

## **Rights-Based and Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches: Divergences and convergences**

### **1 Introduction**

This records the outcome of a brainstorming session at DFIDSA in Pretoria between Bridget Dillon (Social Development Advisor) and Tom Barrett (Rural Livelihoods Advisor) of DFID; Mike Drinkwater of CARE; Leah Nchabeleng of Thavhama Training Initiative; Ian Goldman and Tsiliso Tamasane of Khanya- managing rural change. DFID's Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office covered costs associated with the meeting.

The objective of the meeting was to understand the relationship between the Rights-based Approach (RBA) and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.

### **2 Defining the Rights-Based approach (RBA)**

According to DFID<sup>1</sup> the RBA sees people as active citizens with rights, expectations, and responsibilities. These are based on three cross-cutting principles of participation, inclusion and fulfilling obligations.

#### **Box 1: CARE's emphasis on a rights-based approach<sup>2</sup>**

For CARE, the `shift to a rights emphasis is a natural evolution of the people-centred way the Household Livelihood Security framework has been applied. What a rights-based approach entails is an even deeper grounding in respect for human dignity, and an acknowledgement that development is more about internal psychological and social processes of capacity building than it is about doing things for people.'

CARE has chosen to retain a livelihoods framework for its RBA. Rather than focus on a legalistic analysis of rights (where the emphasis is on state institutions and structures), CARE has chosen to adopt what it calls a relational rights-based approach. This emphasises the rights and responsibilities of all individuals and institutions. It has four key elements:

- participatory governance and the right to participate;
- promoting inclusive social and economic development;
- mutual accountability in respect of rights and responsibilities; and
- an holistic perspective focusing on understanding root causes, removing constraints and creating opportunities and choices for livelihood improvement.

Adoption of an RBA means that institutional mapping (a step in the analysis of what DFID would call PIP) is expanded to include a broader range of responsible actors covering the wider spectrum of rights issues. The assessment also includes a component to help understand local perceptions of the legitimacy and/or value of these institutions.

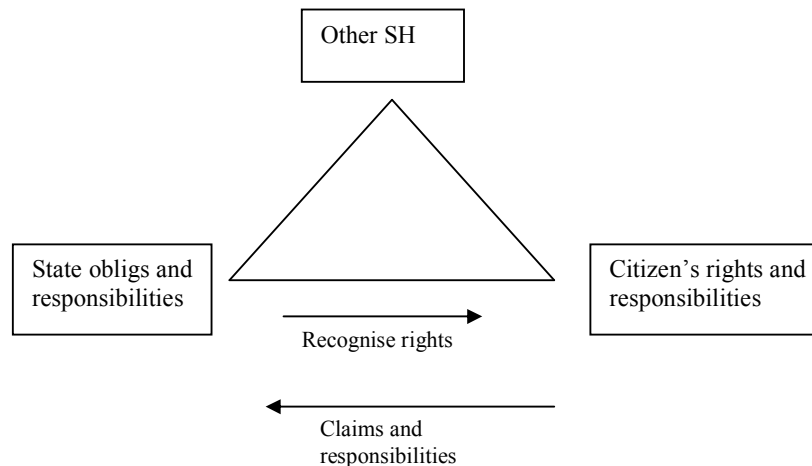
Source: Drinkwater 2001, Jones 2001

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Norton and Moser, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Carney, 2001, Discussion Paper for DFID SL Meeting, 25.10.01

A way of summarising the approach would be that State and non-State actors have specific obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, playing a facilitating, provision or promotion role (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Relation between stakeholders' rights and obligations**



### 3 Rights, claims and responsibilities

A way of conceptualising rights is shown in Box 2.

#### Box 2 Conceptualisation of rights

**Right as legitimate claims:** Rights are widely characterised as legitimate claims that give rise to correlative obligations or duties.

**Rights regime:** A rights regime is a system of rights which derive from a particular regulatory order or source of authority. In a given society several may co-exist – all with distinct normative frameworks and means of formulation and enforcement, for example customary law, religious law and statutory law.

**Individual rights:** These are subset of right-obligation relationships where the rights-bearer is an individual person; group rights would not fall within this subset of rights.

**Universal human rights:** This can be characterised as an individual right with a universal domain –that is, an individual right that applies to all human beings equally, irrespective of their membership of particular families, groups, religions, communities, or societies.

Source: Moser and Norton, 2001

CARE categorises rights as:

- ❑ *security rights* (rights of personal freedom)
- ❑ *economic, social, cultural rights* (rights of access - split society, claim, responsibility, affordability) and
- ❑ *political rights* (rights of representation – voice).

Rights are relational, that is, all stakeholders have rights and responsibilities. The question is what they are doing to protect, fulfil and promote their own rights.

