

Sustaining Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Using the SLA as a framework to review and strengthen how OXFAM GB addresses chronic poverty and vulnerability

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Editor's notes

In recent years there has been increasing recognition that longer-term recovery work after any disaster or emergency needs to begin as early as possible – alongside the actual relief phase. OXFAM GB has, like many other agencies, grappled with how to make this shift and has found the SLA a useful tool to facilitate their understanding of vulnerable communities and their thinking. This SLSA shares how the SLA has helped the organisation to develop a better conceptual understanding of chronic food and livelihoods insecurity. Our thanks to Maxime Houinato¹ and Craig Castro² for their willingness to share this 'work in progress'.

Introduction

Despite progress in reducing poverty in some parts of the world, millions are still struggling to make ends meet. Even in countries that experienced economic growth, inequality and exclusion have grown sharply and chronic poverty increased. In southern and eastern Africa the breadth

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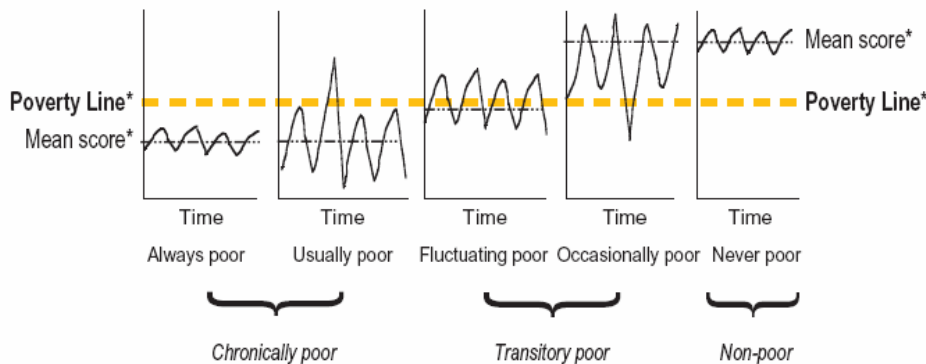
and depth of poverty and vulnerability are increasing as a consequence of increased exposure to natural and human induced shocks and stresses and the impact of HIV and AIDS. An increasingly large number of men and women are unable to cope with and recover from these because of a deteriorating asset base and inappropriate policies, institutions and processes. Understanding the severity and chronic nature of poverty and how this influences and defines the capabilities and capacities of people to overcome poverty is fundamental to defining interventions that support peoples' efforts to improve their own lives.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach has helped OGB in gaining greater understanding of chronic food and livelihoods insecurity and has provided a framework to begin to identify interventions that support poor and vulnerable people to improve their livelihoods, enhance food security and build resiliency to vulnerability. In this article we share how we are trying to address vulnerability through a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of chronic food and livelihoods insecurity from the Vulnerable Livelihood Initiative (VLI). During 2009 we hope to begin to develop experience and learning that could be shared from programmes up and running in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

What is chronic poverty?

The figure below provides a schematic representation that categorises people in relation to poverty over time, hypothesising a relationship between the severity and chronic nature of poverty based on the length of time in which people have been living below the poverty line. According to the figure, the *always poor* and the *usually poor* are made up of people considered to be living in chronic poverty, while transitory poverty covers those people that move in and out of poverty over time – the *fluctuating* and *occasionally poor*.

Figure 1: Various Types of Poverty



Source: Chronic Poverty Research Centre

In this conceptualisation of poverty, "severity" refers to how far an individual is below the poverty line, while the "chronicity" of poverty is how long they remain there. This relationship, between poverty severity and poverty chronicity, is complex and only partly understood. Empirical data show countries with:

- High levels of both chronic and severe poverty (such as Ethiopia, India, Madagascar);
- Relatively low levels of both (such as Chile and the Philippines); and
- High levels of one but not the other (such as Peru and Bangladesh).

