

CHAPTER 2

LIVELIHOODS ANALYSIS AND THE CHALLENGES OF POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY

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Introduction and background

The aim of this paper is to provide the elements of a framework for a broader discussion of how best to design and support interventions that strengthen household livelihoods in post-conflict situations.

The paper sets out to:

- Provide a background on key livelihoods concepts and frameworks;
- Examine the diverse impacts of conflict on the livelihoods of different households, and assess the latter's capacity to cope and recover;
- Explore the contributions that adopting a livelihoods approach can offer to the complex challenges of recovery in post-conflict situations; and
- Examine linkages and synergies with other analytical frameworks that emphasise capabilities, political economy, food security and risk and vulnerability reduction.

Livelihoods concepts and frameworks at a glance

This section explores the roots of livelihood approaches in the changing development narratives over the last 50 years, examining the key concept of differentiation that underpins livelihoods and vulnerability analysis. It provides a brief outline of different livelihoods frameworks, and of the concepts that define them; explores the concepts of assets, capabilities and activities that characterise household livelihood strategies; and investigates the interconnections between these elements and factors in the broader environment that affect household livelihood security. It concludes with a brief examination of the concept of vulnerability, and an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of livelihoods approaches.

A scan of the literature reveals how the concept of livelihoods has permeated most development domains: poverty reduction, environmental and natural resource management, local economic development, land and tenure reform, disaster risk reduction and post-conflict recovery strategies, to identify but a few.

Ellis¹ notes that it is roughly five years since the “explosion of interest in the concept of sustainable livelihoods”. In this period a number of conceptual frameworks have been developed, and a variety of methodological approaches have been adapted to working on different scales. However, the proliferation of frameworks and the debates over the concepts that underlie them have contributed to the general impression that livelihoods analysis is excessively complex, time-consuming and unrealistically holistic. This has led livelihoods practitioners to take stock and refocus on a few core concepts.

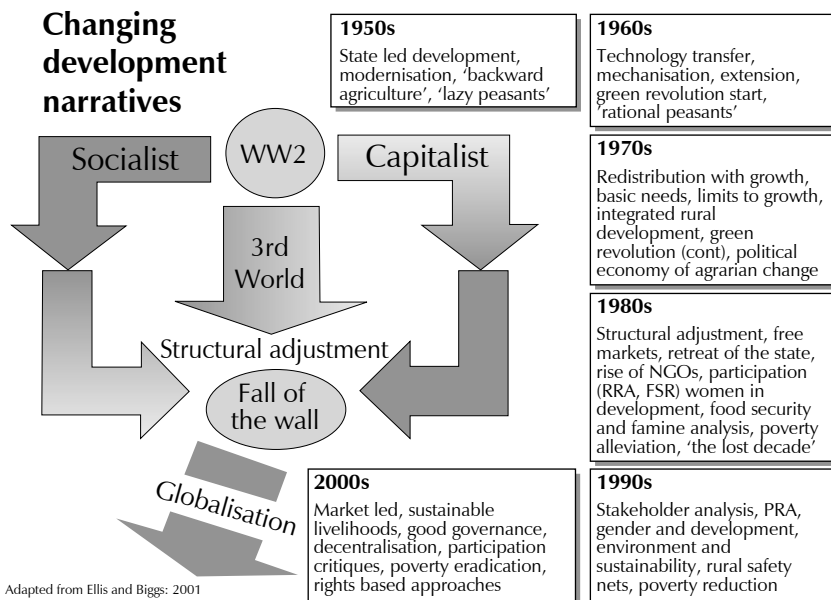
Essentially, adopting a sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach involves working with a conceptual framework that assists one to understand how people live, and to identify the trends and factors in the micro, meso and macro environments that enhance or undermine their means of livelihood and their sustainability.

Ellis describes the commonly accepted core of SL thinking as “the requirement to understand and act upon the asset limitations of the poor, the risks they confront, and the institutional environment that either facilitates or blocks them in their own endeavours to build pathways out of poverty”.²

If livelihoods approaches are to make a meaningful contribution to the development of effective post-conflict recovery strategies, it is important first to review the evolution of livelihoods thinking and assess the significance of the core ideas.

Locating livelihoods approaches among changing development narratives

The graphic on the right provides a schematic summary of changing development trends and themes between 1950 and the present day.³ Clearly, in reality trends are not neatly packaged into decades. Issues that gain prominence in a particular ten-year span often have their roots in a previous period. For example, SL draws on a variety of earlier sources and applications: Integrated Rural Development, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), gender, poverty, governance, sustainability and famine research.



The period 1949–1989 saw the growth and decline of the socialist project, which was characterised by the centrality of the state, the party and ideology; rigid and impermeable definitions of class; and highly centralised command and control planning over most aspects of social and economic life. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to map these trends or to explore the socialist experience in African history (or its linkages with anti-colonial national liberation struggles).

1950s and 60s: Modernisation and technology transfer

In the period immediately following the Second World War, the capitalist bloc also emphasised a strong state. Keynesian economic policies predominated, and much confidence was placed in the benefits of modernisation. 'Development' was something done by the state for the people. Development planning was dominated by the positivist paradigm in which "knowledge about the world is summarised in universal or time and context-free generalizations and laws".⁴ This era was characterised by top-down or blueprint approaches to development "characterised by external technologies and national level policies".⁵

Great faith was invested in the knowledge of technical experts and the development of technological solutions during this period. Development programmes were often characterised by the ‘one size fits all’ provision of technical assistance ‘packages’. For example, the strategies designed for the agricultural sectors of developing countries involved major investments in crop research and the technology of crop production. Such development initiatives were often appropriated by the elites, and were consequently of little benefit to the households they were intended to assist. In some cases such interventions even contributed the dispossession or further marginalisation of the poor. Very little attention was paid by the planners to how poor people actually lived, or what their priorities were.

1970s: Orthodoxies and alternatives

During the 1970s the global scene was characterised by national liberation struggles, the emergence of more radical social agendas, and an upsurge of environmentalism. All of these meant that it was a decade of contestation. A significant Marxist critique that emphasised issues of class power and social differentiation was levelled against mainstream development orthodoxies. While these issues remain central to development practice, the Marxist theoretical frameworks of the time were highly generalised, economic and “aspired to excessive explanatory power”.⁶ Nevertheless this environment of questioning caused some shifts in mainstream thinking, including “the flirtation with ideas of basic needs and redistribution with growth”.⁷ At the same time attempts were made to address some of the problems emerging from technicist development strategies. Mainstream development agencies began to focus on trying to improve both the management of development projects and the integration between initiatives in different sectors – health, education, infrastructure, water supply, agricultural production, job creation and so on. This gave rise to so-called Integrated Rural Development Projects that were variously interpreted by national governments and international agencies, but in general favoured multisectoral planning and improved local area co-ordination. In practice these often proved difficult and expensive to implement, and impossible to sustain.⁸

1980s: The lost decade

The 1980s, which saw the rollback of new thinking in the 1970s at least within the mainstream, heralded the collapse of the socialist project and the new

eminence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 1987 the World Bank introduced structural adjustment policies, which relied on a basic formula: a reduction in public spending; the removal of subsidies on food, health and education; higher interest rates; currency devaluation; lower real wages; reduced tariffs; and the privatisation of services. This laid the foundation for market liberalisation and the globalisation of the world economy. Domestic economies were opened up to international trade and financial flows, which in turn contributed to a diminution of the power of the state (a trend that rapidly gathered momentum during the 90s).

