

# GOODBYE TO PROJECTS? – THE INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES ON DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

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## OVERVIEW

These briefing papers aim to help policy-makers and practitioners in planning and managing development interventions that respond to evolving methodological approaches (such as sustainable livelihoods approaches) and questions over the effectiveness of different formats of interventions.

We focus on two main themes: the practical trade-offs required between operational and normative principles; and how to ensure that development interventions will have a sustainable impact.

The briefing papers include:

1. An overview,
2. The application of SLA principles,
3. The changing format of interventions,
4. Lessons for community-based planning interventions,
5. Lessons for rural livelihoods interventions,
6. Lessons for HIV/AIDS interventions.

'Goodbye to Projects?' is a collaborative project between the Bradford Centre for International Development (BCID), University of Bradford, with the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Uganda; Khanya – managing rural change, South Africa; and Mzumbe University, Tanzania.

Project website:  
<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/dppc/GTP/goodbye.html>

## 5. Lessons from rural livelihoods interventions

By Faustin Kamuzora, Tom Franks, Ian Goldman, David Howlett, Fred Muhumuza, Tsiliso Tamasane and Anna Toner.

*This briefing paper reports on research exploring four detailed case studies of rural livelihoods interventions operating in Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda. Analysing these interventions through an audit of sustainable livelihood 'principles' (as a proxy for best practice) reveals general lessons about both the practical opportunities and challenges for employing sustainable livelihoods approaches to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions.*

### Principal Findings

The analysis of case studies using SLA principles provides us with some general lessons for the management of rural livelihoods interventions

#### In design:

- Holistic analysis of livelihoods is vital for understanding how to increase the sustainability of rural livelihoods interventions. This needs to take account of agricultural and non-agricultural elements, the capacity of state and private sectors and market conditions at all levels, both nationally and *internationally*. It is important that rural interventions address these complex livelihoods, and do not revert to a narrow focus on commodity production.

#### In implementation:

- It is essential to promote appropriate and sustainable mechanisms for the different elements of the production system, and in rural livelihoods systems this may well involve the private sector in a significant way. This requires working with a range of partners, rather than establishing parallel structures. The meso level is a key level for service delivery and must not be ignored.
- Coordination mechanisms are needed, notably at meso level, bringing together public and private sector operators
- Environmental sustainability is particularly important for this sector, and technologies must address this.

#### In monitoring and evaluation:

- Successful interventions require the actions of many independent people. Therefore widespread ownership and understanding are essential. Participatory feedback mechanisms (involving beneficiaries and front-line staff) need to be built into systems, but should not be too complex. This can be an important mechanism for learning from rural livelihoods interventions implemented by a broad range of partners, but is an area that requires more work.

## Rural Livelihoods Interventions

In the last five years 'sustainable livelihoods approaches' (SLAs) have increasingly entered the development arena and are used by a range of organisations including the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, DFID, Oxfam and CARE (Hussein 2002). An understanding of the complexity and integrated nature of livelihoods also allows for a better understanding of their vulnerability to external shocks and stresses. The increasing interest in the conceptual ideas found in sustainable livelihoods approaches have seen a shift in development practice away from a specific focus on agriculture to a broader concern with rural livelihoods more generally.

### The Sustainable Livelihoods-grounded audit

The research study *Goodbye to Projects?*, which is described in some detail in the first of these briefing papers and involved detailed case studies of development interventions in Uganda, Tanzania and Southern Africa. Analysis of the case studies was undertaken using the SL-principles as a structuring framework in order to compare how different principles were translated into practice. The ten case studies included four that were focused specifically on interventions in rural livelihoods (Box 1). TEAM and Magu are projects designed and managed by CARE (an international NGO). ASPS and PMA, are long-term programmes for the restructuring of agriculture and implemented at a national level. Both PMA and ASPS aim at improving the agricultural sectors in the respective countries. However, PMA aimed at the holistic reform of governmental support for rural livelihoods, whilst ASPS dealt only with the agricultural sector. In addition ASPS is only implemented in four out of twenty one regions of Tanzania's mainland, whereas PMA is a national strategy.