OGB consultations with programme staff, partner organisations and key external actors identified the following factors and trends as key drivers of chronic poverty in Africa: political marginalisation, policy and state failure, limited capacity of government to deliver services and/or bad governance, gender inequality, HIV and AIDS, inadequate access to water, and the impacts of disaster; climate change & climate variability.³ OGB has concluded that extreme shocks such as the HIV and AIDS pandemic, as well as a combination of different shocks simultaneously (eg the impact of a changing climate and HIV and AIDS) have multiplier effects on vulnerability that we do not fully understand, nor are capable of responding to through a "business as usual" approach.

The SLA provided a useful framework to analyse how increasing levels of poverty, growing inequality and expanding destitution and chronic poverty impact on different households, with their varied asset base, livelihood strategies, and their differing capacity and capability to respond to the advantages, opportunities and shocks.

Traditional responses to chronic poverty

"Ethiopia has received more emergency support than any other African nation... Its population is increasing by 2m every year, yet over the past 10 years, its net agricultural production has steadily declined. Even in good years, some 5m people need food aid just to survive. Ethiopia is so poor that it takes one bad rainy season to tip millions more into crisis".⁴

At current rate, "by 2020, the world would have spent £165 billion this century fighting emergencies in Africa. Yet it has been estimated that just £132 billion, if spent differently, could instead halve hunger by 2015. Rather than simply saving lives, this money could be spent improving lives and ending the cycle of emergencies".⁵

The quotes above highlight the programmatic and institutional challenges the development community faces in addressing vulnerability and suggests that a shift in practice is needed. The most important challenges include:

- Direct interventions often limit citizens' empowerment and the demand side of accountability;
- Many organisations apply short-term solutions to chronic crises, and are called in year after year for food distribution and emergency relief;

³ The term "**climate variability**" is often used to denote deviations of climate statistics over a given period of time (such as a specific month, season or year) from the long-term climate statistics relating to the corresponding calendar period. (In this sense, climate variability is measured by those deviations, which are usually termed anomalies. The term "**climate change**" is often used in a more restricted sense, to denote a significant change (such as a change having important economic, environmental and social effects) in the mean values of a meteorological element (in particular temperature or amount of precipitation) in the course of a certain period of time, where the means are taken over periods of the order of a decade or longer.

⁴ Ethiopia's food aid addiction; Peter Greste (BBC Nov 2006)

⁵ Sarah Bones: *Living on the edge Report*. p2 -Care International, Oct 2006

- There is limited engagement with relevant research and policy groups resulting in a weak understanding of vulnerability and context. A “one size fits all” mentality and donor funding often drives programme design rather than needs specific to context;
- The reports of implementing organisations often do not give a real picture of the nature and quality of programmes on the ground;
- Programme design processes do not cater specifically for systematic joint programming where it is necessary, and long-term development and humanitarian programmes are planned separately;
- Management and advisory structures that support programmes are disjointed.

But efforts are being made by key agencies to fill the gap. The United Nations, governments, donor agencies and international NGOs (I-NGOs) have now realised that the collective response to chronic poverty and extreme vulnerability has often been inappropriate. Among donor agencies and I-NGO’s, it is now admitted that social protection (including supporting communities for disaster risk reduction) is an important mechanism for reducing chronic poverty and promoting economic growth. Indeed social protection programmes exist across Latin America, Africa and Asia that have changed the poverty landscape and transformed the socio-economic determinants of extreme vulnerability. Several agencies are struggling to adjust their approach to that reality, mainly through integrating disaster risk reduction with livelihoods interventions and testing different variances of social protection. These organisations include ActionAid, Plan International, Oxfam International, HelpAge, and CARE International.

In partnership with these organisations several developing countries (including in Southern and Eastern Africa) have launched ambitious social protection programmes utilising a combination of donor funds, loans and other budget provisions. In Africa governments see this effort as a way of testing an alternative to prolonged food aid (eg cash transfers in Ethiopia and Kenya), reducing vulnerability induced by chronic illness or age (eg South Africa), or boosting the rural economy to support economic growth (eg fertilizer and input subsidies in Malawi). In the same vein, the African Union has developed a social protection policy framework based on a Call to Action agreed to by 13 African governments at an intergovernmental conference in March 2006 (The Livingston Agenda). OGB has recently joined the GUFFP (Grow Up Free From Poverty) coalition which is advocating for universal social protection in the form of pensions, child benefits and disability allowances and is working with the African Union to formulate their social development programme.

