and significance

The objective of the SLA is to place the constraints and opportunities faced with regard to ANR issues in the broader context of other capital assets, PIPs and the vulnerability context. The SLA is clearly well suited to capture the diversity and complexity of ANR issues; there is less evidence of how this knowledge has been ‘translated back’ for the analysis of a particular sector. Most research done using the SL framework *ex ante* has focused on diversification and rural livelihoods. There is little work that uses the SL framework *ex ante* to gather information about a specific resource type. Most of the resource specific work appears to entail running existing scenarios through the SL framework. This is a gap; as the examples of forests and water above suggest, considering particular resources as they are located in local livelihood strategies and constrained by macro-structures is critical. Whilst this has been appreciated for a long time, the SL is a practical means for doing so that has not yet been fully tested.

4. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SLA FOR UNDERSTANDING ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES AND FOR DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO TARGET THESE

The conceptual contribution and potential of the SLA for an understanding of natural resource management issues has been outlined in section 2. What has been its contribution to understanding these issues in practice? As suggested in section 1, this question is difficult to answer as there are no set rules for conducting livelihoods analysis. The only firm position taken by SL advocates is that SL research must be based on the SL principles outlined in section 2. Apart from this, the framework can be used as a checklist or means of structuring ideas; can be used in combination with tools and methods from other methodologies (e.g. surveys); and approaches (e.g. rights based approaches). The SL framework can also be applied for many development purposes, such as: pure research; identification of development priorities; program design; project planning; and monitoring and evaluation. In other words, the actual tools for analysis and the purposes for which these are used are no different than those that had existed before the emergence of the SL approach. So what difference does the SL approach make to the analysis of ANR issues?²

4.1 Evaluation of the SLA and its capacity to understand ANR issues

The application of the SLA to questions of ANR usually aims to test the approach itself, as much as to meet other more instrumental development objectives. Papers usually deconstruct the ways in which the SLA was applied and where and how it was felt to be useful or not. In addition there has been a seminar on *Rural Poverty and Natural Resources* and a seminar on *Sustainable Livelihoods and the Environment* in the DfID Sustainable Livelihoods Seminar Series; both directed to sharing approaches, principles and lessons. Along with more generalised analysis of the SLA as a whole, this provides plenty of material for a consideration of the value of SLA in relation to ANR issues. The following table provides an overview of the main types of SLA application to ANR issues.

² This assessment will remain narrowly focused on papers where there is a direct link between ANR and SLA. It will exclude work on the overall difference that SL has made; work on NR that only indirectly uses the SLA; or general work on sustainable livelihoods that has an NR focus. To include this work would be to include a large chunk of development related papers in circulation.

Table 4.1 Types of SL application to ANR issues

SLA application type	Focus	Comments	Sample References
Non-project related research into ANR issues that uses the SL framework of analysis	<p>Focus often a non-sector specific analysis of rural livelihoods.</p> <p>Asset pentagon is used to consider the role of natural capital in sustainable livelihoods.</p> <p>Analysis of PIP impact on ANR</p> <p>Analysis of Vulnerability context</p>	<p>There are few examples of a full application of the SL framework; most studies tend to use the SL as a check-list and for example compile lists of capital assets. There are few examples where these are then related to PIPs and the vulnerability context; see Goodrich (2001) for an exception. Most of the studies tend to place the focus on a particular aspect of SL and then lose the dynamic interaction between the various aspects.</p>	<p>Goodrich (2001)</p> <p>Baumann and Sinha (2001)</p> <p>Batterbury (2002)</p> <p>Bebbington (2000)</p> <p>Brock and Coulibaly (1999);Carswell <i>et al</i> (1999); Haan <i>et al</i> (2000)</p>
SL analysis of NR programs, projects and policies	<p>SL concepts incorporated into the review of existing projects</p> <p>Livelihood impacts of projects examined</p> <p>Projects redesigned using SLA</p>	<p>SL is frequently and fairly successfully applied to the analysis of existing NR programs, projects and policies; SL advocates have been active in promoting the use of SL to existing projects. Existing information and project structures provide SLA with an in-road to tackle multi-dimensional analysis. Also it is easier to provide constructive criticism of existing projects than to design new ones.</p>	<p>Nicol (2001)</p> <p>Ashley and Hussein (2001)</p> <p>DfID/FAO (2000)</p>
SL project design and management	<p>SLA used as the principal tool for the design and management of projects</p>	<p>It is questionable whether there are actually any real SL projects. That is projects designed using the SL analytical framework and implemented using SL approaches. Most so-called SL projects had a sectoral focus at the outset and have found the link between SL principles, analysis and then participatory design has been difficult to follow in practice. In the end SL is often used mainly as a check-list of factors to be covered.</p>	<p>Turton (2001)</p>
Development of SL methodologies	<p>Development of indicators</p> <p>Impact assessment methodology</p> <p>Conceptual and methodological comparison with other approaches</p> <p>Monitoring and Evaluation review</p>	<p>Perhaps most ANR related SL work has been on the approach itself. Attempts have made to overcome methodological constraints by trying to find ways to quantify capital assets; considering where and how SL should draw on other approaches; improving systems for monitoring and evaluation etc. The broad synopsis is that SL is useful for pro-poor focus, holistic analysis of factors locally relevant, and project design etc, but difficult to implement in practice.</p>	<p>Ashley and Hussein (2001)</p> <p>Macqueen (2001)</p> <p>Murray (2001)</p> <p>Turton (2002)</p> <p>Bond and Mukherjee (2001)</p> <p>Adato and Meinzen-Dick (2002)</p> <p>Smith (2002)</p> <p>Norton and Foster (2001)</p>

