

**SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACHES IN OPERATION:
A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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Table of Contents

Introduction -----3

UNDP/SEPED's Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to Programming-----3

Step I: "Identify the Assets, Entitlements, Activities and Knowledge
Base...Embodied in Coping and Adaptive Strategies"-----5

Step II: "Macro-Micro Linked Policy Analysis"-----6

Step III: "Assessment of Key Technologies "-----7

Step IV: "Identifies...Micro-Credit and Savings"-----8

Step V: "Recommendations For Use By Decision Makers"-----8

Indicators-----9

Conclusion-----9

Bibliography-----11

**SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACHES IN OPERATION:
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Introduction

There are many aspects of gender and sustainable livelihoods, related to the various concepts assumed in sustainable livelihoods, as well as the methodology, and evaluation, including the implications of gender for sustainable livelihood indicators. Indeed, many of the issues which could be raised here can also be raised in the context of other development approaches, many of which are reflected in various ways in the rather broad specification of sustainable livelihoods.ⁱ

For the purpose of this presentation, we shall focus on the gender issues arising out of the UNDP's SEPED proposed sustainable livelihoods approaches, which have already begun to be implemented by some country offices. The discussion seeks to shed light on the key gender issues, as well as point to the possible synergies which could exist between past and current methodologies for gender analysis in all fields, and the newly emerging implementation framework for sustainable livelihoods.

The presentation of the paper follows closely the five steps outlined in the background paper, which lay out the procedures by which sustainable livelihood approaches are to be implemented by UNDP country offices as follows:

- I. Identification of assets, entitlements, activities and knowledge base
- II. Macro-micro linked policy analysis
- III. Assessment of key technologies
- IV. Identification of micro-finance
- V. Recommendations emerging from 1 - 5.

UNDP/SEPED's Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to Programming

It is important to consider gender aspects of sustainable livelihoods (SL) approaches for at least two reasons: First, it is prudent to flag areas where experience has shown that gender is likely to influence outcomes significantly. Second, at these fairly early stages in the development of the methodologies, it is also useful to draw lessons from past and existing analytical tools. I suggest that gender analysis, in the past and present, has some important lessons for frameworks, such as UNDP's Social Development and Poverty Eradication Division (SEPED) SL approaches. These lessons emanate primarily from years of attempting to formalize analytical constructs which place the well being of both men and women, as well as girls and boys, centrally in multi-disciplinary settings. This seems to echo fundamental objectives of SL and sustainable human development (SD) concepts.

A thorough review of feminist and other methodologies, for the purpose of drawing lessons for the continuing formulation and implementation of the SL approaches, is warranted. However, this paper does not pretend to give an exhaustive review, but rather merely draws attention to some salient lessons and recommends that UNDP/SEPED engage in a more complete exploration of issues raised.

The Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods group of SEPED has outlined the following steps for implementing a "sustainable livelihoods approach to programming" for UNDP's country offices:

"Step I: Identify the assets, entitlements, activities and knowledge base which people are currently using to make their living. These are embodied, more or less systematically, in coping and adaptive strategies. It is the understanding of the ways in which the various elements of

these livelihood systems interact that is at the heart of this approach and which provides an important entry point to begin work. This step is accomplished by using participatory research techniques for the purpose at hand (i.e. participatory action research).

Step II: A cross sectoral, macro-micro linked policy analysis is carried out to identify which policies or policy combinations disrupt local adaptive strategies or livelihood systems which are sustainable and which policies reinforce these strategies and systems. A policy analysis matrix is developed and used for this purpose. This step must be carried out in close association with step I in order that the relevant policies for analysis can be determined and the terms of reference for the policy analysts established.

Step III: This is an assessment of the key technologies contributing to the livelihood systems of the impact of introduced technologies over time and on this basis and in close association with steps I and II, a determination of what technologies will help to improve the productivity of the assets and the livelihood systems in a sustainable way. In many cases, this determination might not be possible without access to an appropriate technology information bank but the process will reveal and define such information needs.

Step IV: This step identifies existing microfinance (micro-credit and savings) facilities and traditional practices and identifies opportunities for putting such facilities to the service of local people. The demand for and feasibility of establishing such schemes to improve livelihood systems and income levels to make loan repayment (with applicable interest) possible, are to be carefully considered. ("Taken from "Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods: A Background note for the International Working Group on Sustainable Livelihoods").

