

**What is a livelihood?**

The word 'livelihood' can be used in many different ways. The following definition captures the broad notion of livelihoods understood here: *'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.'*

Adapted from Chambers, R. and G. Conway (1992) *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. IDS Discussion Paper 296. Brighton: IDS.

**Sustainable livelihoods: Putting people at the centre of development**

The livelihoods approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development. A specific livelihoods framework and objectives have been developed to assist with implementation, but the approach goes beyond these. In essence it is a way of putting people at the centre of development, thereby increasing the effectiveness of development assistance.

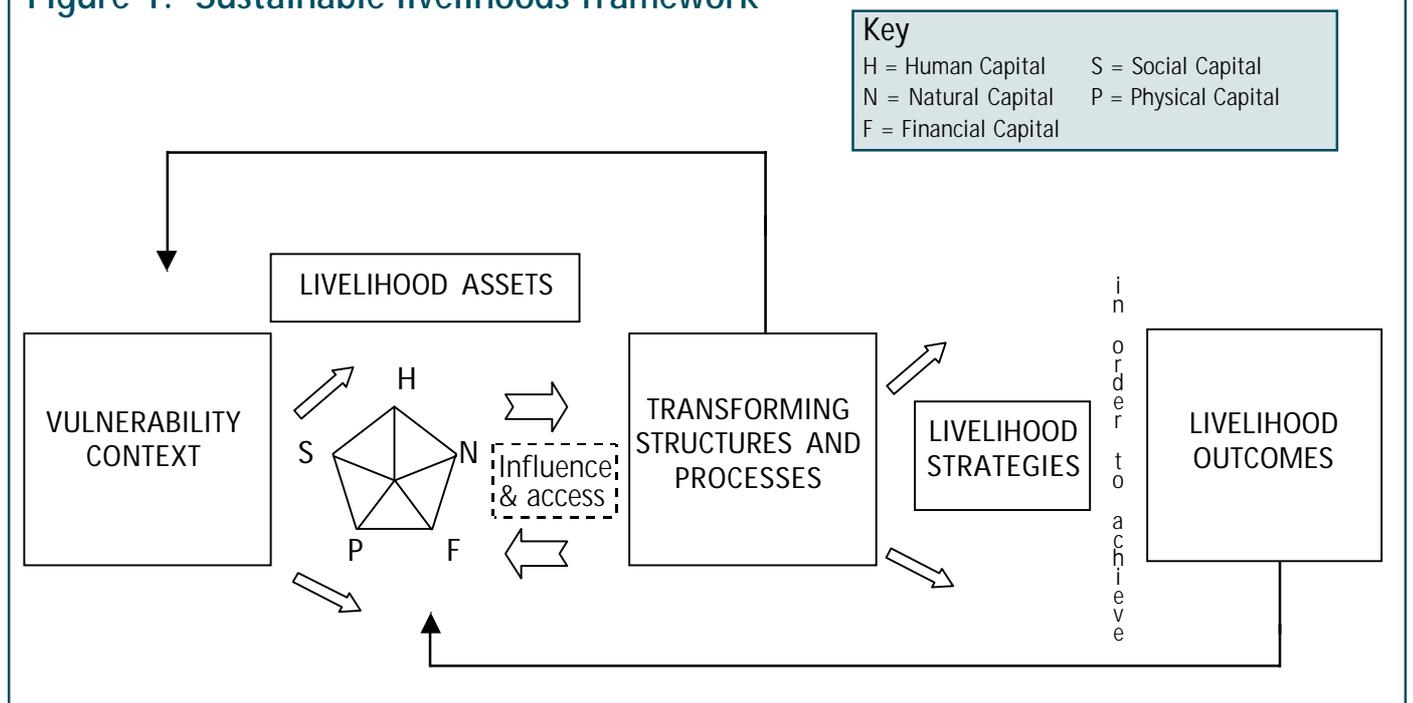
This set of Guidance Sheets attempts to summarise and share emerging thinking on the sustainable livelihoods approach. It does not offer definitive answers and guidelines. Instead, it is intended to stimulate readers to reflect on the approach and make their own contributions to its further development.

**The sustainable livelihoods framework**

The framework, which is presented in schematic form below and discussed in detail in Section 2 of the Guidance Sheets, has been developed to help understand and analyse the livelihoods of the poor. It is also useful in assessing the effectiveness of existing efforts to reduce poverty. Like all frameworks, it is a simplification; the full diversity and richness of livelihoods can be understood only by qualitative and participatory analysis at a local level.