The broad consensus of the case study material is that the SLA has contributed towards the understanding of development constraints and opportunities related to ANR. The context of this consensus has to be borne in mind; SLA development is well funded and has so far had mainly insider appraisal. It has not been exposed to an academic audience nor benefited from the suggestions that such an exposure might contribute³. Nevertheless, with this in mind, the following are the *benefits* that the case studies have isolated in the application of the SLA to ANR issues:

- ∄ Encourages a broad analysis of development problems;
- ∄ Shifts focus onto livelihood outcomes rather than project objectives and on the full-range of project impacts not just cash and physical outputs;
- ∄ Provides a tool for learning about the complex local impacts of NR projects;
- ∄ Encourages the cross-checking of data and the analysis of field results rather than their simple aggregation;
- ∄ Has shifted the sector specific focus of many NR projects to include alternative interventions that support the livelihoods of the poor;
- ∄ Provides a check-list for the development of a comprehensive livelihoods baseline;
- ∄ Enables a more realistic prediction of potential outcomes and impacts of projects;
- ∄ Encourages a more participatory approach to be taken;
- ∄ Maintains a focus on both long and short-term development strategies.

The case studies experience also reveals a broad commonality in the *constraints* experienced and the shortcomings of the SLA identified. It is all very well to have acknowledged the diversity of rural livelihoods; the shifting, complex, contingent web of relations that constitute institutions; the interaction of social, political and economic forces across all levels; and the importance of including a temporal and dynamic perspective; but then what? Researchers and practitioners have come across the following difficulties in using the SLA in practice:

- ∄ SLA is time and money consuming;
- ∄ Requires multi-disciplinary teams and specialist SL training;
- ∄ It is difficult to quantify information on capital assets gathered through SL and so difficult to gain a comparative assessment of ANR issues.
- ∄ Typically this leads to a mass of grey pros and cons and the compilation of lists.
- ∄ Heavy reliance on participatory techniques further complicates quantification.
- ∄ Difficult to generate sector wide and national level policies as required by national governments and donor policy makers.
- ∄ Difficult to draw the link between micro and macro level institutional processes and how they affect ANR issues in practice.
- ∄ Difficult to understand the role of the market and private sector using SLA
- ∄ The SLA should include a focus on cultural capital as these are critical for the understanding of ANR issues.
- ∄ The SLA is based largely on experiences from English-speaking countries.

³ Inevitably an exposure to academia would mean some diversion from the practical development objectives. Some academic deconstruction could lead to self-serving dead-ends; but some could be constructive. For example, academic work on the concept of capital and in particular social capital and negative associational activity has not been fully drawn on. The SLA does draw on a very simplistic version of this work but does not in general engage with the debate nor contribute anything back.

A 2001 seminar on the value of the SLA for an exploration of Rural Poverty and ANR issues asked 48 practitioners from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences. The participants were asked to compare positive and negative aspects of the SLA in 1999 and 2001. They concluded that in 1999 SLA:

- Ø Provided a focus on the policy environment
- Ø Provided policy makers with a common language for development
- Ø Made for more people focused policy.

