Guidelines for Writing a Livelihoods Case Study for Topic Guides and Lesson Learning

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Report Summary

This report puts forward a structure within which the livelihood dimensions of development projects and programmes can be succinctly summarised. The report provides some initial notes for guidance, an annotated briefing paper structure, and two fully worked examples in order to illustrate applying the structure to real case studies.

Note for DFID personnel: These are not guidelines for producing case studies for DFID's external communications such as those for the DFID website. Generic guidelines on case studies are available through InSight[1].

[1] Note to external readers, this is a link to an internal DFID site and will not open for non DFID staff.

Guidance Notes for Writing Case Studies

Rationale

A considerable range of development projects and programmes seek to improve people's livelihoods in one way or another, even if the word livelihoods does not appear in the project title or objectives. **The purpose of these notes** is to put forward a structure as a guide to writing up livelihoods case studies from projects and programmes. The structure will not, of course, fit all projects and programmes, but it is adaptable and components can be amplified or dropped as required. These notes concentrate on the text that is included in a case study; however; graphs, photos or other design elements can also be used judiciously to bring the material to life.

Applying a Livelihoods Lens

A livelihood is generally considered to comprise a set of resources or ***assets*****,** which are applied via productive ***activities*** to achieving ***outcomes*** in the form of food security, incomes, and improving overall living standards. High levels of ***risk*** inhibit outcomes and increase vulnerability. Factors in the ***institutional*** environment (power, governance, markets etc.) can either inhibit or facilitate improving livelihoods.

Projects or programmes address or affect one or more of these five critical livelihood dimensions (assets, activities, outcomes, risk and institutions). For example, providing people with a new skill raises the asset of human capital, enables them to engage in new activities, and hopefully results in higher income and lower livelihood risks.

These five dimensions provide useful reference points for thinking through the livelihood impact of projects and programmes. We can use them to help us answer important questions or illustrate project achievements. For example, ***Which livelihood dimension(s) did a project seek to improve, how did it go about this, and how successful was it in securing a sustained change in people's livelihood circumstances?***

Structure

The structure that follows is designed to suit varying requirements with respect to detail and length. For example, it can be utilised to write a 2-page synopsis, or a lengthier 5- or 10-page project summary. The amount of detail provided under each heading can be contracted or expanded accordingly. It is important to try to provide a balanced account and cover the bases – there is no point in enthusing at length about one particular aspect if the reader is unable to situate this in the way the project worked as a whole. Photos, if included, should be used sparingly: they tend to take up space and sometimes unfortunately have the effect of substituting for proper explanation.

Essential Components

A good case study written with a livelihoods lens has **eight** essential components. Each of these components is described below. To bring the guidance to life, we have included two examples that follow this structure. These can be found at the end of the note:

1. The Context

This section sets out the problem area that a project or programme sought to address. It can provide country or topic background as appropriate (see the examples). It should outline the key problems addressed by the project (seasonal food insecurity; severe poverty; lack of opportunities for poor women; proneness to flooding etc.). It can describe the population, or communities, or group of people the project or programme was designed to help; and the assets lacking that the programme sought to increase or build (e.g. lack of finance – credit; lack of specific skills; education level; child nutrition; farm tools, animals, or inputs; protecting human capital from malnutrition or famine). It may also be appropriate here to summarise briefly any theory of change and associated evidence base underlying the approach adopted by the project.

2. Project Objectives and Coverage

Use this part of the case study to present the objectives and coverage sought to be achieved by the programme. For example, 500 poor women given book-keeping skills and start-up finance for their own businesses. The coverage dimension should provide an indication of scale relative to a larger population. Was this a small-scale project (perhaps a lesson-learning pilot) undertaken in a few villages in a single district? Or was it at national scale intended to reach most people corresponding to particular criteria? Most projects are, of course, intermediate between these scales.

3. Project Cost and Design

Provide some financial and organisational details about the project or programme. For example, what was the overall project budget; on the expenditure side how did overall cost divide between delivery cost (or overheads) distinguished from funds available for livelihood support activities. Who funded the project, under what conditions (grant, loan etc.)? Who were the participating agencies, and what was the division of labour between them? Was any cost benefit analysis or other economic appraisal done?