The framework does not attempt to provide an exact representation of reality. It does, however, endeavour to provide a way of thinking about the livelihoods of poor people that will stimulate debate and reflection, thereby improving performance in poverty reduction. In its simplest form, the framework views people as operating in a context of vulnerability. Within this context, they have access to certain assets or poverty reducing factors. These gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organisational environment. This environment also influences the livelihood strategies – ways of combining and using assets – that are open to people in pursuit of beneficial livelihood outcomes that meet their own livelihood objectives.

**Figure 1. Sustainable livelihoods framework**



## The Guidance Sheets

These Guidance Sheets are intended to be a 'living' series. As the sustainable livelihoods approach evolves, so the sheets will be updated. Suggestions for modifications and/or new topics for sheets are welcomed. These should be sent to: [livelihoods@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:livelihoods@dfid.gov.uk).

Specifically the sheets aim to:

- show how the livelihoods approach fits in with DFID's overall aims;
- explain the livelihoods framework (as it is currently understood);
- explain links between this and existing/past approaches and methodologies;
- lay out suggestions for how the approach can be implemented in practice;
- pinpoint priorities (notable 'gaps' in understanding) for future work;
- identify relevant expertise (projects, experience and literature).

The sheets will be made available on the DFID website.

## Process: Consultation and collaboration

The Guidance Sheets are one product of a lengthy and still ongoing process of consultation about sustainable livelihoods. The consultation, which commenced in January 1998, has extended to:

- DFID personnel (both at headquarters and in regional offices)
- NGO representatives
- representatives of other bilateral and multilateral donors
- researchers
- DFID consultants.

The process of consultation and collaboration has been highly productive. These Guidance Sheets are a genuinely joint product; they try to capture thinking from well beyond DFID itself. However, thus far, DFID's developing country partners – policy-makers, leaders and clients – have not been adequately involved; their views have been sought only indirectly. These sheets can therefore be thought of as a starting point from which DFID personnel, and others who find the sheets useful, can begin to explore and develop further the new ideas with partner organisations.

## Outputs and resources

Other outputs of the consultation process include:

- A book of edited papers presented at the 1998 DFID Natural Resources Advisers' Conference: *Sustainable rural livelihoods: What contribution can we make?* Available from Marnie Durnford ([m-durnford@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:m-durnford@dfid.gov.uk)).
- The Sustainable Livelihoods 'Virtual Resource Centre' formed to provide support to DFID's learning about and implementation of the sustainable livelihoods approach. This resource centre brings together a wide range of external expertise in support of DFID. Management is from DFID headquarters. Contact is through: [livelihoods@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:livelihoods@dfid.gov.uk)
- The Sustainable Livelihoods Theme Group, an internal DFID grouping charged with enhancing DFID's effectiveness in promoting sustainable livelihoods. The Virtual Resource Centre will report through the DFID management point to the Theme Group.
- The establishment of productive working relations with a number of other development partners (including various NGOs, the UNDP, the World Bank).

Livelihoods thinking dates back to the work of Robert Chambers in the mid-1980s (further developed by Chambers, Conway and others in the early 1990s). Since that time a number of development agencies have adopted livelihoods concepts and made efforts to begin implementation. However, for DFID, the sustainable livelihoods approach represents a new departure in policy and practice.

### Origins: The White Paper

This series of Guidance Sheets comes out of an ongoing process of dialogue about how to achieve the goals and policy directions laid down in the UK Government's 1997 *White Paper on International Development*. The *White Paper* commits DFID to supporting:

- (i) policies and actions which promote sustainable livelihoods;
- (ii) better education, health and opportunities for poor people;
- (iii) protection and better management of the natural and physical environment;

thereby helping to create a supportive social, physical and institutional environment for poverty elimination.

Although the sustainable livelihoods approach appears to focus on objective (i), in its interpretation it subsumes the other objectives. It explicitly recognises the importance of physical well-being, education and the state of the natural environment (amongst other factors) to poor people and to the achievement of sustainable livelihoods.