However it was also felt that SL could not be applied at the national level and many of the factors represented in the PIPs box were felt to be overly complex. Two years later it was shown that in fact SLA:

- Ø Could be applied at a national level
- Ø Were complementary to PRSPs and RBAs
- Ø Provided a reality check for macro approaches in aid
- Ø And improved policy links for projects.

What this assessment reveals is that the SLA has responded well to constructive criticism and that there has been a concerted attempt by practitioners to contribute towards its development. Some of the ANR relevant examples of the suggestions that have been made to overcome the constraints identified above are given below.

Table 4.2: Suggestions for SLA compatible and complementary tools of analysis

Suggestion / Experimentation	Reference
Combining the SLA with Rights Based Approaches will improve analysis of power relations and provide a tool for focusing actions on the livelihoods of the poor (see section below for further detail).	Conway <i>et al</i> (2002)
Provides an analytical model of how policy affects livelihoods and a five stage process of moving from initial identification of the poor to the construction of entry points for influencing policy.	Shankland (2000)
Include political capital as a sixth capital asset.	Baumann and Sinha (2001)
Include the SEAGA (Social, Economic and Gender Analysis) approach and the related tools developed within FAO to assist in analysis of institutions at macro, meso and micro-levels.	Marta Bruno (pers.comm)
Consider the 4Rs framework (which tracks Rights, Responsibilities, Revenue and Relationships) as a means for improving PIPs analysis at all levels.	Olivier Dubois (pers.comm)
Livelihood Asset Tracking (LAST) outlines an attempt to make livelihoods comparable using locally derived scoring criteria to give an aggregate livelihoods score.	Bond and Mukherjee (2001)
The Power Tools series provides practical SL compatible help to improve the policies and institutions that affect the lives of the poor.	Mayers (2001)
Suggests constructing a scoring matrix for livelihood capital assets; the argument in this paper is that without a means for quantification the SLA is inoperable.	Macqueen (2001)
Need tools to extend SL analysis from description to a consider implications of alternative policy prescriptions. Should field-test the potential of using participatory poverty assessments. Tools also needed to combine SLA with conventional economic analysis and metric measures such as household consumption.	Norton and Foster (2001)

Mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, triangulation and cross-checks as well as attention to cultural capital and power relations important when applying SLA to agricultural research.	Adato and Meinzen-Dick (2002)
Identifies a range of traditional methods such as SWOTs and CBAs and argues that these can be used as tools for project and programme planning within an SL framework.	Pasteur (2001)
Argues that the SLA can draw from lessons learnt in environmental mainstreaming such as: screening, scoping, impact matrices, check-points, quality assurance, tiering, weighting, comparative risk assessment.	Smith (2001)

4.2 Policies, institutions and processes in the SLA

There is one conceptual area in which the integrity of the SL framework itself (rather than its application) has received particular criticism. This is its treatment of policies, institutions and processes and the position (or lack of a position) taken with regard to power and politics. The partial treatment of power and politics in the SL framework is a shortcoming that is the subject of an ongoing internal debate amongst those institutions involved in developing the framework. The SLA does not provide a tool to distinguish between policies and the power relations that underpin policies; between a structure of rights to natural resources, for example, and the political negotiation that is part of the process by which these rights are defined. Without a means to understand these underlying processes and bring them to the foreground of the SLA it is arguable that the contribution that SLA can make is seriously impaired. To relate this to ANR: line department bureaucrats may raise funds to secure favorable posts which may be extracted from the poor in the form of excess payment for water, trees and seeds. The rural poor may well thus be producing more surplus than is assumed, but their lack of power in such micro-interactions restricts the extent to which they can invest it to enhance other assets or to secure livelihoods. These processes are critical to reproducing poverty, yet they are not transparent and cannot be captured within the SL notion of PIPs.

One recommended solution is to incorporate political capital into the framework as an endogenous variable termed ‘political capital’ which would then become the sixth capital asset. Political capital would be understood as the opportunity and ability to use power in ways that maintain or enhance political and economic positions and so increase livelihood options. While the operation of politics and power is clearly evident in ‘policies, institutions and processes’, it is also a capital asset in the same way as other assets included in the SL framework, on which ‘individuals draw to build their livelihoods’. In the context of sustainable livelihoods, it is an asset that enables (or conversely can hinder) individuals and groups to use broader institutions and processes to make their livelihoods more secure, and so an understanding of it is key to strategies that hope to create sustainable livelihoods options to eradicate poverty.

