

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach: Alternative to Rural Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the concept of sustainable livelihoods as a strategy for rural development. This paper explores how, under different contexts, sustainable livelihoods approach is useful on behalf of different livelihood strategies. This paper is basically based on secondary sources and interpretation is made as a content analysis method. People centered, holistic, dynamic, sustainable, micro-macro links etc. are the key principles of sustainable livelihoods approach. Policy makers are always concerned with the approaches to rural development in emerging country. This research also provides applied knowledge to fulfill the policy gap with reference to rural development. Further, it provides the guidelines to the decision makers, planners and academia, especially for the developing countries to understand the important lessons regarding rural development intervention.

Key words: Assets, Poverty, Sustainable Livelihoods, Vulnerability, Livelihoods Strategies

Introduction

Despite some progress in poverty reduction, Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in the world (NPC, 2018). Poverty itself is a deeply rooted and complex phenomenon. Nepal is not far from this issue and currently, about 18.7 percent of Nepalese live below the poverty line and 65 percent people depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood (NPC, 2020). Food insecurity and poor nutrition are still rampant in Nepal, and it is more chronic in rural area as compared to urban (MoH, 2016). Out of 77 districts, nearly 34 districts have food deficiency. Small and fragmented subsistence farming is a characteristic of Nepalese agriculture, and the average landholding is only 0.68 hectares (CBS, 2011).

Poverty has most commonly been assessed against income or consumption criteria (Sen, 1981). In this interpretation, a person is poor when his/her size of income and consumption is below the national and international threshold. However, when the poor themselves are asked what poverty means to them, income is only one of a range of aspects which they highlight (Chambers, 1987). Thus, life of people residing in rural area having low income and consumption is a constant struggle for survival.

A sustainable livelihoods approach draws on this improved understanding of poverty, but also on other streams of analysis, relating for instance to households, gender, governance and farming systems, bringing together relevant concepts to allow poverty to be understood more holistically. The concept of sustainable livelihood is an attempt to go beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty alleviation. The conventional definitions are too narrow because they focused only on certain manifestations of poverty, such as low income and did not consider other vital aspects: vulnerability, risk, stress, disempowerment and social exclusion. 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. In this turning point, the notion of sustainable livelihood offers a more coherent and integrated approach to poverty alleviation (Krantz, 2001).

The sustainable livelihoods idea was first introduced by the 'Our Common Future' a report published by Brundtland Commission in 1992, advocating for the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as a broad goal for poverty alleviation. In 1992 Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed the following composite definition of a sustainable rural livelihood, which is applied most commonly at the household level:

“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 stress and shocks, maintain or 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 and in the short and long term”(1992, p. 7).

Sustainable livelihood approach embodies three basic attributes: the possession of human capabilities; access to tangible and intangible assets; and the existence of economic activities. With reference to sustainable livelihood approach, rural people's ways of life and survival strategies are sustainable when they:

- are resilient in the face of external shocks and stresses;
- are not dependent upon external support;
- maintain the long-term production and productivity and
- do not undermine the livelihoods of, or compromise the livelihood options open to, others.

This concept puts particular emphasis on strengthening the capability of poor people to enable them to take initiatives to secure their own livelihoods. It therefore stresses empowerment as a fundamental dimension of its approach. In many ways the sustainable livelihood approach is similar to the old integrated rural development approach. The crucial difference is that the sustainable livelihood approach does not necessarily aim to address all aspects of the livelihoods of the poor.

A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base (DFID, 1999a). This new definition does not include the requirement that for livelihoods to be considered sustainable they should also '...contribute net benefits to other livelihoods'. There are three insights into poverty which underpin by this approach. Firstly, economic growth is essential for poverty reduction, giving more emphasis on the capabilities of the poor to take advantage of enlarging economic opportunities. Secondly, the realization that poverty is not considered by the poor themselves- just as a question of low income, but it encompasses many other dimensions, for instance, weak health, illiteracy, powerlessness, vulnerability, weakness, deprivation from social services and basic freedom. Finally, it is sure that local people have valuable insights regarding the problems analysis and able to prioritise their needs.

Therefore, they must be involved in the design of policies and project intended to better their lot.