### Sustainable livelihoods objectives

The sustainable livelihoods approach is broad and encompassing. It can, however, be distilled to six core objectives. DFID aims to increase the sustainability of poor people's livelihoods through promoting:

- improved access to high-quality education, information, technologies and training and better nutrition and health;
- a more supportive and cohesive social environment;
- more secure access to, and better management of, natural resources;
- better access to basic and facilitating infrastructure;
- more secure access to financial resources; and
- a policy and institutional environment that supports multiple livelihood strategies and promotes equitable access to competitive markets for all.

These objectives relate directly to the livelihoods framework; they will be explored in greater detail in Section 2 of the Guidance Sheets. Together they define the scope of DFID's livelihood-promoting activities (though not all objectives will be pursued in any given situation).

### What are we trying to achieve?

DFID's aim is the elimination of poverty in poorer countries. Specifically, DFID has signed up to the International Development Target of reducing by one-half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Adopting the livelihoods approach to understanding poverty, and pursuing the livelihoods objectives above, is expected to make a direct contribution to achieving this aim. It will provide structure to debate and discourse and help DFID and its partners respond to poor people's views and their own understanding of poverty – both its income and non-income dimensions. Most important, it will facilitate the identification of practical priorities for action that are based on the views and interests of those concerned.

The approach recognises the multiple dimensions of poverty identified in participatory poverty assessments (see 1.5). Its goal is to help poor people to achieve lasting improvements against the indicators of poverty that they themselves identify, and from a baseline they define. Through taking a wider and better informed view of the opportunities, constraints, objectives and interactions that characterise people's lives, it extends the 'menu' for DFID support to livelihood development. The

analysis that the approach entails helps improve the targeting of that support and makes explicit the connections between different activities undertaken by DFID and its partners. The result is a more effective contribution to poverty elimination.

## Sustainable livelihoods and poverty elimination

DFID's Theme Group on the Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion provides the overarching focus point for DFID's poverty reducing activities. The Theme Group's aim is to enhance DFID's potential for fostering pro-poor growth, undertaking poverty analyses and designing, implementing and assessing the impact of poverty reducing interventions. It works at both a conceptual level – developing background papers and guidance material – and providing operational support to country programmes. It also plays a role in the dissemination of publicity material on DFID's approach to poverty reduction and it liaises with external networks such as the DAC Informal Poverty Reduction Network.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Theme Group and the Theme Group on the Reduction and Poverty and Social Exclusion share a commitment to develop close links, facilitated in the first instance through overlapping membership. The Sustainable Livelihoods Theme Group looks to the Poverty Theme Group for advice on general approaches to poverty reduction and specific methodologies for understanding poverty (e.g. participatory poverty assessments). At the same time it is hoped that the Poverty Theme Group can gain from the perspectives and approaches to implementation promoted by the Sustainable Livelihoods Theme Group.

Adopting the sustainable livelihoods approach provides a way to improve the identification, appraisal, implementation and evaluation of development programmes so that they better address the priorities of poor people, both directly and at a policy level. In this way it represents one means of pursuing DFID's poverty elimination aim.

## Sustainable livelihoods and rights-based approaches

The 1997 *White Paper* commits DFID to promoting human rights through policy and practice.

Rights-based approaches to development take as their foundation the need to promote and protect human rights (those rights that have been recognised by the global community and are protected by international legal instruments). These include economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political rights, all of which are interdependent. Running through the rights-based approach are concerns with empowerment and participation, and with the elimination of discrimination on any grounds (race, language, gender, religion, etc.).

Rights-based and sustainable livelihoods approaches are complementary perspectives that seek to achieve many of the same goals (for example, empowerment of the most vulnerable and a strengthened capacity of the poor to achieve secure livelihoods). The primary focus of the rights perspective is on linkages between public institutions and civil society and, particularly, on how to increase the accountability of public institutions to all citizens. The livelihoods approach recognises the importance of these links and of enhancing accountability, though it takes as its starting point a need to understand the livelihoods of poor people in context. From this starting point it then tries to identify the specific constraints which prevent the realisation of people's rights and consequently the improvement of their livelihoods on a sustainable basis.

## Partnerships

The *White Paper* stresses the importance of partnerships at all levels. The debate about what this means in practice is still ongoing. It is hoped that the dialogue around the development and implementation of the sustainable livelihoods approach will eventually provide the basis for deeper and more meaningful development partnerships. Indeed this is already proving to be the case for DFID's relations with other donors. The debate has not yet extended adequately to partner organisations in developing countries. This is now a priority: DFID can only work effectively with partners with which it shares common objectives and approaches to development.