The concept of political capital strengthens the link between SL as a framework for analysis and SL as a practical approach to development. It provides a means by which power and politics, which are routinely blamed for the failure of development programs, can be subjected to rigorous analysis in the project context. If political capital is analytically posited in relation to other capital assets at the local level, it places the focus on how it is locally constituted and reproduced and therefore how a

project intervention can be targeted. This is also important because it draws attention to the transition costs of particular programs and project interventions. Policies that aim to empower the poor, for example supporting their claims on common land or improving access knowledge of rights and access to information, may meet resistance from those who stand to lose. An understanding of how political capital is locally situated not only enables appropriated interventions but also a judicious analysis of risk and of possible human costs of project interventions.

The political and policy context of ANR

Some of the most consistent and constructive criticism of the SLA has come from rights-based approaches (RBA). These approaches are rooted in international law and are concerned with the protection of claims that have been legitimised by social structures and norms. The concern is both with the rights that people should be entitled to and how to enhance the capacity of the poor to claim their rights and the related provisions. The RBA critique is that the SLA is stronger on the micro level than an understanding of micro-macro policy linkages and does not provide a means to understand the ways in which power relations produce and reproduce deprivation. Despite being cognisant of the importance of PIPs, the SLA tends to focus more on the technical aspects of development. In particular, by being open to all manner of institutional linkages, and ‘win-win’ solutions to development problems, the SLA avoids taking a political position. Whilst useful at one level, this provides no benchmark for action or prioritization and glosses over the fact that in the end options and choices are usually not institutional and technical matters, but political ones. The RBA suggests that one practical way forward is to consider the rights to which the poor are entitled by international law. These provide focus points for the analysis of the factors that influence livelihoods and entitlements such as social and political contestation over rights; entry points for practical action; and benchmarks for non-partisan political positions on priorities. Moser and Norton (2001) have developed a human rights and livelihoods matrix as a means to show how the capital asset framework of the SLA can be linked to RBA. The following table extracts the example of natural capital from this matrix to show the relevance of the arguments made to ANR.

Table 4.3 Natural capital and human rights

Capital Asssets	Relevant Rights	Principal References in Human Rights Conventions
Natural Capital	Right to a healthy environment Right to safe and healthy working conditions Childrens right to a healthy environment Right to own land and other property Land rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples Right of all peoples to a general satisfactory environment favorable to their development	ICESR 12b ICESR 7b CRC24 UDHR 17;CEDAW16.1h; ICERD5d ILO Convention no 169 African Charter 24 (see also the 1972 Stockholm Declaration&Rio Declaration 1992.

Source: Adapted from Moser and Norton (2001)

The RBA critique of SLA provides a viable suggestion for how to overcome SLA shortcomings related to power relations, PIPs and priorities for action. It is worth

investigating what the practical challenges of such an adapted SLA approach would mean for the analysis of issues related to ANR.

4.3 SLA perspective as a framework for developing strategies for enabling access of poor to NR

The effectiveness of the SLA as a tool for developing strategies is less established than the SLA as a diagnostic tool. A key concern in the development of country level development strategies has been how to integrate poverty and environmental policies into coherent growth-oriented macro-economic frameworks. In many ways SLA as a framework for developing strategies complements what has been termed the ‘new architecture of aid’ (Farrington 2001). The SLA as an approach and the new architecture as the means of organizational delivery constitute a concerted policy focus on ‘mainstreaming’ poverty and the environment. Indeed at the planning level the SLA has been important for identifying entry-points into projects and ensuring a livelihoods focus even in sectoral natural resource projects. The analogy of an ‘acupuncture approach’ has been used in this connection: holistic diagnosis of the problem but the treatment is specific and focused (Ashley and Carney 1999).

Box 2. Identifying and prioritising entry-points

The DfID DELIVERI project in Indonesia is an example of an SL-type project with a single sector entry point, but which worked on several levels within that sector. It aimed to make existing livestock services more client-centered and responsive to the poor and started work on this objective at the sub-district and community level. Experiences gained from piloting new approaches at the village level were used to press for changes at the village level and above. By bringing decision-makers from the provincial level face to face with beneficiaries in pilot villages, the project was able to lobby effectively for policy and institutional change.

