

Chapter 5

Sustainable Rural Livelihood and Poverty Reduction Strategies

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the framework of sustainable livelihoods. The interests of this chapter derive from three issues: (1) How can one determine who in the population achieves a sustainable livelihood and who does not? That is, how does sustainable livelihood assist in eliminating poverty and reduce deprivation in rural communities? (2) What livelihood resources and institutional processes are necessary for enabling or constraining sustainable livelihoods for different groups? That is, does household livelihood help individuals or families to escape poverty? (3) What are the practical, operational, and policy implications of adopting a sustainable livelihood approach to poverty reduction? Namely, what constitutes a satisfactory basis for adopting a livelihood framework?

INTRODUCTION

The search for ways to eliminate poverty has occupied the minds and efforts of policymakers, practitioners, and multilateral agencies in developed and developing economies for decades. In the previous chapters, the author discussed at length some of the currently available ways to mitigate poverty as well as the problems associated with poverty reduction. This chapter extends the study of poverty reduction to rural populations by probing beyond the predicament of who is poor.

This study takes-on the argument that—to achieve poverty reduction in rural Africa, policymakers must aim to achieve *sustainable livelihoods* at the rural level. In this case, the vicarious argument shifts the conversation to address squarely poor people's *capabilities* and their potential strengths to mobilize tangible and intangible assets within their livelihood and sphere of influence to escape and stay out of poverty. The conceptions of 'livelihood' and rural poverty reduction are based on ideas drawn from theories of capability, equity, and sustainability (Rauschmayer, Omann, & Frühmann, 2012). The first section explains the conception of livelihoods (SL) and how sustainable livelihoods assist in eliminating

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poverty in rural communities. The second section provides a critical appraisal of the livelihood resources and institutional processes necessary for enabling or constraining sustainable livelihoods for different groups. The final section provides practical, operational and policy implications of adopting a sustainable livelihood approach to poverty reduction.

CONCEPTIONS OF LIVELIHOOD

The concept of “*sustainable livelihood*” is an important addition to this debate of poverty reduction because this discussion broadens the quest to understanding of the context of the poor people and offers a more coherent and integrated approach to poverty reduction. In the past, conventional definitions and approaches to poverty reduction were found to be weak and narrow because they fixated on certain manifestations of poverty, such as *low standard of living and low income*. Explanations did not consider other vital aspects of poverty such as vulnerability, deprivation, insecurity or social exclusion (Rakodi, 1999).

Empirical evidence and operational experience in developing economies show that sociologists and economists long believed that social development promotes economic growth and leads to better interventions of poverty, and eventually, a higher quality of life (Townsend, 2013). However, other scholars in international development (Asabere-Ameyaw et al., 2014; Korten, 1984; Chambers, 1997; Mohan & Holland, 2001) argued that economic growth alone does not inherently contribute to human development, and that effective programs should encompass strategies that improve local communities’ self-reliance, social justice, and participatory decision-making. In this context, ‘local’ simply refers to interactions outside the governance realm, and as such is a political construct that betrays the centralized nature of much reform practice (Harrison, 2008).

It is now recognized that more attention must be paid to the various factors and processes which either constrain or enhance poor people’s *ability* to make a living in an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable manner (Krantz, 2001; Scoones, 1998). Recent analyses of poverty and well-being have broadened the focus from money-related measures of income and consumption (as found in USA and Europe) to an alternative way of looking at livelihood strategies, in order to enhance understanding of (1) the causes of poverty, (2) the processes of increased well-being or impoverishment, household responses to opportunities, shocks and stresses, and (3) the success or outcomes of policy interventions (Demery & Addison, 1987; Baird, McIntosh & Ozler, 2009).

These alternative ways of assessing who is poor were intended to coincide with perceptions gathered from the poor themselves, based on who might be considered poor, or how to measure or understand their poverty and dependence (Jodha, 1988). Also, this discussion takes note that within “the poor” all poor are not the same: some are poor occasionally while others are often poor; and for each category of the poor, their distance from the poverty line is not the same; some are only marginally poor while others are severely poor, and often the former outnumber the latter (Hulme & Shepherd, 2003). Such disparities complicate our understanding of who is poor. For example, when I asked people in Tanzanian rural villages to describe what *well-being* means for them, they would tell me that well-being or progress for them and their families would mean having a place to live, feeling safe and secure in their homes and communities, having enough to eat, enough firewood to cook dinner and the ability to get clean water from an unpolluted stream. This appraisal is in stark contrast from what my friends and colleagues in the USA, they would affirm— how much money they have in the bank or how much they earned in wages or salaries.

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