The unit of analysis in livelihoods investigation is likely to be an identifiable social group. It is critical not to assume homogeneity in populations or within households themselves. Relevant social divisions may include those relating to class, caste, age, ethnic origin, gender; they can only be defined and agreed through an iterative process of participatory enquiry at community level.

The word 'multiple' is used here because it helps emphasise not only that different people adopt different livelihood strategies and pursue different livelihood objectives, but that the same people simultaneously undertake a range of different activities and seek to achieve a range of different goals. Some goals may even conflict; most goals and activities will evolve over time.

The livelihoods approach is necessarily flexible in application, but this does not mean that its core principles should be compromised. This sheet outlines these principles and explains why they make such an important contribution to the overall value of the approach.

### People-centred

The livelihoods approach puts people at the centre of development. This focus on people is equally important at higher levels (when thinking about the achievement of objectives such as poverty reduction, economic reform or sustainable development) as it is at the micro or community level (where in many cases it is already well entrenched).

At a practical level, this means that the approach:

- starts with an analysis of people's livelihoods and how these have been changing over time;
- fully involves people and respects their views;
- focuses on the impact of different policy and institutional arrangements upon people/households and upon the dimensions of poverty they define (rather than on resources or overall output *per se*);
- stresses the importance of influencing these policies and institutional arrangements so they promote the agenda of the poor (a key step is political participation by poor people themselves);
- works to support people to achieve their own livelihood goals (though taking into account considerations regarding sustainability, see 1.4).

Sustainable poverty reduction will be achieved only if external support (i.e. support from outside the household) works with people in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environments and ability to adapt.

People – rather than the resources they use or the governments that serve them – are the priority concern. Adhering to this principle may well translate into providing support to resource management or good governance (for example). But it is the underlying motivation of supporting people's livelihoods that should determine the shape of the support and provide the basis for evaluating its success.

### Holistic

The livelihoods approach attempts to identify the most pressing constraints faced by, and promising opportunities open to, people regardless of where (i.e. in which sector, geographical space or level, from the local through to the international) these occur. It builds upon people's own definitions of these constraints and opportunities and, where feasible, it then supports people to address/realise them. The livelihoods framework helps to 'organise' the various factors which constrain or provide opportunities and to show how these relate to each other. It is not intended to be an exact model of the way the world is, nor does it mean to suggest that stakeholders themselves necessarily adopt a systemic approach to problem solving. Rather, it aspires to provide a way of thinking about livelihoods that is manageable and that helps improve development effectiveness.

- It is **non-sectoral** and applicable across geographical areas and social groups.
- It recognises **multiple influences** on people, and seeks to understand the relationships between these influences and their joint impact upon livelihoods.
- It recognises **multiple actors** (from the private sector to national level ministries, from community-based organisations to newly emerging decentralised government bodies).
- It acknowledges the **multiple livelihood strategies** that people adopt to secure their livelihoods.
- It seeks to achieve **multiple livelihood outcomes**, to be determined and negotiated by people themselves.

In this way it attempts to gain a realistic understanding of what shapes people's livelihoods and how the various influencing factors can be adjusted so that, taken together, they produce more beneficial livelihood outcomes.

## Dynamic

Just as people's livelihoods and the institutions that shape them are highly dynamic, so is this approach. It seeks to understand and learn from change so that it can support positive patterns of change and help mitigate negative patterns. It explicitly recognises the effects on livelihoods of external shocks and more predictable, but not necessarily less damaging, trends. Attempting to capture and build upon such livelihood dynamism significantly increases the scope of livelihood analysis. It calls for ongoing investigation and an effort to uncover the nature of complex, two-way cause and effect relationships and iterative chains of events.

The true dynamism of livelihoods cannot be adequately presented in a two dimensional framework, but it can be reflected in process and modes of analysis. This is an important area for monitoring and learning as we move forward.

## Building on strengths

An important principle of this approach is that it starts with an analysis of strengths, rather than needs. This does not mean that it places undue focus on the better endowed members of the community. Rather, it implies a recognition of everyone's inherent potential, whether this derives from their strong social networks, their access to physical resources and infrastructure, their ability to influence core institutions or any other factor that has poverty-reducing potential. In 'livelihoods focused' development efforts, a key objective will be to remove the constraints to the realisation of potential. Thus people will be assisted to become more robust, stronger and better able to achieve their own objectives.