These benefits at the planning level, become complicated in implementation. The international development targets and new architecture of aid, as well as the SLA itself, have to operate in country level planning contexts, which are slow to change. Partly this is because projects have to be managed by a single department to be effective and hence Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) are still the planning norm, especially with respect to natural resources. Attempts at inter-departmental cooperation for wider poverty alleviation objectives related to ANR are fraught with administrative difficulties. Further the integration of some SL principles into SWAs will have a profound effect on their content. When these are aimed at the empowerment of the poor these are likely to meet administrative and political resistance. This is particularly so in the case of natural capital, the exploitation of which has disproportionately benefited the elite in many poor countries.

This last point is related to another difficulty of the SLA perspective for planning development. The objective of the SLA is to empower the poor, but despite the many principles that underpin the SLA, there are none that can guide practitioners in what to do if this objective meets resistance. The approach is to talk, persuade and find ‘win-win’ solutions; in some instances this can be positive but clearly this is unlikely

to be effective when interests are vested in the status quo. A review of the potential of using SLA in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers concludes that ‘the framework can best be seen as a device for enabling and facilitating inter-disciplinary dialogue and analysis’ (Norton and Foster 2001: 31) and that to take the analysis forward in a complex context would inevitably require other methodologies and approaches.

Another area of difficulty identified in developing strategies using the SLA is a lack of understanding of how the framework operates and resistance to the use of the framework. In the former instance some practitioners have found it rewarding to work through the SLA with local partners and thus arrive at a shared understanding for the development of strategies; see the text box below.

Box 3. Project Design in a Transition Country

Livestock are one of the main capital assets of Kyrgyz rural communities and deeply integrated into the cultural, social, economic and political fabric of society. Abundant pastures and a tradition of pastoralism – both production and subsistence oriented – as well as a lack of alternatives, make livestock production an obvious focus of development efforts. However the rapidly changing institutional and social structure of a country in transition, as well as the vulnerability of the livestock sector to economic, seasonal and political shocks, calls for sophistication in analysis of development constraints and sensitivity in designing interventions. The SL framework proved to be a very useful tool for exploring these ideas with local partners. Because the Soviet model had been centrally planned and highly sectoral, local partners had no framework with which to conceptualise complex development processes. The SLA provided an easy to explain and comprehensive framework that could be used both to explain the theory, to plan the studies and then to design interventions.

In other instances it has been easier to simply drop the SLA as a shared tool for strategy development and use it as a back-up point of reference. Concerning resistance to the use of the SLA; this usually comes from development practitioners who have their own systems and frameworks for the planning of development strategies. The SL framework would benefit from an exploration of how and when this is grounded simply in established working patterns (which is not necessarily negative); when it is simply resistance to novelty; and where there is an opportunity to explore the cross-fertilization of approaches for planning development.

The practical value of the SLA for ANR is further challenged by a simple lack of direction. Partly this is because the concepts are new and unfamiliar to those in planning positions. More fundamentally this lack of direction is due to the rapid pace of social, economic, political and environmental change as outlined in section 1. SLA has been part of the analytical and policy process that has dispelled environmental and development narratives. This engagement with complex rural realities is progressive but it also means that there are few guidelines to follow in development practice. Practitioners using SL to develop strategies have found themselves compiling long ‘wish lists’ and not being able to identify priority areas for action.

The isolation and ‘bullet-pointing’ of constraints and opportunities in the use of the SLA has become a standard fare of SL influenced work. The livelihoods web-site

provides regularly updated lessons from the field on this subject; much of which is ANR related. *The Proceedings from the Forum on Operationalising Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches* compiled by DfID and FAO carry plenty of lessons on the application of the SLA to ANR specific to all parts of strategy development (project design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, project redesign). Rather than revisiting this information, the following are what I would isolate as the over-arching challenges in using the SLA to develop ANR strategies.

- Ø *Prioritising Actions* Whilst the advantage of the SLA is its holistic approach, the analysis does not always result in clear directions on priority actions to improve livelihoods.
- Ø *Unpacking Policies, Institutions and Processes* The SLA is still a long way from providing a comprehensive analysis of how PIPs work and hence from recommending strategies to change and improve them. Too many key variables are contained in one box in the framework without proper guidance for how these could be unpacked.
- Ø *Changing the Way Organizations Work* Following through the implications of the SLA would mean that institutions have to change and instigating changes in policies, institutions and processes often requires acting to changing the way that organizations work. This fact applies at all levels; from changing the way that line departments operate to challenging property rights at the local level.