4. Beneficiary Selection: Targeting

How were project beneficiaries selected? For example, were they chosen by government officials, community leaders, community consultation, self-targeting, triangulation between several methods? Specify the criteria used to assist selection e.g. single parents, orphans, eating only one meal per day, age, gender, dependency ratio, lack or presence of land to cultivate etc.

5. Project Delivery

How was the programme delivered? For example social transfers might be delivered as food or cash; if beneficiaries were provided with cash was this done through post offices, local bank branches, using mobile phones or smartcards etc. If the programme involved building skills, how was this organised in terms of teaching and learning, and relevant materials? If the programme involved agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer), how were these packaged and provided to beneficiaries, or coupons distributed so that they could purchase them at outlets.

6. Project Achievements

All programmes require M&E, often nowadays extended to capture outputs and impacts. Data collection may have included a baseline livelihood survey, designed to measure livelihood features the programme sought to change for the better. Methods may also have comprised measuring delivery performance against targets, eventual coverage and disbursement of funds, repeat visits to beneficiary households at intervals, comparisons with non-beneficiary households and so on.

Achievements can be divided between inputs, outputs and outcomes or impacts. Relevant points for case studies to consider might be: Did the programme deliver its intended inputs (food, cash, credit, advice, training, seeds, mosquito nets, classrooms etc.)? What were the outputs secured by these inputs (individuals and families protected from hunger, women involved in microfinance, farmers using a new production technique or sowing a different crop and so on)? What were the outcomes or impacts of the programme for beneficiaries e.g. hunger prevented, increases in assets or incomes verified, success rate at starting businesses, yield increases experienced, new crop or farming system persisting beyond project duration, fall in malaria cases etc. It goes without saying that data quality is a key aspect of measuring project inputs, outputs and impacts; and honesty in respect to the strength of evidence is commendable.

Emphasis on post-project sustained impacts is relatively recent, and involves experts with particular skills in making statistically valid comparisons between before and after, recipient or non-recipient, samples of households. Not all projects have the resources or capability to carry out impact evaluations, or these are undertaken as a separate exercise at some interval after project completion. If available, the findings of any impact assessments or other evaluations should be summarised.

7. Lesson Learning

Use this section to highlight what worked and what did not work in this project or programme (strengths and weaknesses). Briefly list the key strong points, and key weaknesses in the programme (just 2-3 of each will be fine). Highlight any particular breakthrough (or cautionary aspect) which can be applied usefully to similar projects in the future. Was the project replicable in other settings? Could its success on a small scale lend itself to scaling up in the same country?

8. Summary

A summary may occur upfront, or at the end, of a livelihoods case study. The summary attempts to distil the essential features of the project in 100-150 words. Overburdened readers will often only look at the summary, so it is worth putting a bit of effort into getting the key message(s) across here.

Read through the two case studies that follow. These have been written using this approach to write a narrative applying a livelihoods lens.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE 1

Ethiopia Productive Safety Nets Programme

This example is based on these sources:

Berhane, B. *et al.*,2011,*The Impact of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets and Household* Asset *Building Programme: 2006-2010*, International Food Policy Research Institute, December

Devereux S *et al.*, 2008, *Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program: 2008 Assessment* Report*.* Brighton and London: Institute of Development Studies and Overseas Development Institute, 2008

Gilligan, D., J. Hoddinott, N.R. Kumar and A.S. Taffesse, 2009, *An Impact Evaluation of* Ethiopia's *Productive Safety Nets Programme,* International Food Policy Research Institute, June

White, P. and F. Ellis, 2012, *Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme, 2010-2014 – A Value-for-Money Assessment*, report to DFID Ethiopia, July

World Bank, 2011, *Project Performance Assessment Report, Ethiopia Productive Safety Net Project*, Independent Evaluation Group, June

The Context

Ethiopia has a long history of vulnerability to hunger of its poorest citizens, manifested in particular by famines in 1984 and 1994, and 13 million people requiring emergency food aid in 2003. After more than a decade of emergency operations of varying size every year, the donor community in consultation with the Government of Ethiopia decided in 2004 to institute a programme of seasonal social transfers to households persistently failing to meet their annual food needs. This programme is called the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) and it has been funded in two phases from 2005-09 and 2010-14.