Development reached an impasse in the 1980s, earning it the label of 'the lost decade'. This period was characterised worldwide by a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Developing countries suffered increasing poverty, exclusion and inequality. There was something of a crisis in development thinking, associated with the removal of socialist trajectories from academic and political development agendas. However this hiatus was short-lived. The new environment quickly opened up fresh perspectives which, interestingly, tended to reject, or at the least show a healthy disrespect for, totalising theory.

Contemporary narratives: 1990 to the present

The contemporary period is one of great complexity. Many of the old areas of contestation have resurfaced in new forms. However the new environment is no longer characterised by simple dichotomies between mainstream and alternative development paths. Alternative discourses promoting popular, people-centred, participatory, gender-conscious and sustainable development are being quickly assimilated into the mainstream.⁹

On the one hand the dominant neoliberal paradigm, with its emphasis on growth-led development, has gathered further momentum with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. This has further weakened the regulatory power of individual states with respect to trade and financial flows, because the WTO aims to create a borderless market where capital and goods (but not people) can move about freely.¹⁰

Numerous commentators argue that although globalisation removes barriers between nations, it simultaneously erects barriers within nations between the poor and the rich. In so doing it unravels the social contract that lies at the core of the redistributive state. The last decade has also seen important shifts

in environmental narratives. The Earth Summit and the parallel Global Forum in Rio in 1992, followed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, heralded the rise of environmental politics and raised awareness of the concept of ‘sustainable development’.

On the other hand, as Lipton¹¹ notes, since the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen, when countries committed themselves to halving by 2015 the poverty levels of 1990, governments, donors and agencies have made reducing or even eliminating poverty their main objective. But poverty has long been on the development agenda. Over the last 20 years, discourse on the topic has shifted from poverty alleviation to poverty reduction, and on to the current objective of poverty eradication. However, as Ellis and Biggs point out,¹² this change in the labelling of poverty discourse amounts to little more than ‘development spin’.

Despite scepticism about the new labels, the current emphasis has led to the development of more nuanced understandings of poverty, many of which derive from participatory assessments. Poverty is now acknowledged to be multidimensional rather than assessable through a simple poverty line measure. Greater clarity is also emerging on the combination of factors that contribute to people’s living in chronic poverty, and the pathways followed by households as they move in and out of poverty.

A corrective shift has been made: poor people are no longer regarded as consumers of services, but as citizens with social and economic rights. There is a growing emphasis on rights-based approaches that make connections and “causal links between political marginality and poverty, and thus emphasise questions of social differentiation and social exclusion”.¹³

The evolution of livelihoods approaches

The livelihoods approach draws on aspects of:

- Integrated rural development planning during the 1970s;
- Food security and famine analysis initiatives during the 1980s;
- Participatory research methods, including Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Resource Appraisal (PRA);
- Farming systems research;
- Gender analysis and household research;
- Entitlement and capability theory;
- Definitions of sustainability;

- Vulnerability theories;¹⁴
- Risk assessment and reduction strategies;
- Household economy approaches;
- Participatory poverty assessment; and
- Appreciative enquiry.

Early definitions of sustainable livelihoods appeared in the Brundtland report issued in 1987. Chambers and Swift, working at the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton in the United Kingdom (UK), started developing livelihoods concepts during the late 1980s. In the early 1990s Chambers and Conway helped to consolidate the concept by proposing a definition of livelihoods and the factors that make them sustainable. This definition underpins many of the livelihoods frameworks currently in use.

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from shocks and stresses, maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels in the long and short term.¹⁵

In 1997 the concept of livelihoods was made a mainstream issue in the UK government's White Paper on International Development, which committed its Department for International Development (DFID) to promoting sustainable livelihoods while improving the management of the natural and physical environment.

They adapted the Chamber and Conway definition as follows:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social assets) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future while not undermining the natural resource base.¹⁶

The original DFID focus on rural livelihoods concerned "mainstreaming environment within a holistic framework".¹⁷

As numerous other actors in the development field adopted the concept, it became more closely associated with poverty reduction and rights-based

discourses. It also lost its exclusively rural label as it broadened to include urban livelihoods.

An earlier definition expresses these perspectives on what 'livelihoods' entails:

People's capacity to generate and maintain their means of living, enhance their well-being and that of future generations. These capacities are contingent on the availability and accessibility of options which are ecological, economic, political and which are predicated on equity, ownership of resources and participatory decision making.¹⁸

The concept of livelihoods has now inserted itself into virtually all development discourse. Hussein¹⁹ has recently published a comparison of the ways in which livelihoods approaches have been adapted by 15 development agencies, which range from bilateral and multilateral bodies to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Households and differentiation

Livelihoods approaches are household-focused as opposed to community-based. Analysis in this discipline starts from a critical assessment of the concept of 'community'.

Many earlier approaches to development oversimplified realities that are multifaceted and untidy, often tacitly assuming that poor rural and urban communities were homogeneous and that households had a single-purpose reliance on one main way of making a living. Again, earlier mainstream development approaches premised on 'community development' often made the assumption that communities or community groups had common interests. They failed to disaggregate households sufficiently, or to identify disparate social relations of power and influence. In the same way the mantra of 'participation' often obscured who was participating and whose interests such processes served. The recent critiques of participation advanced by Cooke and Kothari²⁰ are apposite here.

As a result of these early versions of livelihoods analysis, governments, development agencies and NGOs tended to focus on narrow sectoral strategies that commonly bypassed those most vulnerable. They also failed to recognise both the extent to which the rural and urban poor depend on multiple livelihood strategies, and the ways in which these are institutionally mediated.

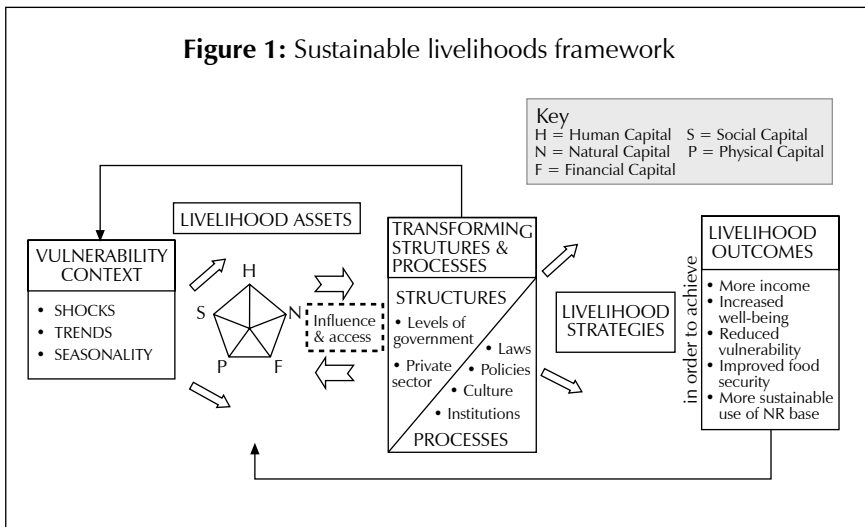
Livelihoods frameworks

A number of frameworks²¹ have now been developed in an attempt to conceptualise the relationship between households, their assets, capabilities and activities and the factors in the local and external environment that either improve or undermine their livelihoods over time.