Figure 1 shows some of the relationships between these. Some of the contested areas in relation to rights, claims and responsibilities are:

- State's obligations and responsibilities to recognise citizens rights
- Citizens' rights and responsibilities and ability to claim rights from the state
- Other stakeholders' obligations and responsibilities

Some issues arising are:

- Need to balance rights and responsibilities
- Need for transparency (clear ground rules, agreed processes, have good information systems, advocacy)
- Power relations are critical
- Need to understand causality (e.g. political economy, type of rights)
- Tensions and trade-offs eg basic needs vs strategic economic development and approach
- The challenge of how to achieve social and economic rights when states are poor, and so the concept of "progressive realisation of rights"
- The challenge of weak or non-existent states (eg Congo), and how the RBA applies in that case

#### 4 Some principles behind the RBA<sup>34</sup>

- People are at the centre of development
- Participation in decision-making
- Need to analyse and understand power relations and root causes of poverty/suffering
- Equal worth for all
- Need to understand social differentiation and empower the marginalised to negotiate with the state and other stakeholders
- Stakeholders need to be mutually accountable and responsible
- Recognition of obligations of the state to facilitate, provide and promote attainment of citizen's rights
- Recognition of the need to promote the public good and that there are interests and trade-offs that need to be negotiated
- Social and political analysis of the relationship between the state and citizens
- Recognition of the dynamic nature of relationships
- Citizens have rights to make claims on the state and each other, but also responsibilities to both
- Need to recognise the reality of differing interests and trade-offs which need to be negotiated and processed and,

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<sup>3</sup> Note Moser and Norton differentiate

- Normative – ie principles
- Analytical – ways of understanding
- Operational – implications for action (although they focus on entry points)

This distinction would be helpful in both the brainstorming above, and with the SLA, where the principles do not differentiate between these.  
<sup>4</sup> Annex 1 summarises the RBA principles proposed by Moser and Norton, 2001

- Systems need to be developed which are transparent to handle this

## 5 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

### Box 2 Core SL principles

Poverty-focused development activity should be:

- **People-centred, participatory and responsive:** sustainable poverty elimination will be achieved only if external support understands the differences between various groups of people and works with them in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environments and ability to adapt.
- **Starting with people's strengths** – it is important to understand people's assets (strengths) and build from where people and institutions are at, rather than starting where they are weakest
- **Holistic** – we need to understand poor people's lives in a holistic way, although actions may be sectoral
- **Micro-macro links:** the scale of the challenge of poverty elimination is enormous, and can only be achieved by working at multiple levels, ensuring that micro level activity informs the development of policy and an effective enabling environment and that macro level structures and processes support people to build upon their own strengths.
- **Conducted in partnership:** with both the public and the private sector.
- **Sustainable:** there are four key dimensions to sustainability – economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability. All are important – a balance must be found between them.
- **Dynamic and flexible:** external support must recognise the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond flexibly to changes in people's situation, and develop longer-term commitments of support.
- **Commitment to poverty reduction**

## 6 Relating the two approaches

Principles behind the RBA	Related principles of the SLA
People at the centre of development	People-centred, participatory and responsive
Participation in decision-making	
Need to analyse and understand power relations and root causes of poverty/suffering	
Equal worth for all	Commitment to poverty reduction
Need to understand social differentiation and empower the marginalised to negotiate with the state and other stakeholders	People-centre – understand assets
Stakeholders need to be mutually accountable and responsible	People-centred, participatory and responsive
Recognition of obligations of the state to facilitate, provide and promote attainment of citizen's rights	People-centred, participatory and responsive Micro-macro links
Recognition of the need to promote the public good and that there are interests and trade-offs that need to be negotiated	
Social and political analysis of the relationship between the state and citizens	
Recognition of the dynamic nature of relationships	Flexible and dynamic
Citizens have rights to make claims on the state and each other, but also responsibilities to both	Micro-macro links
Need to recognise the reality of differing interests and trade-offs which need to be negotiated and processed and,	
Systems need to be developed which are transparent	

to handle this	
	Sustainable
	Partnership
	Holistic
	Strengths-based

What comes out from the comparison is:

- ❑ The RBA is more explicit about the importance of changing power relations if poverty is to be addressed – while this is often stated when explaining the SLA, it is implicit rather than explicit
- ❑ The RBA raises the issues of mutual obligations, stressing the need for rights to go with responsibilities
- ❑ The RBA is stronger on its expression of equality and so issues of social exclusion
- ❑ Both are strong on governance
- ❑ The SLA is more explicit about issues of sustainability (although this may not be addressed in practice)

## **7 Applying the RBA to the 6 Governance issues Khanya have derived from using the SLA**

Khanya has developed a checklist of 6 governance issues based on linking at institutional in a micro-macro context. These have been used to assist in programme design and evaluation, and to help conceptualise what interventions are needed to promote pro-poor development. These were adapted in the meeting as follows.