Programme Objectives and Coverage

The primary objective of PSNP is to reduce Ethiopia's reliance on humanitarian assistance and to ensure that citizens routinely confronting a 'food gap' have a predictable entitlement to a seasonal social transfer either in food or cash. A secondary objective is to assist social transfer beneficiaries to strengthen their livelihoods, so that they can 'graduate' from the programme in the future.

PSNP set out in 2005 to reach a core 7-7.5 million chronically food insecure people in Ethiopia (roughly 1.6 million households). The programme reached 4.8 million people in 2005 and thereafter achieved full coverage. In the 2010-14 phase, the aggregate coverage is set at 7.57 million people each year, and evidence suggests that this is being met. This represents roughly 11% of the rural population.

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Programme Cost and Design

PSNP is funded by a consortium of donors. Its annual budgeted cost in the 2010-14 period is US$450m, of which DFID contributes 15%. Evidence suggests that 80% of the total budget takes the form of transfers to beneficiaries, with 20% being utilised for administrative overheads including delivery costs. The cost-efficiency of delivery at $0.25 admin costs for each $1.00 transfer to beneficiaries is good for this type of project.

The PSNP is one component (albeit the biggest) within an integrated strategic approach to food security in Ethiopia called the Food Security Programme (FSP). Other components of the FSP are the Household Asset Building Programme (HABP), the Complementary Community Infrastructure (CCI) programme and a Resettlement Programme in which families in densely settled zones confronting absolute land constraints are encouraged to move to other prescribed locations within rural Ethiopia. HABP is the component that addresses livelihood strengthening and the potential for graduation from the PSNP.

HABP is funded mainly by Government of Ethiopia, with contributions for specific purposes from the World Bank and other donors. The total cost of HABP over the 5-year period 2010-14 is budgeted at US$649 million, of which approximately US$481 million is expected to be disbursed in credits through a revolving fund, and US$85 million in grants to households.

Beneficiary Selection: Targeting

Targeting for the PSNP begins with regional and district selection (geographical targeting) related to past experience of seasonal food deficits and need for humanitarian assistance. At the community level, beneficiary selection is undertaken in a consultation between community members and village leaders. Beneficiaries must be able to supply labour to public works projects in order to receive seasonal food or cash transfers, although an exception is made for individuals lacking able-bodied labour and with no other means of support e.g. from children or relatives who may qualify for 'direct support' (unconditional transfers). In terms of criteria, beneficiary selection hinges on the notion of a seasonal 'food gap' i.e. a period in the calendar year when the family is unable to secure food either from its own supplies or by generating cash to purchase food.

Programme Delivery

The PSNP is mainly delivered by Government of Ethiopia, through regional and district administrations. A proportion of the programme in specific districts is delivered by international or national NGOs. Transfers are made either in food or cash, with increasing emphasis being placed on cash such that by 2012 about 50% of transfers were made in cash. Cash deliveries are made using traditional manual means (cash withdrawn from bank branches in district towns), rather than the electronic methods direct to beneficiaries used in other recent social transfer schemes in Africa. Ethiopia has a long history of delivery of food aid to PSNP communities, so the logistics of PSNP food deliveries follows similar organisational procedures.

Programme Achievements

By any criteria, the PSNP is a massive achievement. It appears to have prevented food insecurity in Ethiopia reaching crisis levels since it was established, although variable recourse is still made to emergency operations for food insecure populations living in areas other than those covered in the PSNP, as also, occasionally, in PSNP districts using a risk financing facility. Impact evaluations have demonstrated that seasonal food gaps are reduced by participation in PSNP, and that food security and livelihood effects are cumulative – the longer families have stayed in the programme the stronger their assets and incomes have become (Gilligan *et al*., 2009, Berhane *et al.,* 2011).