## Macro-micro links

Development activity tends to focus at *either* the macro *or* the micro level. The livelihoods approach attempts to bridge this gap, emphasising the importance of macro level policy and institutions to the livelihood options of communities and individuals. It also stresses the need for higher level policy development and planning to be informed by lessons learnt and insights gained at the local level. This will simultaneously give local people a stake in policy and increase overall effectiveness. It is, though, a difficult task to achieve. Much macro policy is developed in isolation from the people it affects. Indeed, understanding of the effects of policies on people (what actually happens as opposed to what is assumed will happen) and people on policies (the policy making process itself) is remarkably limited. Both these areas will need to be better understood if the full value of the livelihoods approach is to be realised.

The isolation of rural areas has frequently led to an underestimation of the impact upon rural people of policies and events emanating from the capital city or further afield at international levels. The focus of rural development has therefore tended to remain quite micro and local.

## Sustainability

While it is common to hear and use the short-hand 'livelihoods approach' (i.e. omitting 'sustainable'), the notion of sustainability is key to this approach. It should not be ignored or marginalised. Its different aspects are discussed in detail in the following sheet (1.4).

Sustainable systems – whether livelihoods, communities or national economies – accumulate stocks of assets; they increase the capital base over time. Unsustainable systems deplete or run down capital, spending assets as if they were income, and so leaving less for future generations.

For institutional sustainability to be achieved it is important to have in place: well-defined laws, participatory policy-making processes and effective public and private sector organisations that create a framework within which the livelihoods of the poor can be continuously improved.

An externality occurs when one person's behaviour automatically has effects on other people. This is common in the case of use of natural resources, for example, and has a significant impact upon the sustainability of overall systems.

### What is sustainability?

Sustainability has many dimensions, all of which are important to the sustainable livelihoods approach.

Livelihoods are sustainable when they:

- are resilient in the face of external shocks and stresses;
- are not dependent upon external support (or if they are, this support itself should be economically and institutionally sustainable);
- maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources; and
- do not undermine the livelihoods of, or compromise the livelihood options open to, others.

Another way of conceptualising the many dimensions of sustainability is to distinguish between environmental, economic, social and institutional aspects of sustainable systems.

- **Environmental sustainability** is achieved when the productivity of life-supporting natural resources is conserved or enhanced for use by future generations.
- **Economic sustainability** is achieved when a given level of expenditure can be maintained over time. In the context of the livelihoods of the poor, economic sustainability is achieved if a baseline level of economic welfare can be achieved and sustained. (The economic baseline is likely to be situation-specific, though it can be thought of in terms of the 'dollar-a-day' of the International Development Targets.)
- **Social sustainability** is achieved when social exclusion is minimised and social equity maximised.
- **Institutional sustainability** is achieved when prevailing structures and processes have the capacity to continue to perform their functions over the long term.

Very few livelihoods qualify as sustainable across all these dimensions. Nevertheless sustainability is a key goal and its pursuit should influence all DFID's support activities. Progress towards sustainability can then be assessed, even if 'full' sustainability is never achieved.

### Why is sustainability important?

Sustainability is an important qualifier to DFID's view of livelihoods because it implies that progress in poverty reduction is lasting, rather than fleeting. This does not mean that any given resource or institution must survive in exactly the same form. Rather it implies accumulation in the broad capital base that provides the basis for improved livelihoods, especially for poor people.

### Trade-offs and choices

Recognising the multiple dimensions of sustainability and people's multiple livelihood objectives is key to the sustainable livelihoods approach. However with diversity come trade-offs; trade-offs within livelihood outcomes (see 2.6) and between dimensions of sustainability and livelihood outcomes are inevitable. The following are just some of the different types of tension that may arise:

- tension between locally identified needs for greater livelihood security and wider concerns about environmental sustainability;
- tension between maximising production/income in the short term and guarding against vulnerability to external shocks in the longer term; and
- tension between achievement of individual, household or community livelihood objectives and the requirement not to compromise the livelihood opportunities open to others.

The sustainable livelihoods approach can offer no simple 'solutions' to these challenges. What it does do is to provide an approach to thinking through the conflict, including providing a framework that facilitates coherent and structured discussion of differing perspectives. By encouraging local people to think about a broad range of livelihood outcomes, potential conflicts can be explicitly discussed. Through coupling livelihoods analysis with a broader process of social assessment, equity and 'externality' issues can be brought to the fore. This is, however, an area in which further work is required.