Visualising these relationships presents a challenge. Although a framework diagram does not try to model ‘reality’, it is seldom able even to capture conceptually the dynamic interplay of issues within and between households and the environment within which they exist.

The DFID framework

One of the most widely used livelihood frameworks was drawn up by the UK DFID.



The aim of this framework is to conceptualise the following:

- How people operate within a vulnerability context that is shaped by different factors including shocks, stresses and seasonal or longer-term trends.

- How people draw on different categories of livelihood asset or ‘capital’ (human, social, natural, physical and financial), access to which is influenced by the vulnerability context and a range of local and external structures and processes. (More recently the DFID has changed its terminology to refer to these structures and processes as ‘policies, institutions and processes’ – PIPs – meaning the governance environment that shapes local livelihood options.)
- How people use their asset bases to develop a range of livelihood activities to achieve the livelihood outcomes they desire.

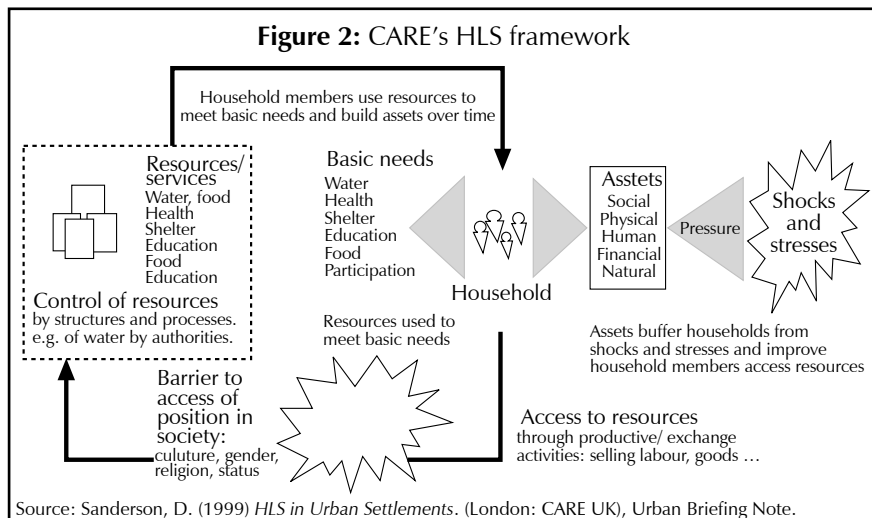
The DFID framework has generated a great deal of debate. It has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to issues of politics and power, and for extending economic concepts into the domain of social science, causing a good deal of confusion. Much of the debate centres on the concept of ‘social capital’, which refers to the “formal and informal networks that enable people to mobilise resources and achieve common goals”. Some commentators like Harriss see social capital as ‘BankSpeak’, a term designed to neutralise and obscure the problems and relations of power,²² a view also advocated by Fine, who argues that any use of the term social capital implies acceptance of mainstream economic discourse.²³ There is a vast literature on the social capital debate. Unfortunately space does not permit a proper analysis here. However, it is important to recognise Murray’s critique of equating assets with varieties of capital.

Equating assets theoretically with varieties of ‘capital’ intellectually distorts our understanding of capital and politically distorts our understanding of the causes of poverty. On the first point capital is properly a social relation between people, not an attribute of rich or poor households respectively. On the second point attention is displaced from the inequalities of power that must surely be invoked to explain the persistence or worsening of poverty.²⁴

Despite the validity of these criticisms, it is worth noting that the concept of social capital has become common currency in policy and development circles that do not subscribe to ‘BankSpeak’ and advocate strong rights-based approaches to the problems of poverty and development.

The CARE framework

CARE is an international NGO that uses the livelihoods approach as its primary planning framework.



CARE emphasises the importance of using a 'light' and adaptable conceptual framework, which focuses on vulnerable households and recognises the factors that perpetuate poverty. It conceives of households as having basic needs. To meet them, members of the household must obtain access to resources by carrying out a variety of activities. There are institutionally mediated barriers, however, which prevent households from gaining access to these resources. Households with a diversified asset base are best able to cope with shocks and stresses in the local and external environment.

CARE also has experience of using livelihoods analysis in post-conflict scenarios. Hussein²⁵ describes how CARE used household livelihoods assessments in Kosovo,²⁶ training separate Albanian and Serbian settlement teams to gather information in different locations. This was conceptualised as part of a shift from relief to longer-term livelihoods perspectives intended to assist recovery.

The Learning about Livelihoods framework

In Southern Africa a regional initiative²⁷ was undertaken to develop a framework to synthesise and simplify aspects of other approaches, and give prominence to issues of differentiation and power.²⁸ The Learning about Livelihoods (LAL)²⁹ framework draws on the original Chambers and Conway definition to identify a simple 'household triangle' of assets, capabilities and activities.

It deliberately avoids the concept of capital, for both theoretical and practical reasons. (The theoretical debates were alluded to in the discussion of the DFID framework.) The practical drawbacks were that those involved in the initiative found that field staff and practitioners often had difficulty with the concept of capital or were diverted into debate on the distinctions between different types of capital.

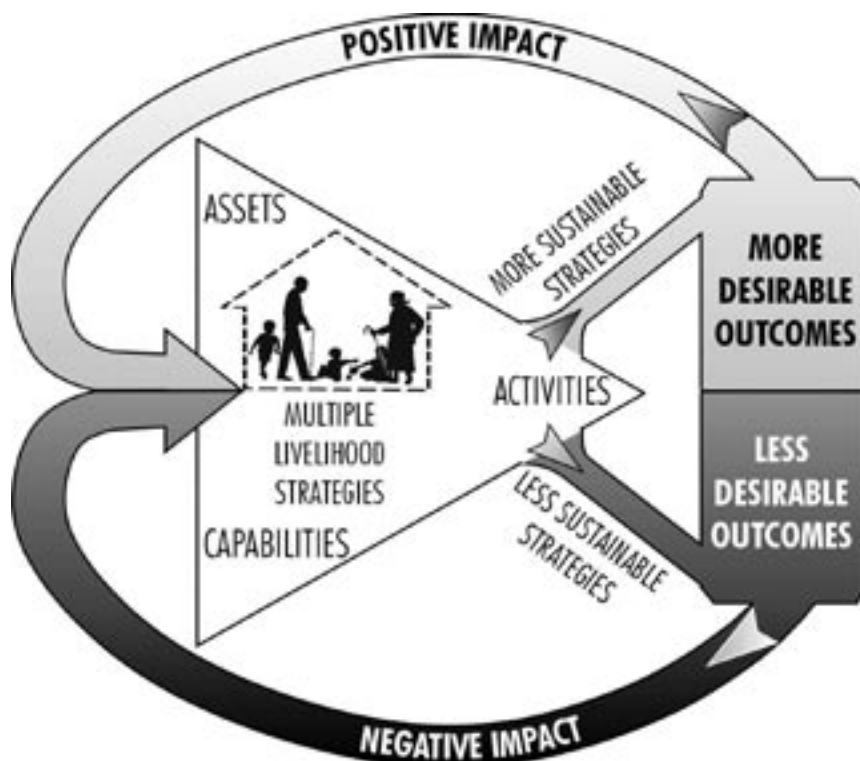
At the core of the LAL approach is the concept of differentiation understanding the differences in power and voice and the disparities in access and entitlement to resources that exist between households and individuals. This has much in common with frameworks in political economy, which are explored further below. Differentiation sheds light both on the complexities in society and livelihood strategies, and on the dynamic interactions of conflict and cooperation, bargaining and negotiation, relative power and powerlessness that define social relations. At the micro level, the approach recognises that there is differentiation between men and women within households, and also examines differences of entitlement between people of the same sex, but of different ages.