These steps then result in a package of recommendations for decision-makers in policy, technology and investments to promote sustainable livelihoods.

Step I: "Identify the Assets, Entitlements, Activities and Knowledge Base...Embodied in Coping and Adaptive Strategies"

There is ample evidence to the gender differences in the distribution of assets, entitlements, as well as the gendered division of activities (Beneria, Lourdes and Shelley Feldman, 1992; (Çagatay, Nilufer and Sule Ozler, 1995). There is also an increasing body of evidence as to the gendered nature of knowledge, both in the type of knowledge, as well as in the processes by which that knowledge is acquired. In the development literature, the debate around the "gendered nature of knowledge" has emanated in such disparate fields as indigenous and local knowledge (Hill, 1995) as well as in gender, science and technology (United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, 1995) and in human resources development literature (for example, African Economic Research Consortium, 1994).

It follows then, that women and men are likely to play different roles in the formulation and implementation of a significant number of coping and adaptive strategies. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from the coping strategies adopted by the poor in response to economic hardships seems to support this. (Muntemba 1995; Tadesse 1991). Much less is documented on the gendered nature of adaptive strategies and indeed needs to be done. However, it seems a fairly reasonable outcome of the gendered nature of assets entitlements, activities and knowledge, which, in interacting with natural and social stresses, form the basis for adaptive strategies.

Why is this important? In past development efforts, when gender has not been specified explicitly in the conceptualization and adoption of programs, it has tended to be either omitted, or given very little attention. The unfortunate result of this neglect tends to be a re-enforcement of existing gender inequities, or in some cases, even an amplification of these biases. This outcome would be in direct conflict with the equity and participation pillars of the SL approaches.

Ignoring gender in the specification and implementation of policies has, in some cases, been shown to hinder the effectiveness of policies. For example, Evans (1991) argued that policies for Zambia's agricultural sector which tried to promote maize production over other crops failed to have the desired supply response because they ignored the fundamental question of differential gendered control of incomes emanating from various crops. Thus, despite increased maize prices, due to market liberalization, women did not show the anticipated switch to maize production because historically they had had greater control over cash incomes from other crops, even when, as in the case of peanuts, these were more labor intensive to grow and harvest.

Thus, it is imperative that great care be taken to identify aspects of coping and adaptive strategies for which gender has implications, and visa versa. This needs to be specifically accounted for in the methodologyⁱⁱ with respect to the strategies themselves, as well as the processes by which they are formed.

Step II: "Macro-Micro Linked Policy Analysis"

Gender analysis remains the focus of feminist methodologies. However, because of their emphasis on the actual lives that men and women live, these approaches also tend to consider gender at its interface with other social distinctions, most commonly those of class, age, and ethnicity. Here in lie some important lessons for the implementation of development systems which aim to place human welfare centrally, such as those of sustainable livelihoods, and sustainable development. Indeed, as UNDP attempts to define practical tools for the implementation of sustainable livelihoods, it is worth looking at the lessons learned in the evolution of feminist methodologies, as they evolved from the initial roles of advocacy for women's suffrage to the current more inclusive analytical tools, which have been applied in the fields of especially in the fields of sociology, and increasingly in other areas, including economics (Bakker 1994, World Development 1995), institutional analysis (Goetz 1995), and agriculture and environmental studies (Kettel 1995; Gladwin 1990).

For example, consider the relatively new, but very important emphasis being placed on the meso level. Since the mid-eighties, there have been repeated calls for illumination of the micro-consequences of macro-level policies (Commonwealth Secretariat 1991, United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 1995), resulting in the development of macro-policies which were informed by the realities of vulnerable groups in society. In theory, even the major international institutions involved in the design of such macro-level policies as structural adjustment programs seem to now acknowledge the need for considering macro-micro linkages (Demery et al. 1993). However, in practice, it has been difficult to isolate impacts of specific policies, and even more difficult to develop macro-level policies which contain, *a priori*, mechanisms for protecting vulnerable groups in society.