In our own work, we found that there were several obstacles to integrating short-term emergency response with long-term development interventions. A significant institutional challenge was that our work was separated organisationally, with humanitarian responses falling under the programme aim related to the “Right to Life and Security” and long-term development interventions falling under “Right to a Sustainable Livelihood”. Other obstacles to integrated programming have included:

- Lack of staff with both humanitarian and development experience;
- Donor funding mechanisms that separate short-term emergency response from long-term development interventions;
- Targeting of programme beneficiaries is different for humanitarian and development programming;
- Lack of demonstrable practical examples of integrated programming;

- A challenge of macro (policy-level) versus micro (community-level) approaches; and
- Difference among teams, ways of working and management structures.

OGB efforts to move beyond the traditional response

In 2006, OGB produced “A Companion to Livelihoods Analysis” to guide staff and partners in designing livelihoods programmes based on sound research and analysis. The Vulnerable Livelihood Initiative (VLI) emerged as a result, encompassing social protection mechanisms to address the chronic aspects of poverty and disaster risk reduction strategies to address the acute, both of which represent important strands of the VLI.

The VLI is based on the premise that people living in extreme poverty and/or vulnerability fall between traditional organisational structures and programmatic responses; that is between immediate humanitarian response and long-term development programming. Traditionally, our interventions in humanitarian responses tended to target the population in the extreme left side of figure 1 (chronically poor) while our livelihood programmes supported people on the right side (transitory and non-poor).

In developing the Initiative we began with a scoping exercise to identify relevant initiatives across the organisation, the development of case studies from different regions including southern, eastern and western Africa, a regional consultation with country and regional staff, and finally a consultation with managers and key stakeholders to validate the emerging framework. Through this process of analysis we came to the realisation that:

- a) The chronic nature of most shocks affecting poor people requires long-term solutions combined with emergency preparedness, disaster risk reduction strategies and more traditional livelihoods programming; and
- b) Given extreme vulnerability in poor communities, it was necessary to revisit the concept of “sustainability” and the role of the state, to allow for the use of cash transfers to the most vulnerable women and men in the communities where we work.

In short, we realised that addressing vulnerability means addressing both the underlying causes of poverty and ensuring that emergency responses do not undermine the livelihoods of people living in chronic poverty.

Implications for practice: what needs to change?

Approach

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is based on a set of principles including: people-centred, participatory, holistic, dynamic, multi-level, sustainability, long-term, learning and flexibility, and partnerships. These principles have served to guide the process of analysis in the design of our approach to address vulnerable livelihoods in the context of chronic poverty.

An overriding priority is the need for effective **partnerships** to reduce chronic poverty and address vulnerability, **working with local actors**, particularly government and private sector to promote social protection and safety net mechanisms to support the efforts of the most vulnerable women and men to sustain and develop their livelihoods. This also needs **joint teams** to develop and implement integrated programmes, including tools and management

arrangements across different types of interventions, particularly livelihoods and humanitarian programmes.

For our programmes to be successful, it is necessary to take a **holistic** view, understanding diverse livelihoods (assisted by the SL framework), integrating short and long-term programme interventions, supporting/promoting social protection as a thematic response.

Another is the requirement for active **learning** among staff, partners, communities and other stakeholders, and build the capacity of partners and communities to encourage more active and empowered citizens.

Further, there is a need to act on different levels from micro to macro:

- **globally**, to ensure that vulnerable households and vulnerability move to the top of the agenda of the development community so that a more enabling environment is created to finance and support interventions addressing chronic poverty worldwide;
- at **national level** to work with partners and national governments to develop co-ordinated policies addressing the main drivers of vulnerability for vulnerable populations; and
- at a **local level** support capacity-building of vulnerable women and men and their support organisations to demand their rights and hold government to account.