The asset pentagon that lies at the heart of livelihoods analysis (see 2.3) encourages users to think about substitutability between different types of capital. This is particularly useful when considering whether a decline in the quality or availability of natural capital can be compensated for by an increase in other types of capital (for example social or financial capital).

- Some argue that sustainability is achieved when overall stocks of capital (in whatever combination) are maintained and accumulated. This metaphor presents problems in practical application (e.g. certain types of capital cannot be readily measured). At the same time it seems to reflect well the way in which we think about our environment and the way technology can be manipulated to compensate for losses in non-renewable natural resources.
- Others argue that different types of capital cannot readily substitute for each other. This type of 'strong sustainability' thinking is reflected in the International Development Target on environmental sustainability. This takes the view that natural resources are sufficiently important to such a wide range of livelihoods, that absolute preservation – even replenishment, given the extent to which they have already been degraded – should be the aim.

In all cases, the feasibility/acceptability of interchanging types of capital will depend on the type of environment in which people live (e.g. the types of shocks and trends that they are likely to face, the reliability of markets and institutions, etc.).

The International Development Target on environmental sustainability and regeneration calls for 'the implementation of National Strategies for Sustainable Development in all countries by 2005 so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015'.

## National Strategies for Sustainable Development

The 1997 *White Paper* commits the UK Government to work at both an international level and with partner countries to help develop and implement National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSDs). The international agreement that these NSSDs should be under implementation by 2005 makes this an immediate priority for DFID.

Essential elements of DFID's current thinking on NSSD implementation are that:

- NSSDs should build on existing work rather than being new, stand-alone documents;
- environmental sustainability (and poverty reduction) objectives should be integrated into mainstream development policy, rather than being 'add-ons';
- implementation should be considered not only at the national level but also at sub-national, district, local levels, etc.;
- consultation and participation should be balanced with sound analysis;
- while donors can help co-ordinate, domestic governments – and other domestic stakeholders – must own NSSD processes;
- it is vitally important to build local capacity for design and implementation of NSSDs; and
- environmental costs should be internalised through the development of appropriate policies and incentive structures.

There is clearly much congruence between the sustainability concerns of the livelihoods approach and NSSDs. In addition, to be effective NSSDs must build upon extensive stakeholder participation, coupled with a strategic and long-term approach to development. Both these features are also key to the success of the livelihoods approach.

## Maximising the positive (as opposed to minimising the negative)

Both NSSDs and the livelihoods approach go well beyond traditional notions of 'the greening of aid'. These tend to focus upon minimising the negative impacts of development interventions through the use of environmental impact assessment and checklists. These methodologies are important but limited; they are often costly, seldom participatory and have a tendency to emphasise the state of resources themselves, rather than people and their livelihoods. By contrast, the livelihoods approach views the sustainability of resources as an integral component of the sustainability of livelihoods (which has many dimensions). Rather than seeking to minimise the negative, it seeks to maximise the positive contribution made by the natural environment to people's livelihood outcomes.

The livelihoods approach enters an already crowded conceptual and operational landscape for development. Understanding the links between different approaches is essential, both to avoid confusion and to improve the scope for collaboration with colleagues and partners who come from a different starting point. Section 4 of the Guidance Sheets deals with links and overlap at a methodological level. This sheet briefly outlines links at the level of broad approaches to development (participatory development, sector wide approaches and integrated rural development). Other linking issues, such as decentralisation, public sector reform and community-based development are addressed at relevant points in subsequent sheets.

### Participatory development

The livelihoods approach will not be effective unless operationalised in a participatory manner by people who are skilled in social analysis and who share an overall commitment to poverty elimination. The approach incorporates and builds upon existing participatory methodologies (see Section 4).

- It promotes people's achievement of their own livelihood objectives. There is no prejudgement about what these are – they must be 'established' through participatory activities.
- It builds upon people's strengths. Again, this is only possible if participatory methodologies are used to establish who has access to which types of capital and how this is affected by the institutional, social and organisational environment.
- It seeks to understand, through participatory analysis, the effects of macro policies upon livelihoods.
- Indicators of impact are expected to be negotiated with local people. This idea of 'negotiation' goes well beyond minimal ideas of participation as consultation.