4.4 Watershed, Watershed Plus and Sustainable Livelihoods in India

The DfID supported watershed projects operating in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are a good illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of the SLA as a tool for enhancing ANR. The significance of a watershed for planning development is that it represents the most rational unit at which to plan for integrated conservation and management of natural resources for optimal production. Early projects took ecological objectives as their starting points when selecting the scope and scale of interventions. Projects were managed along a public works model with complex tendering processes, detailed work plans, target orientation and a total lack of participation. Watershed projects run along these lines have been implemented in India since before Independence.

There has been a transformation from this early concept of watershed management to one of watershed development. The rationale behind the new concept of watershed management in a nutshell, is that the rehabilitation and development of environmental resources in an integrated manner can lead to the development of economic resources within the watershed. For this to occur, holistic watershed development has to move away from a physical target focus and incorporate associated, non-land based activities in an integrated approach. This reflects the recognition that many land-based activities do not help the landless or the poor, and that the management of natural resources has to be linked to the development of secure livelihoods in order to be sustainable. Emphasis has been placed on a participatory approach that involves people in both the planning and the management of interventions. The Government of India passed Guidelines for Watershed Management in 1994 to create an institutional

structure that would support watershed management along these newly conceived lines.

The SLA has been influential in changing the way that watershed development is understood in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Shifting the focus of development efforts from resources to people and their livelihood outcomes lies at the heart of SLA. The SLA did not instigate this shift in focus; it grew out of decades of failed watershed projects, lessons from participatory development and the poverty alleviation focus of centrally planned development projects in India. However the SLA provided a coherent framework within which these concerns could be discussed as well as tools with which to analyse watershed-related development problems and plan appropriate interventions. This illustrates a point that has been made several times in this paper; SLA may not be new but it has 'come of age' in a receptive policy environment and is able to provide practical support in tackling complex issues, even if this is only through a shared point of reference.

The design of the Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project was already well advanced when the design team started to use the SL framework. This was mainly due to timing; the SLA was still being developed. Nevertheless the project design was already based on the broader notion of watershed management and had included interdisciplinary studies and attempts at enabling local participation. When the team encountered the SLA towards the end of the project design, it was found to be useful in integrating the insights gained into the complexity of poverty and drawing out the implications for potential project activities. In particular the asset pentagon contributed to the notion of 'watershed plus'; projects that would include activities targeted at the poor and aimed at building mainly social, human and financial, rather than natural capital.

The DfID funded watershed projects in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh are 'watershed-plus' projects and they deviate significantly from conventional watershed projects. The SLA has been instrumental in: (1) providing a point of reference and common language between the donor, state government, NGOs and consultants; (2) moving the focus away from natural capital alone to the total capital asset base of the poor; (3) building on local capacity and strengths; (4) addressing macro-level constraints through advocacy for pro-poor approaches.

The experience of the DfID funded Rural Livelihoods Projects in India also raises several questions about both the utility and limitations of the SLA.

- Ø It is highly debatable whether the SLA *per se*, as opposed to a general awareness of the obvious role of power imbalances, highlighted much about power relations. Even if the SLA added marginal value in this respect, it was not able to pinpoint anything *specific* about power relations, at least in the case of Orissa, which has design implications.
- Ø The SLA was effective because the two state governments were receptive to the notions contained within SLA. What the utility of the SLA would have been had it met any resistance is an open question.
- Ø Related to the point above, despite a general receptiveness to the notions of the SLA, there have been only marginal changes in organizational and institutional

power structures at all levels that continue to constrain the livelihood strategies of the poor.

- Ø The notion of watershed-plus has led to the generation of a large number of project activities with an unclear relation to the ultimate goal of sustainable livelihoods.
- Ø The SLA provides no guidance on points of policy and politics; such as what *ought to be* the division of tasks between local government and local committees.

