

CONCLUSION

A politically sophisticated and realistic sustainable livelihoods approach faces many challenges and calls for an interrogation of current strategies for post-conflict recovery. Some noteworthy points arose in the course of the workshop.

- How is livelihood data gathered? While historical livelihoods analysis is needed to appreciate the nature of livelihoods, this is not always possible because it is difficult to obtain baseline quantitative, given the lack of access to both institutional structures and historic data sets. Furthermore, because situations are so volatile, information may date quickly. Allan Cain suggested that a way around this problem is to make use of 'conflict data' as a baseline set, as was done in Angola during the time of the war. This was found to be as relevant and valuable as longer time series. Another constraint is that conflict environments are seldom conducive to data collecting, as was the case in Angola, which for more than 15 years discouraged social science research.
- The word 'community' is loosely defined and has often been used as a catch-all term. Because the target of a sustainable livelihoods approach is at the community level, the application of this term should be used with an appreciation for the fact that communities encapsulate many different social processes and power dimensions that 'order' communities. Because communities have different power relationships, as do households, 'community participation' can easily be 'abused' by powerful elites as part of a legitimising process.
- How can you assess who achieves a sustainable livelihood and who does not? What are the relevant outcome indicators? War economies often create inflated earnings for individuals and who are too often expected to go back to subsistence farming. This raises the issue of bearing in mind the role of 'political assets' and appreciating how to work with different forms of patrimonialism. Power and reciprocity in vertical networks of support can become important political assets for survival strategies:

people may also benefit economically, gaining considerable wealth by making use of comparative (political) advantages.

- Something that is often overlooked is the changing role of NGOs, indigenous civil society organisations and aid agencies, and the need for collaboration between them, and with government institutions, in establishing new sustainable post-conflict recovery strategies. Linked to this is the question of how to root approaches in an understanding of the historical legacies and current political and administrative arrangements. The role of traditional authorities must not be ignored, although years of conflict may result in the lack of a clear agreement about who wields what influence in a region. One of the issues facing Angola is the renewing of legal structures that existed before the civil conflict. The role of the state in facilitating proper recovery strategies is critical in this regard. Regarding environmental risks and threats, there is a need to bridge the gap between action and information. Agencies are the custodians of much data that is often 'lost' to other interest groups; because of the role that scientists play in driving information, everybody would benefit from greater collaboration.
- The prosaic debate on the relief–development continuum has fortunately ended in paralysis. The predominant belief is that development aid targeted at recovery and reconstruction should be provided only once the situation has stabilised properly, although there is some recognition of the need for transition funding to be made available in the interim. It is not generally acknowledged as a phase deserving in its own right, and currently only USAID and Britain provide some transition funding. Typically humanitarian agencies have envisaged a linear progression from focussing on relief activities – on saving lives – to building sustainable livelihoods. But as Timpson discusses, this is being challenged increasingly as simplistic and inadequate. It calls for a far greater astuteness than is currently noted in the timing of emergency and development aid. The belief was expressed in the workshop that contrary to common belief, development interventions can be started **during** conflict within displaced communities and between individuals. Such an approach, furthermore, serves to create trust with the relevant government. The value of coordinating efforts with government ministries during times of conflict cannot be overlooked as this increases the possibility of government responsiveness to aid agencies in designing post-conflict policy strategies.
- The issue of how to play a constructive role in promoting real redistributive reforms was noted. Given the correlation between poverty and

conflict, recovery strategies and techniques must be broad-based if there is to be balanced economic recovery. It is important to note the institutional processes (formal and informal) that constrain the achievement of sustainable livelihoods for different groups of people. Aid organisations must be willing to take a stand against governments who are ‘helping themselves’ and who are not allowing for the genuine participation of their citizens in the recovery or development processes. Organisations often fail to take a stand because of vested commercial interests of their own governments within the country concerned, and decisions against governments, which could jeopardise these commercial interests. In Angola, it was noted that communities’ coping strategies are under attack and that the socio-economic gap was widening within the country. Empowering national civil society is a key strategy to counteract such developments: social organisations can, and should, play a key role in institutional development and policy debate. Networks around land, gender, environmental change and human rights at all levels are being initiated. In the case of Angola, strengthening indigenous civil society groups would serve to strengthen all other aspects of life; spiritual groups, including churches traditionally have very strong institutional structures that can be leveraged. The role of the media as a tool for ‘informal criticism’ of government policies was also considered useful. Investigation is needed of the role of horizontal and vertical networks in bringing about policy change.

Concluding comments

The economic, social and human costs of war are enormous. Local populations have to do all they can to develop strategies of survival in the face of a range of assaults such as displacement, forced migration, changing household composition, loss and depletion of assets, deteriorating economic conditions, and changes in social capital. Humanitarian organisations need not only to save lives, but also to support livelihoods. Adopting a sustainable livelihoods assessment approach in such situations contributes to a better understanding of the complex range of problems faced by populations, and to identifying the livelihood strategies people may resort to for their survival. Most notably, it goes beyond ensuring mere food security or survival, and includes an analysis of political vulnerability and the processes that contribute to this, which is essential to determining how to protect populations. Increasingly the need to give attention to the aspects relating to the political economy is being highlighted. The value of doing this lies in identifying the aid channels through

which livelihoods' support can be given, an appreciation for how institutions and structures relate to conflict dynamics, and an understanding of vulnerability that is based not only on poverty but also powerlessness. Furthermore, the qualitative approach of a sustainable livelihoods framework is particularly valuable because it emphasises people's potential in a holistic way, rather than stressing only problems, constraints and needs. It also reveals how civilians utilise networks of social and political capital assets to stabilise their livelihoods and thus shape the evolution of local institutional arrangements.

Peace agreements are only the first step in restoring quality of life to war affected populations. How the ideals of a sustainable livelihood approach – poverty reduction, reducing livelihood vulnerability, improving environmental sustainability, and participatory approaches – can be realised in a post-conflict situation, requires new ways of thinking about institutional and organisational arrangements for development, as well as understanding how poor people can gain access to natural resources and influence policy processes so that their concerns are met. A fresh agenda for external support will serve to target activities to reduce poverty more accurately. Ultimately, however, this requires flexibility on the part of humanitarian and development agencies and their partners, and most particularly a need shift away from operating and allocating resources along sectoral lines. A sustainable livelihoods approach provides a compelling framework for overcoming the structural problems constraining the reconstruction of war-torn societies.