#### **Box 1 The rural livelihoods interventions**

##### ***Training for Environmental and Agricultural Management (TEAM-Lesotho)***

TEAM was a rural livelihoods project, managed by CARE Lesotho-South Africa, which developed an extension approach that increased the knowledge and improved the practices of rural farmers, including their decision-making and problem-solving abilities. The project was based on the principles of participation, experiential and adult learning, using teams and self-directed staff.

##### ***Magu District Livelihood and Food Security Project (MDLSP) – Tanzania***

MDLSP (hereafter 'Magu'), operated in Magu district from 1997-2000 to address the causes of livelihood insecurity for 5,000 vulnerable family households. Special attention was to be paid to women-headed households.

##### ***Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (Uganda)***

The Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) was a multi-sectoral, strategic framework for eradicating poverty that aimed at enabling the people to improve their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. The PMA was part of the Government of Uganda's broader strategy of poverty eradication contained in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP).

##### ***Agricultural Sector Programme Support (Tanzania)***

The Agricultural Sector Program Support (ASPS) was a multi-faceted initiative financed by the Government of Denmark through Danida. The overall objective of ASPS was to increase income and improve nutrition for the poorer sections of smallholders, and in particular women.

## Design stage

All interventions talked of **addressing the poor**, with ASPS working with women in particular, and TEAM/Magu aiming to support the livelihoods of identifiable groups of rural poor in their respective locations. In PMA, while livelihoods were supposed to be central, in the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS, one of the key services within the PMA) the focus is on supporting individual "enterprises" or commodities. This does not reflect the reality of complex livelihood systems and also favours commercial over subsistence farmers and shows some contradictions between livelihoods language and reality.

The design stage of the two CARE projects involved detailed **participatory work** using CARE's Household Livelihoods Security Framework. This provided these projects with a means of disaggregating and targeting specific groups of the poor and to build on the priorities of these groups in designing the scope and focus of the project. PMA sought to respond to livelihoods concerns expressed through the Ugandan Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP) and so also managed to incorporate livelihoods information.

They all showed elements of **flexible and process** approaches, and took long time scales. However there was a problem in not taking sufficient account of the wider environment, and not using just community-level analysis. For example in designing the PMA, the analysis did not take account of the fact that agricultural production takes place in an open international market and that it is influenced by changes in that market. Similarly, ASPS failed to include financial as well as market analysis in most of the activities it planned to undertake.

Another design challenge in all cases was to address **institutional sustainability**. The design of PMA assumed that there was sufficient private sector capacity to fill the gap left by the reduction in the role of government provision in service provision. Whether this is institutionally sustainable is not yet clear, and a lack of understanding of the complexities of this institutional sustainability has bedeviled some agricultural reform programmes in the past. In TEAM and Magu there was insufficient attention to the challenge of institutionalizing the approaches, notably at meso level. Although PMA began as a Ugandan initiative, donors played a strong role in shaping the intervention. They were well represented on the national steering committee and employ Technical Advisors within the PMA Secretariat and NAADS. This also raises questions about the strength of local ownership and control over the conceptualisation of the PMA, and sustainability in the longer term.

## **Implementation**

Both TEAM and Magu demonstrated good levels of **flexibility** during the implementation stage by responding to new needs of the beneficiaries. Magu started working with another NGO that was dealing with HIV/AIDS control, even though they were not in the initial plan. This was necessitated by the fact that HIV/AIDS was becoming increasingly significant in the project area. Other activities that Magu added were assisting in the designing and procurement processes of treadle irrigation pumps by providing loans. The pumps proved to raise profitability levels threefold for horticulture and rice production enterprises. Similarly, TEAM diversified its activities and supported a project producing essential oils in response to an opportunity emerging. However there are questions as to whether such additional initiatives result in diversion from the aims of the project.

The two larger programmes also demonstrated flexibility. For example ASPS demonstrated flexibility in terms of rescheduling the start of some activities after realising that the participatory processes were taking longer than planned. In doing this, the funds for the rescheduled activities were not affected. NAADS had a building up process to allow learning from the experience of initial pilot districts.