Some solutions to this are emerging from analytical constructs coming out of meso-level analysis, especially with respect to gender. In pointing out how institutional arrangements and interactions are able to impart gender to apparently gender-neutral variables, such as money and interest rates, Elson (1995) Appleton and Collier and Goetz (1995) demonstrate how critical it is to analyze the role of institutional arrangements in the transmission or macro-policy effect to the micro-level. Indeed,

considering meso level conditions and interactions brings forth profound understandings of why economic variables, thought to be gender neutral, in fact have highly gendered micro-level impacts. This suggests strongly that sustainable gains in combating adverse gendered impacts of macro-economic policies cannot be attained without meso-level interventions, an important lesson for palliative efforts which have tended to focus on alleviating negative impacts at the micro-level, after the implementation of the macro-economic policies. (Kerr, forthcoming)

Along these same lines, I venture to argue that in fact it is not likely that sustainable poverty eradication can come out of any development approach which does not deal with the meso level questions surrounding the conditions and processes for the transmission of macro-level policies to the micro level. Clearly, the second step of UNDP's sustainable livelihoods approach, "macro-micro linked policy analysis", can draw some lessons from gender analysis in economics and institutions vis-a vis the meso sector.

Step III: "Assessment of Key Technologies"

The introduction of new technologies for development has offered perhaps the largest number of examples of gendered impacts, many with disastrous results, such as water pumps in West Africa designed at an ideal height for men, who, however, were not primarily responsible for water provisioning in the household, or the loss of jobs due to the introduction of harvesting machinery for wheat in Bangladesh. Most recently, great concerns for gender and technology are voiced with respect to the impact of information technologies on women's jobs.

However, this is one area where the SL approach seems to offer some solutions, so long as gender analysis in the first two steps is thorough, and identifies the often conflicting impacts of any proposed technologies. The emphasis that the methodology places on participation and considerations of equity are extremely significant here. Extremely adverse effects on any one segment of the community stand a good chance of being revealed, and the community is ideally given an opportunity to make informed decisions about future technological introductions.

The SEPED background paper is absolutely correct in its acknowledging the likely need for appropriate technology banks. There is no shortage of information from which to start. Organizations such as APPROTECH in Asia, Do-it Herself project by Helen Appleton in Latin America and other countries, and a myriad of technologies emerging out of research and development institutions, such as the International Development Research Center, in

Ottawa, Canada, as well as funding agencies such as UNIFEM all offer important starting points in the search for gender-sensitive, appropriate technologies whose need may be identified in stages I and II. UNDP's division of Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries (TCDC), may also be an excellent source of information about technologies which have been shared among developing countries, and may have been proven to be appropriate and effective. Of course, in some cases, there may be a need to develop completely new technologies.

Step IV: "Identifies..Micro-Credit and Savings"

Development literature abounds with case studies of the biased distribution of credit facilities, and indeed many projects, such as India's Working Women's Forum, Bangladesh's

Grameen Bank, and CIDA's gender fund in Kenya, have been established with the precise intention of reducing this gender imbalance. Hence, I will not be labor the point.

That said, it becomes obvious that there are many examples, from gender funds, environmental funds, local credit organizations, both formal and informal, as well as other credit facilities, from which SL approaches can draw valuable lessons, especially with respect to local aspects of credit provision and administration, which significantly impact their performance. For example, it has been noted repeatedly that the success stories of micro-credit provision, such as the Grameen Bank, have not been successfully replicated in attempts with many woman's groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, local conditions have significant impacts on the success of the credit schemes.

This is an example where clearly, a lot of learning from past examples of credit schemes would be invaluable. Even though credit provision in the SEPED's SL approaches are specifically tied to issues arising out of steps I, II and III, it is likely that many valuable lessons can be drawn from other credit arrangements, including those that UNDP has been involved with in other areas.

Step V: "Recommendations for Use by Decision Makers"

Whether or not the implementation of SEPED's SL approaches eventually results in replication, and thus more pervasive application, depends critically on the quality of emerging recommendations (clarity, relevance etc.), how effectively they are transmitted to the decision-makers, and ultimately whether they address the priorities which decisionmakers are willing to commit resources. Thus, it is probably one of the most important, and yet most difficult steps of the SL methodology because the bottom line is that if decision-makers do not develop an adequate stake in the recommendations, the methodology will have little substantive impact on poverty eradication.