We need to act on the **policies, institutions and processes**. Our interventions will seek to enhance the capacity of citizens to organise and demand their rights and to increase the responsiveness and accountability of government. This requires political will, administrative and technical capacity and financial resources.

Capacity

As an organisation we are heading in a new direction; taking on new ways of working within the organisation, across departmental lines as well as new ways of working with other stakeholders. In the process of developing the VLI, a number of potential areas were identified where we need to enhance the skills, behaviours and attitudes of staff including in:

- Conducting risk and vulnerability assessments;
- Understanding the impact of migration on vulnerability;
- Understanding how markets affect food security;
- Integrating disaster risk reduction and livelihoods interventions for more holistic programming;
- Understanding the impact of HIV & AIDS on the livelihoods of people living in poverty and turning this into effective, holistic programme interventions;
- Integrating community adaptation to climate change into future programming;
- Planning basic services (education & health) within nomadic/pastoral communities and other vulnerable contexts;
- Developing programming in social protection and safety nets;
- Supporting/promoting national advocacy and campaign on social protection (eg financing from national budgets); and
- Developing effective mechanisms to support learning.

Senior programme staff at district and country levels will need support to better manage the multi-disciplinary teams envisioned to address the complexity and variety of issues surrounding vulnerability and chronic poverty. For example, managers of long-term development interventions will need humanitarian personnel in their team, which often brings tensions and conflict due to differences in approach, methods and ways of working.

In this context, we believe that learning should take place within each individual programme and between different regions, starting initially from similar vulnerability contexts. This suggests that knowledge will be generated not from the "centre", but from countries and regions where the new approach will be tested as well as from outside the organisation to capture learning from the many initiatives being implemented by other agencies. Areas where we anticipate learning include: effective programme tools, scaling-up pilots, transferring skills and responsibility to local communities and government, advocacy and campaigns, and strategic partnerships with regional and continental configurations (eg SADC and the AU) and regional donors.

Conclusion

The breadth and depth of poverty and vulnerability are increasing as a consequence of increased exposure to natural and human induced shocks and stresses. New ways of working and integrated, holistic responses are needed - "business unusual". This will include more integrated programming for both short and long-term interventions (including social protection) and intervention at multiple levels from micro to macro. This requires effective learning partnerships between and among civil society, national governments, regional configurations and bodies, and the private sector to bring about more significant change in the livelihoods of people living in extreme vulnerability and chronic poverty, as well as a more active and empowered citizenship.

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Useful resources

Livelihoods Connect has moved to Eldis. You can still access a wide range of resources on sustainable livelihoods approaches through www.livelihoods.org or go directly to www.eldis.org/go/livelihoods

In the paper "A Companion to Livelihoods Analysis" prepared by Annabel Southgate at Oxfam GB, a number of other resources were identified that are shared here:

The Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation website run by the International Agricultural Centre, Wageningen, provides a comprehensive overview of these and other participatory methods and approaches that can be used in livelihoods analyses. [http://portals.wdi.wur.nl/ppme/?Methodologies %26 Approaches](http://portals.wdi.wur.nl/ppme/?Methodologies%26Approaches).

A summary of methods used in a DFID-funded livelihoods research project across Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi and Kenya can be found in the LADDER working paper number 2: http://www.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.1004!wp2.pdf

DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets

The Guidance Sheets are DFID's evolving core guidance on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach to development. They provide detailed information on the concepts outlined in the Livelihoods framework, and a summary of tools that can be used in livelihoods analysis.

<http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/dossiers/livelihoods/what-are-livelihoods-approaches/training-and-learning-materials>

Household Economy Analysis

The Household Economy Analysis was developed by Save the Children (UK) in order to provide an effective approach to predicting the effects of drought and other economic shocks on rural populations. It has been widely adopted within Save the Children, by the UN and by governments, both to provide a quantitative description of the economy of a defined population and to analyse the relationship between a shock and the ability of households to maintain their food and non-food consumption.