Micro-macro links and the meso level in particular proved a major challenge in all cases. TEAM and Magu worked well with local (micro level) institutions and participated in increasing the capacities of these institutions. However they failed to establish an effective working relationship with the meso level (local government/district) institutions. Both interventions created parallel structures to implement the activities in the local communities leading to very limited institutional sustainability and an inability to scale-up the real innovations at micro level. ASPS realised the importance of working with existing institutions at both central and local government level but maintained significant control from headquarters. In contrast NAADS worked strongly with local government, while also establishing farmer structures at subcounty and district level.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

TEAM and Magu used the concept of participatory village self-monitoring, unlike the larger programmes. This provided an opportunity for villagers to actively monitor aspects of the activities that were being implemented in their areas, empowering beneficiaries in the process, ie providing some

**accountability.** In the case of Magu the monitoring tools were translated into the national language ensuring that most of the beneficiaries understood them. In TEAM the intentions were laudable, but the complexity of the proposed M&E system meant that it was not implemented as planned. Magu ensured that beneficiaries participated in both the mid-term and final evaluation process. The learnings from the mid-term evaluation enabled Magu to modify some of the activities to accommodate priorities of the beneficiaries which had changed from those identified during the design stage.

ASPS employed a well-elaborated mechanism of **monitoring** its activities. It was used by field officers to collect data that was captured onto computers. However, beneficiaries did not participate fully in the monitoring activities. At the time of field work, PMA was in the process of establishing an M&E system that builds on the existing institutional processes and data collection systems. Additionally one of its aims was to make support for rural livelihoods more responsive to the needs of people and therefore activities were designed to be demand-led and so monitored and evaluated by their participants.

### **Emerging issues for rural livelihoods interventions**

One of the challenges for rural livelihoods projects is their **complexity**. Credit, marketing, input supply, and extension services may all be required for success. Holistic analysis may illustrate this complexity, but the challenge is to find sustainable mechanisms to improve capacity, as private sector capacity is often inadequate. TEAM also tried to cover many aspects of the agricultural system, creating parallel structures to the governmental (meso level) institutions. National level programmes have tended to identify public sector (and increasingly private sector) partners for service delivery. For example the PMA tried to stimulate the private extension system, while working with local government to contract services on behalf of farmer groups. However, care must be taken to actually increase capacities of structures rather than just increasing the time burden on partners and participants. More work is needed on the support for the emergence of appropriate institutions, and how best to stimulate the private sector.

Complexity also leads to a need for **multi-disciplinary** approaches. However working across government sectors is still problematic, above all at national level, and there is a need for workable institutional mechanisms. This is much more workable at meso level, but this requires decentralisation and appropriate coordination systems. For example, NAADS coordinators worked at local government level in Uganda, but by contrast there were poor linkages with the meso level in TEAM.

Another issue for rural livelihoods is the importance of **environmental sustainability** to safeguard natural resources. TEAM and Magu placed great emphasis on environmentally-sustainable technologies. In contrast the emphasis in NAADS is on commodities, and environmental issues are secondary in the selection of commodities. This leads to production systems with environmental benefits, such as forestry, being ignored.

The livelihoods of poor people are **multidimensional**, and may involve production of fuel, fodder, building materials, fruits, wildlife as well as conventional crops and livestock. It is therefore important to understand these linkages if the livelihoods of the poor are to be addressed. There was some recognition of this in TEAM, which looked at household production systems, but not in the PMA, where NAADS focuses on individual commodities, and farmers are expected to be part of only one commodity-based group. The PMA approach does not recognise the interrelationship of livelihoods, and the importance of addressing the different elements of the livelihood system.

Successful programmes require the actions of many independent people. Widespread ownership and understanding are essential and participatory and responsive approaches are therefore very important. Participatory M&E systems are one ingredient, so individuals and groups can monitor and respond to emerging learning.

### **References**

Franks T. et al (2004) *Goodbye to Projects? The Institutional Impact of Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches on Development Interventions*. Bradford Centre for International Development, Bradford University