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The SLA has not been discussed in the academic literature; the literature reviewed here therefore includes mainly documents, reports produced by donor agencies, NGOs, independent reports contracted by these organizations and discussions posted on web-sites. ANR issues on the other hand have received much coverage in the academic literature; but none of this has been related to SLA. Most of the papers and documents reviewed here are available on-line and most even have annotations on line; I have included full references only for those papers that are not available on-line. The following are some useful web-sites for tracking SLA in relation to major development themes; none of these are specific to ANR issues so apart from looking up the references in this paper, the reader has to trawl the sites.

www.livelihoods.org is a web-site dedicated specifically to the advancement and development of the SLA funded by the Department for International Development and managed by the Institute of Development Studies. It includes a list of key documents on SLA (including the SL Guidance Sheets) and organizations working on SL issues. The web-site hosts discussion groups and publishes the proceedings of DfID funded seminars on key development themes; including natural resource management and the environment. The web-site includes a lessons section in which lessons from the field are collected and analysed and a regular email update.

www.ids.ac.uk has two useful web-sites that review and annotate recent literature on development. One is the eldis site and the other is the ID21 service; both can be searched for literature on SLA and sustainable development.

www.dfid.gov.uk this web-site will have official documents on SLA published by the DfID but most of the non-official reports produced by DfID will be available on the three sites mentioned above.

www.undp.org/sl is another useful web-site on general SL Issues. This site has information on the poverty-environment initiative which has some good overview reports on ANR issues, though these are mainly sectoral reports and not specific to SLA.

www.oneworld.org/ecdp/index.htm is good for policy and institutional issues.

<http://www.odi.org.uk/rpeg/srls.html> provides information on ODI's work on Sustainable Livelihoods

www.odi.org.uk/nrp the Natural Resource Perspective Papers have useful recent updates on ANR issues; the Working Papers published by ODI have been running a special series on Sustainable Livelihoods. ODI also published Key Issues papers on Development; many of these have ANR themes.

www.iied.org has information on the research project 'Institutionalising Participatory Approaches and Processes for Natural Resource Management' managed by the IIED Rural Livelihoods and Environment Group.

www.deliveri.org describes the experiences of the Decentralised Livestock Services in Indonesia Project, which developed and tested a range of improved, more client-oriented approaches to livestock service provision and management at field, district and national levels. This site is interesting as DELIVERI is one of the projects most often cited as having made positive use of the SLA.

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Further information about the LSP

The Livelihood Support Programme (LSP) works through the following sub-programmes:

Improving people's access to natural resources

Access of the poor to natural assets is essential for sustainable poverty reduction. The livelihoods of rural people with limited or no access to natural resources are vulnerable because they have difficulty in obtaining food, accumulating assets, and recuperating after shocks or misfortunes.

Participation, Policy and Local Governance

Local people, especially the poor, often have weak or indirect influence on policies that affect their livelihoods. Policies developed at the central level are often not responsive to local needs and may not enable access of the rural poor to needed assets and services.

Livelihoods diversification and enterprise development

Diversification can assist households to insulate themselves from environmental and economic shocks, trends and seasonality – in effect, to be less vulnerable. Livelihoods diversification is complex, and strategies can include enterprise development.

Natural resource conflict management

Resource conflicts are often about access to and control over natural assets that are fundamental to the livelihoods of many poor people. Therefore, the shocks caused by these conflicts can increase the vulnerability of the poor.

Institutional learning

The institutional learning sub-programme has been set up to ensure that lessons learned from cross-departmental, cross-sectoral team work, and the application of sustainable livelihoods approaches, are identified, analysed and evaluated for feedback into the programme.

Capacity building

The capacity building sub-programme functions as a service-provider to the overall programme, by building a training programme that responds to the emerging needs and priorities identified through the work of the other sub-programmes.

People-centred approaches in different cultural contexts

A critical review and comparison of different recent development approaches used in different development contexts is being conducted, drawing on experience at the strategic and field levels in different sectors and regions.

Mainstreaming sustainable livelihoods approaches in the field

FAO designs resource management projects worth more than US\$1.5 billion per year. Since smallholder agriculture continues to be the main livelihood source for most of the world's poor, if some of these projects could be improved, the potential impact could be substantial.

Sustainable Livelihoods Referral and Response Facility

A Referral and Response Facility has been established to respond to the increasing number of requests from within FAO for assistance on integrating sustainable livelihood and people-centred approaches into both new and existing programmes and activities.

For further information on the Livelihood Support Programme,
contact the programme coordinator:
Email: LSP@fao.org

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