Lesson Learning

The strong points of the PSNP have been:

- recognition of the chronic rather than acute nature of most seasonal food insecurity in Ethiopia;
- provision of predictable transfers to beneficiaries from predictable annual budgets, replacing former reliance on emergency operations (humanitarian assistance);
- the attempt to build in livelihood strengthening components, so that families might potentially be able to exit the programme in the future.

The weak points of the PSNP have been:

- poor and delayed implementation of HABP, the component meant to strengthen beneficiaries' livelihoods;
- failure to achieve significant 'graduation', perhaps partly due to HABP problems, but also pointing to deeper underlying difficulties with shrinking access to land, continued rural population growth, market size constraints for agricultural outputs, and slow growth in non-farm employment opportunities;
- variable command over food represented by a fixed level of cash transfer unadjusted to annual or monthly changes in food prices in PSNP locations.

Summary

The Ethiopia PSNP is a seasonal social transfer programme designed to prevent famine by anticipating in advance the food access failure of chronically food insecure rural households. The PSNP operates mainly as a workfare programme in which food or cash up to prescribed limits is provided in exchange for labour in public works or community infrastructure projects. The PSNP represents a significant logistical achievement, reaching 7.5 million individuals, and is cost-efficient in its delivery of transfers. It appears to have prevented the emergence of famine in Ethiopia since 2005. While PSNP has been successful at addressing the predictable food gaps of the poorest 10 per cent of the population, it has been less successful at addressing the underlying factors reproducing food insecurity in the long term, and there has been little effective graduation from the programme since its inception.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE 2:

Kenya Linking Farmers to Supermarkets

This example is based on two sources:

Rao, E.J.O and M. Qaim, 2011, 'Supermarkets, Farm Household Income, and Poverty: Insights from Kenya', *World Development*, Vol.39, No.5, pp.784–796

Ngugi, I.K., R. Gitau, J. Nyoro, 2007, *Access to high value markets by smallholder farmers of African indigenous vegetables in Kenya*, Regoverning Markets Innovative Practice series, IIED, London

The Context

An important policy area for raising rural incomes is to assist farmers to access higher value markets, in particular supermarket supply chains. Supermarkets represent a rising share of food markets in most countries, and capture market growth created by urbanisation and rising urban incomes. Smallholders face difficulty in complying with the quality and timeliness requirements of supermarkets; however, if they can succeed in meeting these they can experience more stable and secure output sales than in traditional markets. This case study describes an initiative in Kenya to link smallholders to supermarkets.

Project Objectives and Coverage

Since the early 2000s a NGO called Farm Concern International (FCI) has worked at various sites in Kenya and other eastern and southern African countries to improve farmer participation in supermarket value chains. One such location is Kiambu in Kenya where small farmers have a long tradition of supplying the capital city, Nairobi, with fresh fruit and vegetables. Nevertheless, the resilience of this trade was threatened by the ability of expanding supermarkets to source from any location meeting their procurement needs, giving rise to the risk of a shrinkage in the traditional market and exclusion from supermarket supply chains. The objective of the FCI project was to secure Kiambu farmer inclusion in these value chains. This was to be achieved by creating farmer groups to ensure a regular supply of horticultural crops, helping farmer groups to negotiate contracts with supermarkets, and assisting them in complying with agronomic and quality standards.

Project Cost and Design

Cost data on the FCI project is not known from the sources consulted, although it seems that USAID was the main donor funder of this initiative. The key design feature of FCI's work with farmers was to assist farmers to organise into groups called business support units (BSUs). Between 2001 and 2006, twenty such groups were initiated in Kiambu. The primary purpose of such groups was to ensure that a critical threshold of reliability and continuity of supply to supermarkets was reached; however, they also serve several other functions including consistency of agronomic practices and output quality across group members, negotiating contracts with supermarkets, coordinating supplies to meet contracts, and facilitating timely payments to members from produce sold. FCI implemented a phased 26-module training programme for each BSU covering these features. It also facilitated the initial negotiation with supermarkets resulting in the two chains Uchumi and Nakumatt purchasing produce from Kiambu farmer groups either directly or through an intermediary.