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/foodsecurity/publications/manual.htm>

Livelihoods Options Guidance Sheets: ODI

These guidance sheets are based on three years of livelihoods research in India. They review the key concepts in understanding livelihoods, the methods for understanding livelihoods and the links livelihoods and policy change.

<http://www.odi.org.uk/Livelihoodoptions/papers/guidance.htm>

Enterprise development and Sustainable Livelihoods: EDIAIS

This paper presents a broad overview of the Sustainable Livelihoods approach and its implications for impact assessment.

<http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/iarc/ediais/pdf/StrategicImpactAssessment.pdf>

Combining Quantitative (Formal) and Qualitative (Informal) Survey Methods: NRI

This guide offers practical assistance for field staff and project managers in selecting the most appropriate data collection and analysis methods when faced with information objectives and constraints in data collection and analysis.

<http://www.nri.org/publications/bpg/bpg10.pdf>

A Summary of the British Red Cross Cash Grants for Livelihood Recovery in Aceh, Indonesia the IDL group; 2008

This study draws lessons from the experiences of the BRCS livelihoods programme in Aceh to inform and strengthen future interventions. It also considers the relevance of a sustainable livelihoods approach to recovery programming.

<http://theidlgroup.com>

Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09: Escaping Poverty Traps

Through research, the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09 identifies five main traps that underpin chronic poverty – insecurity, limited citizenship, spatial disadvantage, social discrimination and poor work opportunities – and outlines key policy responses to these.

It argues that the development of a 'just social compact' between citizens and states must be the focus for poverty eradication. Development actors can nurture such a compact through social protection, public services, effective anti-discrimination action, gender empowerment, economic growth and fiscal policy, and the management of migration and urbanisation processes.

<http://www.chronicpoverty.org/cpra-report-0809.php>

Upcoming events

SLA Seminar Series: Community-driven Development and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach 26 March 2009, Johannesburg

This seminar will be hosted by Khanya-aicdd and will draw on the expertise of a range of researchers and practitioners from Southern and East Africa. One of the central and distinctive features of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is that it aims to put people at the centre of development and Community-driven Development (CDD) is a practical means of doing this, but evidence of improved development outcomes is sparse. Whilst CDD promises much, in some cases such processes can lead to elite capture and erosion of strategic institutional capacity.

This seminar will provide a platform to analyse CDD theory and practice in relation to the key principles of SLAs, thereby contributing to and progressing debate on the relationship between SLAs and CDD.

For more information, please go to

<http://www.khanya-aicdd.org/events/event.2009-01-16.4813362368>

Oxfam present Susie Smith Memorial Prize 2009: An award for writing on HIV and AIDS from sub-Saharan Africa which has already been published Deadline: 30 March 2009

Susie Smith, a pioneer in the fight against HIV and AIDS, worked for Oxfam GB for 30 years. With this prize, Oxfam wants to acknowledge her commitment to sub-Saharan Africa and her constant willingness to challenge conventional thinking.

The prize of £3,000 will be awarded for a single piece of writing on HIV and AIDS from sub-Saharan Africa which has already been published. Any writing – possibly an article, poetry, fiction or a chapter of a book – of up to 10,000 words and published in English since 2006 will be eligible. The judges will focus on the quality of the submissions and on the impact the writing has had.

All submissions must be received by March 31st 2009. Please include a cover letter outlining the impact your piece has had. We expect to announce the winner in July 2009.

To enter, send your submission, with a cover letter, to: susiesmithmemorialprize@oxfam.org.uk

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/susiesmith/index.html?ito=2771&itc=0

**34th WEDC International Conference: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene: Sustainable Development & Multisectoral Approaches
18 – 22 May 2009, Ethiopia**

The WEDC International Conference is a week long, practitioner and research focused conference, exchanging knowledge and experiences in the water and sanitation sector. The Conference will be held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa from 18 to 22 May 2009, by invitation of the Ministry of Water Resources, Ethiopia and WEDC, UK.

The WEDC International Conference is a highly respected, global platform for practitioners, decision makers, academics and researchers who lead water and sanitation innovation in developing countries.