The concept of differentiation is particularly important in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. It can help us understand why certain households and individuals are better able to cope than others in conflict situations, and how conflicts may present opportunities for some households while devastating the livelihoods of others.

The LAL framework puts households at the centre, and emphasises their complex, dynamic and differentiated nature. Households come in different shapes and sizes. They are not necessarily 'bounded' – people who are regarded as members of the household may be living elsewhere. They can also be ranked into different categories of well-being, usually derived from locally-defined criteria related to their livelihood activities.³⁰ Households turn their capabilities – health, labour power, education, skills, knowledge (and rights) – into social and material assets by engaging in multiple livelihood activities.

The livelihood activities undertaken by any household may be more or less sustainable and have more or less desirable outcomes, both for that household and for others. Those strategies that are more sustainable and enable the household to achieve its ends with a low risk of unintended consequences have a positive impact. Often (but not always) this good result filters into the social, economic, institutional and natural environment in which the household operates, by association. The converse can also be true.

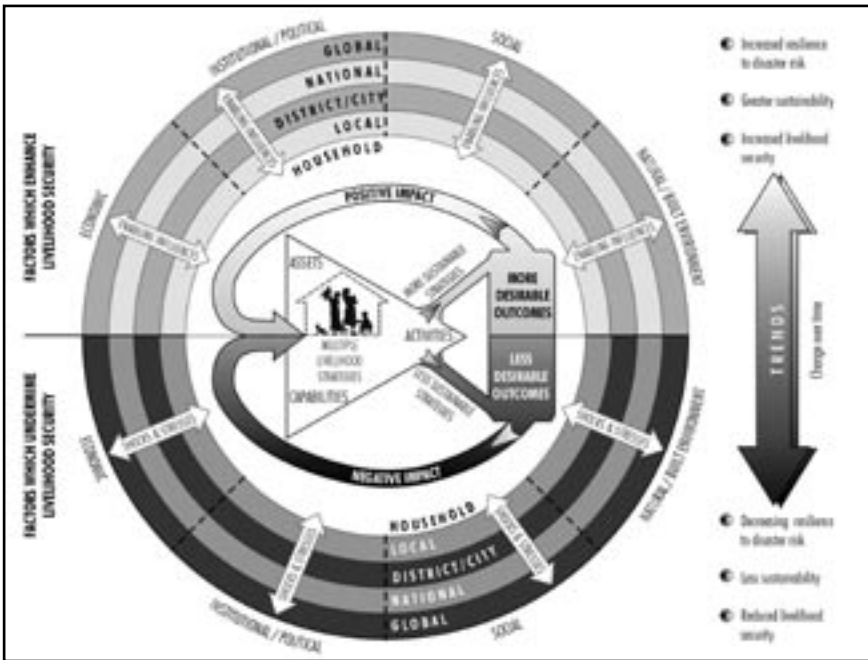
However there is an important caveat to be entered here. While the livelihood strategies of one household may be sustainable and have positive effects for the household itself, *at the same time* they may directly undermine the livelihood of another household. Thus the win-win scenario that is often predicated as the outcome of development initiatives to diversify household livelihoods should be critically examined, particularly in conflict and post-conflict scenarios.



Like its predecessors, the LAL framework shows how households and their livelihoods are affected, and in turn affect, the external environment at different levels. (See the graphic on the next page.) The external environment contains factors that either improve or undermine livelihood opportunities, security and sustainability. These factors are located in different spheres, ranging from local to global, and in different sectors: economic, institutional or political, social, the natural and the built environments. They can be grouped

into enabling influences (the top hemisphere) and undermining influences, shocks and stresses (the bottom hemisphere).

The dynamic interplay between these various factors enables analysts using the framework to understand trends and changes over time. These may indicate increases or decreases in household resilience to risk of disaster and threats to livelihood security. The trends identified provide information as to the balance of forces that can either lift households out of poverty or pull them in deeper.



Assets

As can be seen from the frameworks described above, there are different ways of conceptualising assets.

Chambers and Conway distinguish between social and material assets: Social assets are ‘intangible’, being the benefits that come through relationships with people and institutions and access to resources; and the social and economic rights and entitlements that are determined by local rules, social norms, institutions and political structures. Gender and age also shape the nature of the

claims and access to the benefits that a particular social system will provide. Material assets are tangible, actual physical things that people own, control or have access to. They include land, housing, services, cash, stores of food, furniture, tools and equipment and livestock.

As noted above, the DFID framework conceptualises assets as different types of capital – human, physical, social, financial and natural. The table below consolidates the categories identified in the different frameworks that distinguish between social and material assets.

Social assets	Material assets
Human capital – skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health	Physical capital – the basic infrastructure (transport, shelter, water, energy and communications) and the production equipment that enables people to pursue different livelihood options
Social capital – the social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to various social institutions) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods	Financial capital – the financial resources available to people (savings, sources of credit, remittances and pensions) which can be drawn on to pursue different livelihood options
Political capital ³¹ – power and rights, development of political capabilities, vertical claims on landlords, the state	Natural capital – resources present in the natural physical environment useful for livelihoods (land, water, wildlife, biodiversity)

Capabilities

There are a variety of interpretations of the concept of capabilities. Some are functional; others are a reflection of rights and entitlements. Amartya Sen's capability approach combines "freedoms to achieve in general and capabilities to function in particular". The LAL framework draws on this interpretation, and emphasises that household capabilities are directly affected by factors in the social, institutional and political environment in which each household lives. Household capabilities include health, ability to work, education and skills levels on one hand, and the power to claim entitlements (to land, natural resources, social support, services and so forth) on the other.

Activities

The frameworks use two broad approaches for characterising activities. The CARE framework distinguishes between production and income, consumption, and processing and exchange activities. The LAL framework draws on Moser, who distinguishes between productive, reproductive and community management activities.³²

It is important to note that not all productive activities are legal. Many of the livelihood strategies of poor households may involve participation in the so-called ‘grey economy’ – activities such as growing dagga, smuggling precious stones, rustling cattle and selling liquor illegally. In certain contexts such activities may form a significant part of a household’s livelihood strategy.

Each of these characterisations of activities has its own logic. The important thing is to distinguish between different types of activity, who the participants are, how much time the activities take and how the household’s access to different kinds of resources shapes the time spent on, and value of, these activities. The analysis of activities is closely linked to an understanding both of the variations in resource flows into and out of households at different times of year, and of the nature of the formal and informal markets with which people’s livelihood activities articulate.