There are particularly strong links between the sustainable livelihoods approach and participatory poverty assessments (PPAs). PPAs have been developed as an instrument for including the perspectives of the poor in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to deal with it. Early PPAs were mostly commissioned to contribute to the preparation of a particular broader document (e.g. a World Bank Country Poverty Assessment, or a UN Country Human Development Report). Increasingly, the trend is to build PPAs into ongoing welfare monitoring and policy formulation processes and to use them as a way to build ownership and new relations between various actors in the policy process.

Like livelihoods analysis, PPAs are rooted in traditions of participatory research and action. The two share many themes in common (e.g. an emphasis on vulnerability to shocks and trends and on various kinds of assets) and are therefore expected to be complementary. However, since both vary by context, it is not possible to make definitive statements about the links in any given case.

### Sector-wide approaches

Livelihoods and sector-wide approaches are broadly complementary; each should gain from recognising the strengths of the other. Livelihoods analysis lays a heavy emphasis on understanding the structures and processes that condition people's access to assets and their choice of livelihood strategies. Where the major constraint is poor performance by government agencies at a sectoral level, then sector wide support programmes will be highly appropriate. This is especially the case for government-dominated areas such as health and education.

Sector programmes themselves will be enriched if they build on the information gathered in livelihoods analysis. This will help those involved to perceive the interactions between different sectors and the importance of developing inter-sectoral links in order to maximise impact at a livelihood level (the benchmark for performance). It will also encourage public sector institutions to recognise the many different players in the development process, creating pressure within the sector planning process to open up the dialogue beyond government, to innovate and to incorporate best practice from existing project-level activities.

The quality of PPAs is uneven – those that have produced a deeper analysis have generally involved the participation of experienced social researchers with a detailed knowledge of the country or area concerned.

It is important not to treat capacity-building work within public sector agencies as an end in itself. Its ultimate goal should be to contribute to poverty elimination through more effective delivery of services, better management of resources, etc.

Livelihoods approaches and the support activities which derive from them should also gain from the lessons learnt and the objectives pursued in sector approaches. These include:

- the importance of ensuring domestic government ownership of the development process;
- the need to base all support on best-practice public management principles (i.e. not to extend the role of government to inappropriate activities and to stress the importance of developing capacity in areas such as financial management and budgeting); and
- the value of co-ordination between different donors (and the steps required to achieve this).

## Integrated rural development

One of the early 'criticisms' that has been levelled at the livelihoods approach is that it is too similar to the failed integrated rural development (IRD) approaches of the 1970s. It is easy to see where this reflection is coming from; the two approaches share much in common. But the sustainable livelihoods approach endeavours to build upon the strengths of IRD (especially the recognition of the need for broad-based support in rural areas) without falling into the traps that caused IRD's downfall. In particular, the livelihoods approach does not aim to establish integrated programmes in rural areas. While recognising the importance to rural poverty reduction of a wide range of factors it will target just a few core areas (with the help of thorough analysis of existing livelihoods and a bottom-up planning process) so that activities remain manageable. The livelihoods approach will also address macro level and institutional factors where these are a major constraint. IRD, by contrast was forced to operate within a hostile macro-economic and institutional environment, dominated and often heavily distorted by government.

Table 1 juxtaposes the two approaches and suggests where some of the main differences lie.

For a fuller version of Table 1 see Chapter 1 (p. 19) of *Sustainable rural livelihoods: What contribution can we make?* Papers presented at DFID Natural Resources Advisers' Conference, July 1998.

Table 1.	Integrated Rural Development (1970s)	Sustainable Livelihoods (late 1990s)
Starting point	Structures, areas	People and their existing strengths and constraints
Conceptions of poverty	Holistic, multi-dimensional Recommendation domains suggest uniformity (an operational simplification)	Multi-dimensional, complex, local Embraces the concepts of risk and variability
Problem analysis	Undertaken by planning unit in short period of time, viewed as conclusive	Inclusive process, iterative and incomplete
Sectoral scope	Multi-sectoral, single plan Sector involvement established at outset	Multi-sectoral, many plans Small number of entry points Sectoral involvement evolves with project
Level of operation	Local, area-based	Both policy and field level, clear links between the two
Partner organisation	National and local governments	Local and national governments NGOs, civil society organisations, private sector
Project management structure	Dedicated project management unit, external to government	Project within partner organisation
Co-ordination (between sectors)	Integrated execution (donor-driven)	Driven by shared objectives, benefits of co-ordination identified by those involved
Sustainability	Not explicitly considered	Multiple dimensions Core concern