There are, however, three basic features common to most development approaches. The first is that the focus is on the livelihoods of the poor. The second is that the approach rejects the standard procedure of conventional approaches of taking as an entry point a specific sector such as agriculture, water, or health. And finally, the sustainable livelihood approach places great emphasis on involving people in both the identification and the implementation of activities where appropriate.

Objective of the Study

The discourse of rural development is a top agenda in emerging countries. The intensive effort to rural development was undertaken after the World War Second in global south. In Nepalese context, when democracy was born for the first time in 2007 BS, then the pace of rural development take place. The objective of this paper, basically, is to analyze the concept of sustainable livelihoods approach; and to assess the implication of sustainable livelihoods approach in rural development.

Methods and Materials

This paper is focused on a literature review to settle the objectives. Among the different development approaches, this paper deeply reviews the sustainable livelihoods approach to rural development. This paper tries to explore the sustainable livelihoods approach as a strategy for rural development; and attempts to describe the strategies and principles of sustainable livelihoods approach with reference to rural development and poverty alleviation. Thus, this paper uses descriptive design, and entirely based on secondary sources which are borrowed from different documents along with related websites.

Results

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

A livelihood implies the necessary capabilities, assets and activities for a means of survival. It has multiple forms and nature. Formal and informal livelihoods activities are made by the rural people for their sustenance. Sustainable livelihood is a broad spectrum for poverty reduction and could serve as ‘an integrating focus to allow policies to address ‘development, reasonable use of resources and poverty alleviation hand in hand. Sustainability is considered as an ability to do work. It’s about taking what we need to live now, without jeopardizing the potential for people in the future to meet their needs. Thus, the sustainable livelihood approach also facilitates an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty by focusing on the variety of factors, at different levels, that directly or indirectly determine people’s access to different kinds of resources and their livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods approach is broad spectrum and a way of thinking about the visioning, objectives, scope and priorities for sustainable rural development in substantial manner (Rao, 2006). In essence it is a way of putting people at the centre of development, thereby increasing the effectiveness of development assistance. It can, however, be distilled to six core objectives:

- A more supportive and cohesive social environment;

- Better access to basic and facilitating infrastructure,
- Improved access to high-quality education, information, technologies and training and better nutrition and health;
- More secure access to, and better management of, natural resources;
- More secure access to financial resources; and
- A policy and institutional environment that supports multiple livelihood strategies and promotes equitable access to competitive markets for all (Rao, 2006).

‘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 (Scoones, 1998)’.

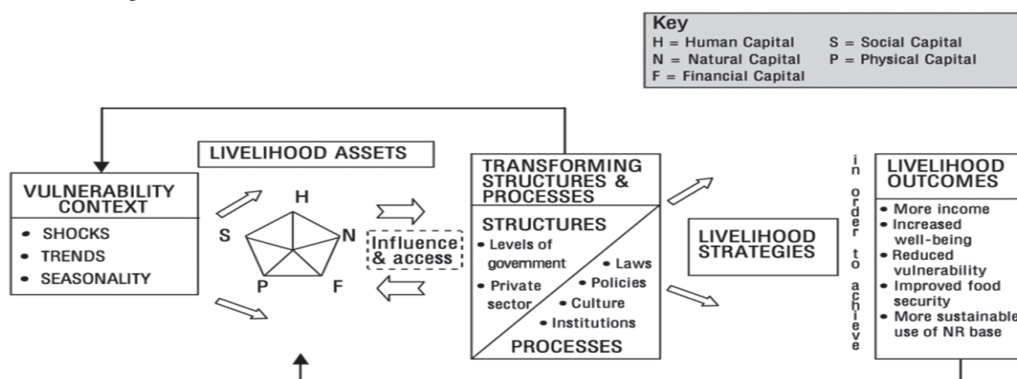


Figure 1, Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

DFID, 2000

Sustainable livelihood strategies comprise a series of activities and choices that people undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals. They have to be understood as a dynamic process in which people combine activities to meet their various needs at different times and on different geographical or economical levels, whereas they may even differ within a household. The framework identifies five types of capital asset which people can build up and/or draw upon: human, natural, financial, social and physical. These assets constitute livelihood building blocks. To a limited extent they can be substituted for each other. The figure shows the conceptual framework of sustainable livelihood approach in rural poverty alleviation. The activities they adopt and the way they reinvest in asset-building are driven in part by their own preferences and priorities. However, they are also influenced by the types of vulnerability and seasonal variations. In aggregate, these conditions determine their access to assets and livelihood opportunities, and the way in which these can be converted into outcomes. In this way, poverty, and the opportunities to escape from it, depends on all of the above.