Examining the interplay between framework elements

The combination of assets and capabilities to which a household has access shapes the range of livelihood activities that its various members are able to carry out. Assets, capabilities and activities are closely interdependent. Clearly, the type of household (such as single-headed or intergenerational) and the defining factors of its physical environment will affect the amount of time that household members have to spend in different types of activity. For example, people displaced by conflict and living in socially volatile areas will have to invest much of their effort in day-to-day survival: fetching water, finding firewood, queuing for assistance, negotiating with local power and administrative structures while simultaneously guarding their possessions.

Similarly, a household may have access to assets but lack the capabilities to make full use of them. This is particularly true where households are headed by older persons, or where a household member has a chronic illness. The impact of HIV/AIDS on household livelihoods has been well documented.

Where a household member who is HIV positive starts to develop full-blown AIDS, much of the time members of the household usually devote to labour will be used to care for that person instead. The same applies to the household's material assets. The pandemic undermines the ability of the household to undertake other livelihood activities, depletes savings and other resources, and dramatically increases household vulnerability. The death of a household member may demand significant financial outlay on the funeral, which poor families cannot afford. Social networks may be stretched to breaking point as relatives take responsibility for the costs of care, medicine, funerals and the children orphaned by the AIDS. When social and material dislocation of conflict accompanies the disease, households can experience major hardship.

Understanding vulnerability

Moser characterises vulnerability as the insecurity of individuals, households or communities in the face of a changing environment. She adds that because people move in and out of poverty, the concept of vulnerability is a better reflection of results of change than the more static measures ordinarily applied to poverty.

Chambers³³ observes that “[v]ulnerability has two sides: an external side of risks, shocks and stress to which an individual or household is subject and an internal side which is defencelessness, meaning a lack of means to cope with damaging loss”.

Vulnerability is also a reflection of relations of power. In a conflict situation, poorer and less powerful families may be unable to secure entitlements that are available or to claim them.

Shocks and stresses

Poverty-stricken individuals and households are subject to shocks or stresses in the local or external environment that undermine their livelihoods. Shocks are sudden events that strain the skills of members of the household, erode assets and restrict activities. Everyday examples include retrenchment, the sudden death of a breadwinner, an eviction, a fire, flood, or other extreme weather event. In situations of conflict or violent crime, key assets of a household may be physically appropriated or destroyed, or access to a livelihood source may be denied.

Households develop short-term crisis management responses, known as coping strategies, to survive specific shocks. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on the breadth and depth of the household's social and material asset base, and/or on the availability of appropriate external support. Chronically poor households have a thin spread of resources to fall back on, and may depend on very few activities. If they lose a key resource following a major shock, or are prevented from carrying out a particular activity, they may become totally destitute.

Stresses, in contrast, are long-term trends that undermine livelihood opportunities. These can result from factors as diverse as unplanned urbanisation, demographic changes, political and economic decline, environmental degradation and climate change. Some of these stresses may be the spillover effects of conflicts in neighbouring countries. For example, if a refugee camp is established adjacent to an existing community, members of the latter will soon begin to experience a combination of social and natural resource stresses that may represent a threat to their livelihoods over the long term.³⁴ However, it is also important to note that such situations may also contain opportunities for some communities: new markets may open up or wider economic connections may be made.

Increasing costs, hyperinflation or the progressive running down of health and education services are also stresses. Others may take the form of ill-maintained infrastructure, poorly functioning state bureaucracies or dysfunctional local institutions. Another kind of stress may involve households in having increasing numbers of dependants, as relatives take responsibility for children whose parents have died from HIV-related illness. Alternatively, stress may take the form of reduced farming yields or stocking rates resulting from climate change or land degradation.

Over the long term, households adjust their behaviour and practice (using so-called adaptive strategies) in response to such stresses. In conflict scenarios the collapse of markets and their reconfiguration into higher-risk war economies cause changes in economic activity and behaviour that may persist for long periods.

Linkages and trends

Livelihoods analysis involves combining qualitative and quantitative research methods at the micro level. Methodologically, this involves consulting focus groups, compiling life histories, and surveying and profiling households. At

the meso and macro levels the focus is on policy and trend analysis. This is designed to explore connections between the different layers of the external environment, spanning locality, district, province, national, regional and global dimensions as appropriate. The objective is not only to identify key micro–macro linkages but also to isolate the key elements that drive local histories of change. This may allow the analyst to pinpoint a particular policy or institutional failure that has had a particularly damaging effect on local livelihoods. For example it could happen that a change in conservation or natural resource management policies has restricted access to essential livelihood resources for poor households; or that the commodisation of certain natural resources such as medicinal plants affects sustainable harvesting and use and therefore creates a conflict between those people harvesting for the market and local users.

In areas affected by conflict, the whole institutional environment may be radically altered, resulting in a collapse of social mores including consensus, norms, values, and gender and age-related roles.

Institutions comprise a wide variety of formal and informal relationships that enhance societal productivity by making people's interactions and cooperation more predictable and effective. Some institutions... have organizational form, while others have more diffuse patterns of norms and behavior about which there are social consensus.... [Thus,] institutions can be understood as complexes of norms and behaviors that persist over time by serving some socially valued purposes. Institutions provide shared understanding of the cultural meaning of activities.³⁵

Strengths and weaknesses in livelihoods approaches

Ellis warns that where livelihoods approaches have been elevated to a panacea for all development concerns, they inevitably fall short. Ironically, the “explosion of interest” in, and demand for, sustainable livelihoods and “household livelihood security” frameworks and methods of analysis have resulted in a process of “branding”.³⁶ In some cases more energy has been spent on promoting and defending particular frameworks than on engaging creatively with the basic ideas and the practical processes of framework application.

There is also an increasing risk that, as livelihoods concepts become firmly embedded in mainstream development discourse, so the ideas and the frame-

works that animate them will be reduced to politically correct and obligatory simplifications. When frameworks and concepts are routinely applied, they inevitably begin to lose their edge. Ironically this process of ‘mainstreaming’ is often the precursor to the stagnation of concepts and their eclipse by the next big idea.

Murray³⁷ has developed a concise summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant DFID livelihoods framework, which is summarised in the table below.

Strengths of the framework	Weaknesses of the framework
It seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context	Elements of the vulnerability context such as macro economic trends, inflation, civil conflict and mass redundancy are underplayed
It explicitly advocates a creative tension between different levels of analysis, and emphasises the importance of micro-macro linkages	There is an implicit assumption that people’s assets can be expanded in a generalised and incremental fashion
It acknowledges the need to move beyond discrete and narrow sectoral perspectives – urban and rural, industrial and agricultural, formal and informal, and instead emphasises the linkages between different sectors	Inequalities of power and conflicts of interest are not sufficiently acknowledged
It requires investigation of the relationships between the different activities that constitute household livelihoods, and in the process focuses attention on social relations within and between households	The notion of participation may disguise the truth that the enhancement of the livelihoods of one group may undermine those of another
	The continuing vagueness of the concept of livelihood sustainability is accompanied by lack of means to measure this over time

Perhaps the critical weakness is the impracticability of the framework. While it is reasonably clear conceptually, many planners and practitioners seem unable to use it to identify clear, practical interventions that can make a tangible difference to the security of local livelihoods.