### Micro level

- Poor people are active and involved in managing their own development (claiming their rights and exercising their responsibilities)
- Responsive, active and accessible network of local service providers (community-based, private sector or government)

### Meso level

- At local government level (lower meso) services facilitated, provided or promoted effectively and responsively, coordinated and held accountable
- The region/province (upper meso-level) supportive and supervising the districts/local governments, and promoting regional actions

### Macro level

- National level providing holistic and strategic direction around poverty and redistribution and oversight of development
- At international level, institutions and processes strengthening the capacity in-country to address poverty

## **8 Improving the SLA**

The SL principles provide a useful checklist in looking at interventions to see their potential to support pro-poor development, but have mixed normative, analytical and operational elements. The RBA brings in two key areas in sharp focus, the concepts of power relations

(and empowerment), and rights and responsibilities, which could potentially be added to the SL principles (and are added below). Taking these two points into account the SL principles could perhaps be reclassified as:

#### Normative

- **Commitment to poverty reduction** ( or perhaps better, Drinkwater's use of inclusive social and economic development)
- **People-centred, participatory and responsive**<sup>5</sup>: sustainable poverty elimination will be achieved only if external support understands the differences between various groups of people and works with them in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environments and ability to adapt
- **Power relations** – the need to address power relations and how they empower or inhibit people's ability to improve their livelihoods
- **Mutual accountability** – individuals, organisations and the state have mutual rights and responsibilities
- **Sustainable**: there are four key dimensions to sustainability – economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability. All are important – a balance must be found between them.

#### Analytical<sup>6</sup>

- **Starting with people's strengths** – it is important to understand people's livelihoods, their assets (strengths) and vulnerabilities and build on these, rather than starting where they are weakest<sup>7</sup>
- **Holistic** – we need to understand poor people's lives and the causes of poverty in a holistic way, although actions may be sectoral and focused

#### Operational

- **Micro-macro links**: the scale of the challenge of poverty elimination is enormous, and can only be achieved by working at multiple levels, ensuring that micro level activity informs the development of policy and an effective enabling environment and that macro level structures and processes support people to build upon their own strengths to access their rights and exercise their responsibilities
- **Conducted in partnership**: In order to have an effective responsive it is essential to build on the strengths of both the public and the private sector
- **Dynamic and flexible**: external support must recognise the dynamic nature of livelihood strategies, respond flexibly to changes in people's situation, and develop longer-term commitments of support

<sup>5</sup> Drinkwater uses Participatory governance

<sup>6</sup> Note analysis would also need to look at the actual situation with the elements under normative and operational, eg power relations, or micro-macro links

<sup>7</sup> This also applies to institutions

## **Annex 1 Human rights, sustainable development and livelihoods: key normative principles as suggested by Moser and Norton, 2001**

- ❑ **Human freedom:** Expanding human freedom entails expanding human liberties, opportunities and capabilities. Deprivations in human freedom relate to the inability to avoid hunger, poverty, treatable illnesses and premature mortality as well as the denial of civil and political liberties. A human rights perspective highlights the importance of processes and policies that expand human freedoms and capabilities by respecting, protecting and fulfilling individual choices and enabling people to achieve what they value.
- ❑ **Universalism and equality:** Human rights are inclusive in character and apply to all people everywhere on an equal basis. The principle encapsulates recognition of the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. All people should be treated fairly in a consistent and/or equitable manner on the basis of non-discrimination.
- ❑ **The multi-dimensional character of well-being:** Human rights for the life, survival, integrity and development of the human person include human rights to liberty, security and well-being. These human rights reflect the principles of interdependence and indivisibility in the sense that achievement of all human rights should be given equal priority and urgent consideration.
- ❑ **Transparency, participation and empowerment:** In order to expand peoples' freedoms and capabilities, development processes and policies that respect people's human rights and entitlements are required. The principles of transparency, participation and empowerment can help to ensure that development institutions are responsible and accountable, and that people are fully informed and can influence and have a stake in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- ❑ **Responsibility and accountability:** Individuals, organisations and governments have responsibilities to respect, promote and fulfil all human rights for all. Governments have particular responsibilities and are accountable for respecting, promoting and fulfilling internationally recognised obligations in the field of human rights.
- ❑ **Sustainability:** Development processes should respect the rights of future generations as well as the present. As Sen argues sustainability means 'development that promotes the capabilities of people in the present without compromising the capabilities of future generations' (2001).

## **Annex 2 Key references**

- Carney, D (2001): "Discussion paper for DFID SL Meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2001"
- Drinkwater, M (2001): "Programming principles for a Rights-Based Approach: experiences to date in Southern and West Africa", Johannesburg, CARE.
- Jones, A (2001): "Incorporation of a Rights-Based Approach into CARE's Programme Cycle: a discussion paper for CARE's programme staff", CARE.
- Moser, C and Norton, A (2001) "To claim our rights: livelihood security, human rights and sustainable development", London, Overseas Development Institute.