Strategies for Rural Development

To overcome the existing rural poverty, it is necessary to follow the following slogan: Whoever you are wherever you live and whatever you do there is always something more that you can do to help reduce poverty. As mentioned by the World Bank (2003), security, opportunities and empowerment are the three guiding forces to alleviate the poverty incidence. Sustainable livelihood approach to rural poverty alleviation always focuses on the following key strategies:

- Giving top priority to solve problems relating to agriculture, rural areas and farmers and balance development of urban and rural areas; more efforts to build a harmonious society.
- Speeding up strategic re-adjustment of agriculture and rural economy.
- Focusing on pursuing a combination of high yield, good quality, high competition & efficiency with ecology improvement instead of simply seeking high yields;
- Keeping sustainability based on conservation of energy, water, land, material consumption and recycle resources utilization become prior policy.

The successful implementation of sustainable livelihood approach in rural development process, the local people will be able to secure their dignified life and security. Basically, this approach helps to achieve some key outcome such as higher income, food security, risk reduction, capacity building, strengthen to social capital, conservation and reasonable use of natural resources, fostering agriculture production and productivity.

Core Principles

The livelihoods approach recognizes the importance of these links and of enhancing accountability, though it takes as its starting point a need to understand the livelihoods of poor people in context. From this starting point it then tries to identify the specific constraints, which prevent the realization of people's rights and consequently the improvement of their livelihoods on a sustainable basis. The livelihoods approach is necessarily flexible in application, but this does not mean that its core principles should be compromised. Some of these principles are:

People-centered: Livelihood approach is about people and their wellbeing and it puts people at the centre of development effort. This focus on people is equally important at higher levels as it is at the community level. Therefore, poverty alleviation will be successes only when development agents work according to the principles of demand driven model focusing both present and future generation.

Holistic: The livelihoods approach attempts to identify the most pressing constraints faced by, and promising opportunities open to, people regardless of where these occur. It builds upon people's own definitions of these constraints and opportunities and, where feasible, it then supports people to address/ realize them. The livelihoods framework helps to organize the various factors, which constrain or provide opportunities and to show how these relate to each other.

Dynamic: Just as people's livelihoods and the institutions that shape them are highly dynamic, so is the approach in order to learn from changes and help mitigating negative

impacts, whilst supporting positive effects.

Analysis of Strengths: A central issue of the approach is the recognition of everyone's inherent potential for his/her removal of constraints and realization of potentials. This will contribute to the stakeholder's robustness and ability to achieve goals.

Micro-Macro links: The livelihoods approach attempts to bridge this gap, emphasizing the importance of macro level policy and institutions to the livelihoods options of communities and individuals. Sustainable livelihood intervention must tend to focus at either micro or macro level.

Discussion and Conclusion

A livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life. Livelihood is sustainable and secure only when it enables people to cope with and recover from vulnerability, risks, shocks and stresses by mobilizing multiple assets including human, natural, cultural and physical resources. A person's livelihood refers to their "means of securing the basic necessities -food, water, shelter and clothing- of life". Livelihood is defined as a set of activities, involving securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, clothing and the capacity to acquire above necessities working either individually or as a group by using both human and material assets for meeting the requirements on a sustainable basis along with dignity and identity.

The sustainable livelihoods approach is a way to improve understanding of the livelihoods of poor people. It can be used in planning new development activities and in assessing the contribution that existing activities have made to sustaining livelihoods. There are two key components of the sustainable livelihoods approach, namely, i) a framework that helps in understanding the complexities of poverty and ii) a set of principles to guide action to address and overcome poverty. On the era of 21st century, sustainable livelihoods approach to rural development provides valuable insight and substantial framework to explore the existing mitigation measures to overcome the intensity of poverty through accelerating the livelihoods strategies in response to rural poor.

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