Appreciative enquiry

While recognising the need rigorously to analyse social relations of conflict and inequality and to understand the constraints that hamper the livelihood activities of the poor, the analyst must acknowledge that there are limitations to a sole reliance on problem-based approaches, particularly at the micro level.

Appreciative enquiry practitioners have developed a critique of problem-based approaches. They argue that such analyses often ignore local agency, make it difficult for people to see anything but problems, and run the risk of reinforcing a sense of powerlessness and dependency in the poor. They also hold that problem-solving approaches often give more weight to 'expert opinion' and solutions proposed by professionals than they do to local solutions. Rahnema observed that "the problematisation of the poor's needs in modern economic terms further contributes to the disintegration of vernacular spaces, thereby exposing the poor to situations of even more helplessness".³⁸

Again, these critics warn that problem-based approaches can privilege technical solutions, which often have unintended consequences and further aggravate existing power imbalances. Crucially, they argue that problem-solving approaches are no longer able to inspire and mobilise people at local level. There is a deepening scepticism on the part of the poor as to whether government or development agencies will ever address the problems that are routinely identified in planning exercises (be they participatory or expert-led).

Appreciative enquiry, as the term suggests, sets out to understand and value what people do to give meaning to their lives and secure their livelihoods. The enquiry involves poor people in discussing and identifying what works, how they cope, what they take pride in, and what they have achieved. From this basis, analysts examine what can be done to build on and consolidate those things that already work.

Given that the livelihoods approach is an asset-based (as opposed to deficit-based) approach, it has obvious similarities with appreciative enquiry, which sets out to enable people to identify their strengths and find ways to use them to the greatest advantage. Appreciative enquiry can provide insights into social and material assets that may go unnoticed by outsiders, and yet are essential to a household's livelihood strategies. It can also suggest ways to enhance them.

There are obvious limitations on the use of appreciative inquiry methods in conflict situations, but the notion of exploring what works for whom, and why, remains valid whether in the context of peace or war.

Livelihoods and conflict

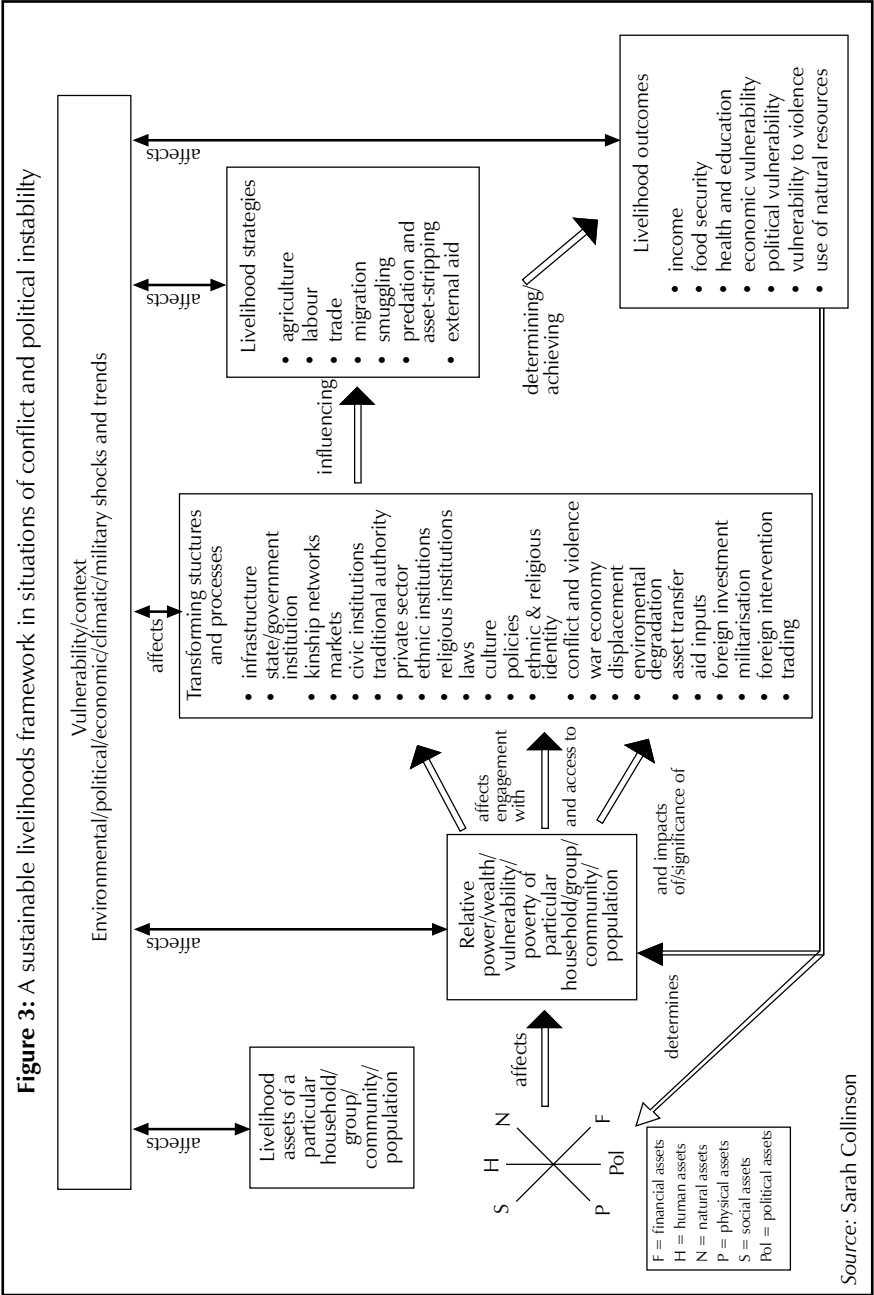
Collinson observes that to date most livelihoods literature has focused on relatively stable development situations. This could lead to questions being raised about the applicability of livelihoods analysis to conflict situations.³⁹ In particular, practitioners need to consider the extent to which a livelihoods approach requires adaptation to accommodate conflict and post-conflict situations. However, even apparently stable situations that are characterised by asset poverty, powerlessness and livelihood insecurity contain the kernel of conflict, though this is likely to occur on a relatively minor scale.

Collinson has adapted the DFID livelihoods framework to make it more appropriate to conflict scenarios.

Collinson's revised framework for conflict or political instability foregrounds political assets and power. It introduces military shocks, war economy and livelihood strategies that include predation and asset stripping. In general she provides a good example of the portability of the livelihoods framework, while also illustrating how an emphasis on political economy can make livelihoods analysis more robust.

She describes political economy analysis as involving:

The interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time. When applied to the situations of conflict and crisis political economy analysis seeks to understand both the political and economic aspects of conflict and how these affect power and vulnerability. According to a political economy approach vulnerability should be understood in terms of powerlessness rather than simply material need ... A political economy approach should incorporate a wide historical and geographical perspective... The view that it encourages is therefore dynamic, broad, longitudinal and explanatory.



In many respects Collinson's description of the political economy approach and the author's account of livelihoods analysis (provided earlier) have a great deal in common. Both need to be extended conceptually to include the ways in which conflict situations undermine the livelihoods of some communities or households, and advantage those of others. Particular attention also needs to be given to the interventions required for conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. Again, in the uncertain, highly fluid and threatening environments that characterise conflict and post-conflict situations there are significant risks associated with external interventions, and a much higher likelihood of unintended consequences. Another area for research is the nature, causes, scale and intensity of any conflict. These need to be understood to enable livelihoods analysts to explore the impact of conflict, both on livelihoods and on the institutional, social economic and environmental contexts that support them.