For more information go to: <http://www.wedconference.co.uk/>

Future Agricultures Consortium International Conference on Seasonality 10 July, 2009 Institute of Development Studies Brighton, UK

The Future Agricultures Consortium, together with the Centre for Social Protection, is convening a 3-day conference on Seasonality, to be held on Wednesday 8th to Friday 10th July 2009 at IDS Sussex. Funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID), the Future Agricultures Consortium operates as an international partnership of research institutions, working together to encourage critical debate and policy dialogue on the challenges of establishing and sustaining pro-poor agricultural growth in Africa, through stakeholder-led policy dialogues on future scenarios for agriculture, informed by in-depth field research.

Conference Focus

Pioneering work on seasonality in tropical agriculture was undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s, which identified the cluster of negative factors that converge to make the lives of poor

people worse during the pre-harvest months every year. Since then, a number of things have changed – structural adjustment programmes, HIV and AIDS, climate change, the global food and financial crises – which all have seasonal dimensions or implications. However, these seasonal dimensions are under-appreciated, and policy responses in the areas of agricultural investment and social protection programmes rarely pay due attention to seasonality. The Future Agricultures Consortium aims to revive academic and policy interest in seasonality, partly by hosting this conference.

The conference will bring together 50–60 international participants, to include academics and practitioners, as well as policymakers from both governmental and international bodies. The conference will be global in scope but with a strong focus on Africa. The event aims to think through lessons from the past, examine current research, review good practice and consider policy options for the future. We invite proposals for papers for the conference, focused on the following areas:

- Seasonal Inter-linkages:
- Seasonal Blind-spots:
- Seasonal Trends:
- Methodologies:
- Policies and Projects:
- Social Protection Responses:

Abstracts of proposed papers (500 words) are due by April 1st, 2009. Applicants will be notified by April 31st. Complete papers are due by May 31st 2009. **Please send your abstracts to seasonality@ids.ac.uk**

For more information go to:

http://www.future-agricultures.org/EN/Events/Fertiliser%20Workshop/seasonality_workshop.html

Past editions of SLSA - available at www.khanya-aicdd.org

25	September 2008	<i>Reflect</i> and the SLA: exploring linkages and opportunities for strengthening livelihoods with literacy practice
24	March 2008	An integrated approach to improving livelihoods: the Cata story
23	May 2007	Zimbabwe's Protracted Relief Programme
22	February 2007	Adding value to development through Human Rights-based approaches
21	December 2006	Monitoring & Evaluation as Learning: Rethinking the dominant paradigm
20	August 2006	Local and Community Driven Development: Principles and Evolution
19	May 2006	Decentralisation
18	Feb 2006	Local institutions and participatory development
17	Nov 2005	Participatory forest management (PFM)
16	Sept 2005	FAO's work on People-centred development with a livelihoods perspective (PCD-L)
15	July 2005	Shelter and livelihoods
14	Sept 2004	Community-based management
13	June 2004	Learnings about the sustainable livelihoods approach
12	Feb 2004	Sustainable livelihoods and small-scale mining
11	Oct 2003	Sustainable livelihoods and gender
10	June 2003	Community-based natural resources management
9	April 2003	Community-based workers as a model for pro-poor service delivery
8	Feb 2003	Institutional support for sustainable livelihoods
7	Sept 2002	Local economic development and sustainable livelihoods
6	June 2002	HIV/AIDS and sustainable livelihoods
5	March 2002	Social capital and sustainable livelihoods
4	Dec 2001	Rights-based approach to development
3	Sept 2001	Corporate Citizenship
2	July 2001	Community-based Planning
1	May 2001	The sustainable livelihoods approach

Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa is an initiative of the Khanya-African Institute for Community-Driven Development (Khanya-aicdd). The editors are Ian Goldman, Khanya's CEO, and Rachel Searle-Mbullu a Khanya-aicdd Senior Associate. Ian can be contacted at goldman@khanya-aicdd.org and Rachel at rachel@khanya-aicdd.org