Beneficiary Selection: Targeting

The principal beneficiary selection criterion in a project of this type is the preparedness of farmers to join a group and abide by its rules and regulations. This is therefore a form of self-targeting, and probably results in more forward thinking farmers comprising the majority of membership (members were found to have larger farm sizes than non-members in subsequent evaluation). Groups are not, however, fixed in membership at creation, and some members choose to let their membership lapse while others are able to join.

Project Delivery

This occurred over a roughly five year period from 2001 to 2006. In addition to group formation and training, a reason for this duration is that many participating farmers had to change their crops and patterns of planting and harvesting in order to comply with supermarket demand requirements. However, by 2006, all groups were routinely supplying the supermarket chains with produce and the project was observed to be having measurable positive outcomes for the stability and level of farmer incomes.

Project Achievements

An impact evaluation was conducted in 2008 in Kiambu (reported in Rao & Qaim, 2011) to ascertain whether supplying supermarkets raised farm incomes by comparison to an equivalent set of farmers selling similar produce in traditional markets. A survey of vegetable farmers independent of the group structure created by FCI was undertaken in four of the main vegetable-producing divisions of the district. Since farmers who participated in supermarket channels were in the minority, they were oversampled using lists obtained from supermarkets and supermarket traders. In total, the sample comprised 402 farmers of which 133 were supermarket suppliers and 269 traditional channel suppliers.

While for many variables no statistical difference was observed between supermarket and traditional farmers, the supermarket suppliers had larger farm sizes (2.7 vs. 1.9 acres), larger vegetable growing areas (1.2 vs. 0.7 acres) and greater engagement in non-farm activities (61 vs. 43 per cent) compared to traditional suppliers. The gross margin per acre in vegetable growing was 92,244 KShs against 53,502 KShs respectively, and the net margin (net income) per acre 79,950 KShs against 36,865 KShs. Overall, results showed that participation in supermarket channels produced gains in per capita household income of 48 per cent. Smaller and poorer farms supplying supermarkets benefitted over-proportionally. Simulations demonstrated that poverty rates among supermarket suppliers were 20 per cent lower than would have been the case without supermarkets.

Lesson Learning

The livelihood constraint addressed by the Kiambu project was that of market access, and in particular access to higher value and more reliable sales of marketed farm output. Strong points of the project seem to have been:

- formation of farmer groups with a strong commercial ethos able to ensure continuity and timeliness of delivery to supermarkets;

- sufficient project duration to undertake a full sequence of training, correct emerging problems, and establish firm relationships with supermarkets;
- higher returns achieved by selling directly to retailers, rather than into the first level of a traditional marketing chain with several sequential middlemen involved.

The evaluation carried out in 2008 may have occurred too early to verify long term consolidation. Questions to be considered are:

- cost effectiveness of facilitating the linkages between farmers and suppliers, on which there no evidence was available in the sources consulted;
- the stability and longevity of the farmer groups after the prime facilitator has disappeared from the scene: their duration as a viable organisational form for connecting to supermarkets after, say, 6-8 years would be a considerable achievement;
- how limiting or expansive is this kind of opportunity in that farming area more widely? i.e. further down the line have other farmers been able to take up and expand the model which worked for the initial beneficiaries.

Summary

The Kiambu marketing project described here had the objective of connecting small farmers to higher value markets in the form of supermarket supply chains for fruit and vegetables. The project developed a potentially replicable model comprising farming group formation, training and contract negotiation with leading supermarket chains. Benefits include timeliness and continuity of supply of horticultural products, and higher returns due to sales direct to retailers rather than in village markets or to first-tier middlemen. An evaluation demonstrated large and statistically significant income and poverty reduction gains from participation in the project. Longer term sustainability, especially of the group-based organisational model, remains to be examined and would be useful to undertake, say, 5-6 years after project completion to verify the gains observed two years after.