The experience of past efforts at engaging the committed attention of policy makers, and other decision makers offer valuable lessons. For example, the importance of including all stakeholders, including key decision-makers from the early stages of demonstration projects has been well documented. Efforts such as those of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) project of 1995 on "the Adaptive Strategies of the Poor in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Sub-Saharan Africa" may offer significant lessons about the intricacies of involving researchers, members of the community and policy makers in various stages of the project cycle.

Clearly, one of the biggest challenges in this step is the explanation, to all stake holders of a concept which in fact is still evolving, a concept around which there is still much experimentation, a concept which has basically yet to prove itself. UNDP can do a lot in the area of education in house, as well as among researchers, and decision-makers of all kinds. As the experience of setting up frameworks around issues of gender or race relations, has shown, there is a need to engage a critical mass of decision-makers in order to move up the scale and longevity of impacts, and even then the acceptance of new ways of analysis of age-old problems, such as the eradication of poverty, is not easy, as has been demonstrated by reluctant international bodies, such as the World Bank, whose focus on poverty eradication remains, for the most part, locked in the world of the neo-classical economic paradigm.

Indicators

The final proof of the success of the SL approach must involve some measures of performance for specified indicators. The HDI has demonstrated that gender-sensitivity of indicators is important, and can serve as useful tools for assessing the implications of implemented programs for gender equity, participation, empowerment etc. The development of indicators in general, let alone gender-sensitive ones, is one of the key challenges which the SL approach must face. Many institutions such as the World Bank, environmental groups, and indeed SEPED itself, have developed indicators, and guidelines for indicators which can finally be part of a comprehensive set of indicators for sustainable livelihoods. Due to the dependency of SL on physical and socio-economic, political etc. environment, it is unlikely that any one set of indicators will satisfy all SLs. However, sets of guiding indicators are necessary and useful tools for assessing performance.

Conclusion

Every single step of the proposed sustainable livelihoods approach contains aspects of gender which must be addressed specifically. In the framework's focus on equity and participation, this seems to be par for the course. However, specific attention is required because, although gender equity and gender analysis may seem obvious in the methodology, experience has shown that where it is not singled out, it tends to be marginalized.

As the sustainable livelihoods approach to programming begins to take hold, there is clearly a need to incorporate as many lessons from other models, past and present, of development as possible, so as to not replicate work already done. Although not an approach to development on its own, methodologies and experiences derived in multi disciplinary feminist analyses seem to offer some lessons for the sustainable livelihoods approach and should be explored vigorously.

Overall, as Hoon et al. (1997) note, there are still significant wrinkles to be ironed out in formalizing the sustainable livelihoods concept, as well as moving it on to the stage where it can be operationalized. Among the significant challenges are in promoting a more widely understood notion of the various components, including its basic tenets of coping and adaptive strategies, and the interactions of these with natural and social stimuli, including socio-economic policies. This is extremely important because unless the underpinnings of the approach are well understood and accepted as valid by the various stake holders in the development field, outcomes from its implementation are likely to be insignificant with regard to wide spread, sustainable poverty eradication.

In addition to the concepts, the methodology also needs to gain a critical mass of believers both within and outside the UNDP. The wide propagation of results obtained on initial efforts at implementation will go a long way in bringing this about. Also, establishing clear linkages, and where appropriate demonstrating differences with other approaches will also assist in this. Ultimately, the SL approach must demonstrate clearly its value added, as well as its rigor at both the conceptual and methodological level.

Finally, it is imperative that clearly defined, and easily applicable gender-sensitive indicators of sustainable livelihoods be developed. It would be very difficult to demonstrate effect without specific measures. The development of indicators is usually complex, and the results frequently controversial. This is compounded, in the SL approach by the fact that the concepts are still being formulated, and the fact that it covers such a wide range of possible indicators. Since sustainable livelihoods must essentially be defined within given physical and social parameters, no one set of

highly specific indicators will apply to all conditions. However, there are many commonalities across communities which suggest the development of at least sets of "guiding indicators" which can be more specifically adjusted to specific conditions.

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ⁱ For discussions on concepts, refer to Parakh Hoon et al., 1997; and Singh and Titi, 1995.

ⁱⁱ Although participatory action-research, and other participatory methodologies, have proved to be useful in collecting different kinds of data, it is very important that in fact methodologies which are employed in SL approaches be diverse, benefiting also from more traditional data collection techniques.