To extend livelihoods analysis to include conflict situations, a new set of questions needs to be considered.

What are the effects of conflict and war on formal and informal economies?

Conflict situations have major implications for local economies. They affect the ability of people both to gain access to key assets and to continue with particular livelihood activities in safety. A crucial dimension of such analysis in the context of conflict would be to understand how the formal and informal economies that existed in the pre-conflict era could transform into dynamic war economies.

What are the characteristics of a war economy?

How do these characteristics vary from place to place?

What are the commodities and trading relations that drive a war economy?

How does conflict reframe power, gender, age and social relations?

An assessment of the power relations extant in an area prior to the outbreak of conflict is central to understanding how the balance of power shifts as the

conflict plays itself out. The livelihoods analysis would need to examine the following issues:

- Who are the new power figures?
- Who has been eclipsed?
- How does the conflict affect women?
- What changes are there in social relations between young and old as militias recruit child soldiers, or as young men acquire weapons and access to economic opportunities they did not have before?
- What are the impacts on social networks in particular localities? Do they cohere or do they fragment? And if they fragment, along what lines does this occur?

Who are the new patrons?

Conflict creates new sources of patronage. Analysis could be used to map new social and patronage relations, and the extent to which they are dependent on the occurrence of conflict.

What was the content of patronage relations in the period preceding the conflict? How has this changed?

Who now has the power to dispense patronage, and what form does this take?

How will these relations be affected by the cessation of hostilities?

Who is losing what assets, and with what consequences?

A livelihoods analysis would involve understanding the different ways in which conflict affects households and individuals, and in consequence being able to establish what they need to help them recover. These needs are not just material. Households also have to cope with the loss or disablement of family members; and children may be forced to survive on their own because of the death or displacement of their parents.

Overall, analysts need to understand the many different ways in which conflict affects the assets and activities of the poor.

- Have people lost access to their fields due to the laying of land-mines?
- To what extent have food stocks been raided and livestock rustled?
- Has farming and other production equipment been appropriated?
- What effects has the conflict had on seed stocks and the availability of agricultural AIDS?
- Has the conflict resulted in people being forced to provide labour or sexual services? How has this affected households and livelihoods?
- How have infrastructure, housing and community facilities been affected?
- Are there certain areas which have become 'no-go' zones? How has this changed livelihood activities?
- How has conflict affected land security and tenure? Has it altered access to natural resources?

Who is gaining, and in what way?

For young people, combat and the power conferred by the possession of weapons can become a livelihood strategy. This raises a further set of questions for the analyst.

To what extent will a peace-making process depend on the capacity of the new order to reintegrate combatants and find them new livelihood opportunities?

How does the war economy institutionalise new forms of appropriation and corruption? Does it create opportunities for warlords who may subsequently threaten the peace?

How does conflict affect people's general resilience?

Conflict has the effect of lowering people's risk thresholds. Again, different households will experience this in different ways. What is needed is an examination of the interconnection between the dangers presented by conflict and other risk factors. The questions that follow suggest some of the directions analysis might require.

What are the possible effects of a drought on the livelihoods of the poor?

How does a particular conflict affect the provision of primary health services, immunisation and malaria control?

In what ways do conflict, social dislocation and physical displacement render people vulnerable to infection with HIV/AIDS?

How does poverty and desperation connect with high-risk sexual behaviour, which may in itself be a survival strategy?

What are the effects of internal displacement?

The framework of livelihoods analysis needs to be extended to examine both people who have been displaced during a time of conflict, and people who have been affected by the arrival of large numbers of internally displaced persons.

How are the livelihoods of urban dwellers altered by influxes of displaced people from the countryside?

What are the effects that an inflow of displaced persons and refugees on the economies and livelihoods can have on people in neighbouring states?

How are the environment and natural resource bases of countries affected by uncontrolled settlement and their inability to enforce conservation and other policies?

What are the institutional implications of conflict?

Another area requiring analysis is an exploration of the different ways in which conflict affects formal and informal institutions. This could be done by exploring questions such as the following:

How are local norms and values affected by conflict?

What impact does conflict have on local institutions?

How does conflict alter people's rights to land and natural resources?

What happens to local tenure and land rights management systems?

What obstacles to recovery do the institutional changes pose?

The complexities of recovery

A combination of livelihoods analysis and political economy approaches would provide a means to begin exploring answers to the above questions, so that the information gained can provide a platform for targeted interventions. But there are a number of constraints that must be overcome if any practical programme is to be drawn up.

The central constraint is the conundrum propounded by the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit of the World Bank.

Many of the world's poorest countries are locked in a tragic vicious circle where poverty causes conflict and conflict causes poverty. Eighty percent of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered a major civil war in the past 15 years. On average, countries coming out of war face a 50 percent chance of relapsing in the first five years of peace.

However there are arguments that it is not poverty *per se* that causes conflict, but rather the sudden removal of the means of livelihood that is the trigger.

A common denominator for many, if not most, of the internal wars and conflict plaguing Africa, South Asia, and Latin America during the last decade, is poverty as a result of loss of livelihoods, in turn often caused or exacerbated by environmental degradation. Empirically, it has been difficult to demonstrate that either poverty or environmental factors, in and by themselves, are strong determinants of conflict. Loss of livelihood constitutes an often missing link in explanations of current conflict patterns. While poverty may be a near-endemic condition in certain societies, loss of livelihood marks a rapid transition from a previous stable condition of relative welfare into a condition of poverty or destitution. It is the rapid process of change resulting in a sudden fall into poverty, more than the endemic condition of poverty, that creates the potential for livelihood conflicts.⁴⁰

If the conflict itself contributes to further immiseration, then it follows that a double and sustained pull will be required to reverse the losses of conflict and to re-establish household livelihood security (even if the livelihoods lost were insecure at best). Only success on both fronts will enable sustainable post-conflict recovery.

The challenges to humanitarian agencies represented by scale, urgency and limited resources

The arguments above suggest the need for a reevaluation of the way in which humanitarian agencies operate. Collinson points out that there have been high-profile failures of humanitarian intervention in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. She claims that there is mounting evidence that assistance can exacerbate conflict and undermine local capacity, and argues that there is “no strong analytical tradition within the humanitarian system” to redirect it.⁴¹

Even if this is the case, the nature of the context (the conflicting demands of providing assistance on an appropriate scale, the urgency of the need and the limitations of resource bases) tends to mean that agencies fall back on traditional approaches.

Using livelihoods analysis for developing recovery strategies

A number of tentative suggestions follow for a process that would use livelihoods analysis to plan strategies that assist the recovery of livelihoods in communities affected by conflict.

The need for a spatial framework

Livelihoods research takes time, which is in short supply in conflict situations. Also, to make the best use of limited resources, the researchers need to locate their analysis within an overall spatial framework. How this framework is drawn up would be determined by the circumstances. It might be aligned with zones or theatres of conflict; or agro-ecological zones; or known sites where livelihoods are diverse. Whatever the case, a reasonable spread of research sites should be aimed for, as livelihood contexts and activities can vary substantially from one area to another. This will allow researchers to identify significant changes that occur in some areas but not in their neighbours.

A rapid appraisal of pre-conflict baselines – livelihoods, poverty, hazards and risk

One of the problems found in development work generally is the absence of reliable baseline data. This makes it very difficult to assess both the livelihood

changes brought about by conflict or the effectiveness of remedial measures. Historical information, and particularly data relating to the pre-conflict situation, are a key resource for planners. Clearly an important factor in conflict risk assessment is the collection of data in areas previously identified as being at risk. This would allow pre-emptive measures to be introduced in anticipation of a possible return of conflict.

Livelihoods assessment as a means of assessing impacts of conflict

Targeted livelihoods research, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, resource mapping techniques, timelines and so on should be able to yield fairly detailed assessments of the nature of the changes brought about by conflict in specific localities. However, the more difficult challenge will be to coordinate this information with that carried by baseline data sources, and to prevent the cooptation of the research process by powerful local interests.

Understanding the different economies of peace and war

As noted above, complex economic transitions are brought about by conflict and war. Collinson advocates the use of commodity chain analysis to explore the particular resources that play important roles in war economies. Given the existence of vested interests, and the potential for the further enrichment of certain powerful individuals or groups created by conflict situations, this is no easy task.⁴² Once the differences between peace-time and war economies have been understood, practical measures can be designed to release an economy moving from war to peace from the grip of militias and external actors. Stephen Jackson's insightful analysis of the coltan trade in the Democratic Republic of Congo graphically illustrates the complexities and powerful interests involved.⁴³

The acupuncture analogy – identifying key enablers, reducing vulnerability and risk

The process of restoring a country's economy can be described by using acupuncture as an analogy. Both revolve around the identification of the major pressure points, and of the way in which these can be used to bring about relief. As applied to livelihoods practice, the process involves adopting measures that release communities from war-induced vulnerability and risk, and create opportunities for livelihood renewal.

One of these measures is financial assistance, a 'key enabler'. However, another question needs to be asked: What kind of financial aid is most appropriate? For example, the Feinstein International Famine Centre has made a comparison of the benefits of relief grants versus micro loans as offered by humanitarian agencies to assist poor families to recover from the depredations of conflict.

In recent years, some in the humanitarian community have recognised the potential value in certain situations of using credit rather than relief grants to support livelihoods. Some micro credit programs have blossomed in refugee camps, boasting repayment rates of over 98 percent, and outreach to thousands of clients. Others have failed and been forced to shut down by lack of repayment, or the resumption of hostilities. Some income generating programmes have required in-kind repayment. Indigenous, community-based institutions and methods have been supported, including community banks, ROSCAs and rotating livestock credit programs. Many difficulties and dilemmas have arisen concerning the philosophy, implementation and outcomes of these kinds of credit-based approaches in conflict zones.⁴⁴ Potentially, micro loans have the capacity to reinvigorate pre-existing institutions, although clearly there are substantial risks involved.

Strengthening institutions and governance

In addition, ways have to be found of rehabilitating and strengthening local institutions and reinstating stable governance. This can be done only within the context of long-term peace-building strategies.

Another requirement is that there should be much closer co-ordination of efforts to assist impoverished communities between government and donor agencies. The latter need to become more aware of the social and political context within which their interventions take place. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) argues that a fundamental shift in orientation is required by external humanitarian agencies, especially from the northern hemisphere, who have often proceeded without adequate consultation with other parties working in conflict-affected areas.

Host governments and southern hemisphere civil society have been largely absent from the design and implementation of tools, frameworks and approaches for peace and conflict-sensitive development practice. These approaches have primarily emerged from northern academic and policy insti-

tutions in co-operation with donor governments and multilateral institutions with little space given to national governments and to indigenous approaches and southern perspectives.

Peace building is a long-term process: structural inequalities within society, such as gross disparities of wealth and inequitable power relationships require long-term sustained engagement by donors.

A long-term orientation that addresses the full conflict cycle and links short-term emergency measures to long-term programmes will be required for maximum sustainability.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Livelihoods analysis which actively incorporates an understanding of the importance of power and differentiation, and which explicitly addresses the political economy of poverty, could offer a valuable tool for the development of a more nuanced understanding of the causes of conflict and its effects on the poor in particular. A combination of micro-level research (which draws on household profiles and histories, and gives a voice to those customarily silenced by conflict and powerlessness) can bring to life the implications of conflict for livelihoods. The linking of micro studies to macro analysis can expose the interrelationships between the causes of conflict, and in so doing disclose potential pathways to peace and the renewal of subsistence livelihoods.

However, this promise is subject to serious constraints. Many of these can be overcome only if the main participants develop new ways of doing things. Work from a livelihoods perspective requires that humanitarian agencies ask new kinds of questions, and look beyond the short-term view of relief. A new emphasis has to be placed on risk reduction strategies related to social, environmental, economic and political threats. Holistic engagement requires different sets of skills, and the ability to manage multidisciplinary teams. It also demands new and better coordinated ways of obtaining, collating and managing information and developing sources of reliable baseline data. Only in this way will the present gap that exists between analysis, the development of practical risk reduction strategies and the demands of operational planning be narrowed.

Endnotes

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- 21 See De Satgé op cit. and Hussein, op cit. for a summary of different livelihoods frameworks.
- 22 J Harriss, *Civil society: Universal concept or donor fad*, 2002, <<http://www.odi.org.uk/speeches/destin2002/civsoc.html>>, retrieved 24 July 2002.
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- 25 K Hussein, op cit.
- 26 See CARE International *Urban Briefing Notes – Participatory livelihoods assessment*, Kosovo, January 2001.
- 27 This initiative was facilitated by Ailsa Holloway of the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, and involved practitioners from CARE, Oxfam and Thlavama.
- 28 De Satgé op. cit.
- 29 The framework takes its name from the title of the book in which it was published.
- 30 Such activities could be problematic in post-conflict scenarios, where tensions and grievances may lie just below the surface. Their appropriateness needs to be assessed.
- 31 For some time there has been debate over whether to include political capital in the DFID framework. The distinction between social and political capital is often based, at least in part, on the nature of the claims that they serve. Social capital relates to horizontal claims on kin, associations, and social networks of different

- kinds, while political capital is much more concerned with power, differentiation and vertical claims that households can make on the state or those more powerful than they.
- 32 C Moser, *Asset vulnerability framework: Reassessing urban poverty reduction strategies*, pp 1–19 World Development, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1998. Reproductive activities are those that maintain the household – cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water and fuel, childcare, nursing the sick and so on. Community maintenance activities are those that strengthen the communities in which people live – involvement in local structures, dispute resolution, natural resource management and others.
 - 33 R Chambers, *Vulnerability, coping and policy*, IDS Bulletin 20, 1989.
 - 34 The video titled *Moving on*, which is part of the Learning about Livelihoods package, tells the story of the Mapeta family, living on the eastern border of Zimbabwe. The members of this household experienced some of the stresses associated with the presence of a refugee camp of 55,000 people located next to their settlement during the 1980s.
 - 35 D Narayan, with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher, Sarah Koch-Schulte, *Can anyone hear us?:* Oxford University Press, New York, published for The World Bank, 2000.
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