

# Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa

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**Issue: 5 March 2002**

Theme of the Issue **Social capital and sustainable livelihoods**

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## **Editor's notes**

This month's theme is social capital, one of the least understood types of people's assets, but which plays a critical role in the resilience of the poor. The partner for this edition is South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), who are leading on a pilot study that Khanya is participating in, that looks at how social capital could be used to promote sustainable livelihoods, with emphasis on youth.

## **Some background to sustainable livelihoods – the assets context**

At the heart of the livelihoods approach lies an analysis of different six types of assets upon which individuals draw to build their livelihoods.

These are:

1. **Natural Capital:** the natural resources stocks from which resources flows useful for livelihoods are derived (e.g. land, water, wildlife, biodiversity, and environmental resources).
2. **Social Capital:** the social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to wider institutions of society) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods.
3. **Human Capital:** the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health important to the ability to pursue different livelihood strategies.
4. **Physical Capital:** the basic infrastructure (transport, shelter, water, energy and communications) and the production equipment and means which enable people to pursue their livelihoods.
5. **Financial Capital:** financial resources which are available to people (whether savings, suppliers of credit or regular remittances or pensions) and which provide them with different livelihood options.

Some people would also add cultural or political capital. Cultural capital can be defined as the cultural resources (heritage, customs, traditions) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods.

## **What is social capital?**

Putnam (1992:167) defines social capital as those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions. Fukuyama (1995:10) refers to the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations.

### **So why is social capital important to sustainable livelihoods**

In the debate on sustainable livelihoods, there has been a relative consensus on the roles played by natural, physical and human capital in growth and development, but there has been little consensus on the social factors. Furthermore, a conceptual framework to explain how economic actors interact and organise themselves to generate growth and development was missing. This missing ingredient was supplied by the concept of social capital.

To illustrate, the concept of human capital starts from the premise that capital today is embodied less in land, factories, tools, and machines but increasingly, in people's capabilities, their knowledge and skills. In addition to skills and knowledge, an important asset is people's ability to associate with each other, which is critical not only to economic life but to virtually every other aspect of social existence as well. The ability to associate depends in turn on the degree to which communities share norms and values and are able to subordinate individual interests to those of larger groups. Out of such shared values comes trust, and trust has large and measurable economic values.

Social capital has important implications for development theory, policy and practice on the micro, meso and macro levels. On a conceptual level social capital provides us with a basis for analysing, understanding and building social relations. It also allows us to understand why social relations are resources for development.

Table 1 below, illustrates the relevance of social capital to the SLA principles.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Example of relevance of social capital/networks</b>
People-focused and responsive	Local structures often know quickly the situation of households and can respond to needs, eg help for families in need, assistance with ploughing. Sometimes the people-focus can be exclusionary, eg with caste or racial discrimination.
Participatory	Traditional structures can be participatory (eg groups of elders select chief) or exclusive (eg caste structures restricting benefits to particular groups)  Credit unions can benefit all members
Strengths-based	Often local groups set up based on particular strengths or interests of particular households, eg gardening groups
Holistic	Local structures know families in depth, and can respond to their needs, eg extended family, church groups. Some can focus only on one aspect, eg interest groups.
Partnership	Complex partnerships actually support people's lives at local level, their work colleagues, church and family groups etc.
Dynamic	People's memberships of networks can change with age, status (eg when married, or when have children), changing interest. Some networks are relatively permanent (caste, religious or ethnic), others change rapidly (changing workgroups, interest groups growing and dying).

**Ways in which an understanding of social capital can impact on better development practice** This section looks at how social capital could be conceptualised at the different levels of analysis. Table 1 outlines some practical examples.

At the **micro** level, the emphasis is on the individual's ability to mobilise resources through local network institutions, e.g. community based organisations, extended families and social organisations (see Table 2 below). Of huge importance is the need to facilitate access of networks by the marginalised. A key challenge is to identify local social networks/institutions, understand them and their relationship to the poor, and where appropriate see how to build and strengthen them.

**Table 2. Examples of social networks**

Level	Family	CBOs/NGOs	Religious structures	Traditional/ethnic structures	Political parties
Micro (household/community level)	Nuclear/extended family Caste and class structures	Credit union Cooperative Gardening club Creche group Association of traditional healers	Groups associated with specific place of worship (church, synagogiue, mosque, temple) Priests	Village headman Local elders	Local branches

### SL activities/programmes

1. Khanya carried out a series of 4 studies which looked at the institutional issues arising from promoting such an approach in Southern Africa. These studies were carried out in Zambia, Zimbabwe and two provinces in South Africa during 1999, and aimed to draw from the development of policies and institutions in these countries over the past 20 years. The study used the SL framework to structure analysis, using a vertical transect linking a case study village and district through meso level to central policy-making. The focus was on the changes to policies, structures and processes to support a sustainable rural livelihood approach. Country reports and a methodology report are available on [www.khanya-mrc.co.za](http://www.khanya-mrc.co.za), or [www.livelihoods.org](http://www.livelihoods.org).
2. PLAAS is conducting a scoping exercise in Flagstaff and Lusikisiki for a two year project on "Sustaining Rural Livelihoods in South Africa". First summary of the exercise is due by end-April 2001. For details contact Edward Lahiff at [elahiff@uwc.ac.za](mailto:elahiff@uwc.ac.za), Tel +27 (0)21 959 3961.

### Upcoming events

1. The HSRC in a joint effort with UNDP will hold a workshop on the 29th May 2001, at the HSRC offices. The workshop will be on the UNDP's Human Development Report. For further details contact Richard Humphries at [RHumphries@silwane.hsrb.ac.za](mailto:RHumphries@silwane.hsrb.ac.za)
2. CARE-TEAM project in Lesotho is holding a sustainable livelihoods workshop in Bloemfontein on 4&5 June 2001. For more information contact Sechanba Mokhameleli at [CARETEAM@leo.co.ls](mailto:CARETEAM@leo.co.ls)
3. The Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN), based at the Human Sciences Research Council will hold a conference on Southern African land issues and their links to poverty alleviation and reduction in the region. The conference will be held at the HSRC in Pretoria on Monday 4 and Tuesday 5 June 2001. For more information contact Richard Humphries at [RHumphries@silwane.hsrb.ac.za](mailto:RHumphries@silwane.hsrb.ac.za)
4. Khanya-managing rural change is hosting an international workshop on

community-based-planning in Durban on the 19 & 20 June 2001. Participating countries are South Africa, Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The aim of the workshop is to share experiences between these countries. For more information contact James Carnegie at [james@khanya-mrc.co.za](mailto:james@khanya-mrc.co.za) or 083 555 5053. If you know of good case studies of community-based planning in South Africa, please give details to Tsiliso at [tsiliso@khanya-mrc.co.za](mailto:tsiliso@khanya-mrc.co.za).

## Useful internet resources on sustainable livelihoods

DFID SL site [www.livelihoods.org.uk](http://www.livelihoods.org.uk)

UNDP SL site [www.undp.org/sl/](http://www.undp.org/sl/)

Institute of Development Studies [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)

Khanya's website [www.khanya-mrc.co.za](http://www.khanya-mrc.co.za)

ODI [www.odi.org.uk](http://www.odi.org.uk)

## Future topics

We invite contributions for upcoming topics. The topic for June will be on community-based planning.

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*Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa is an initiative of Khanya-managing rural change, PLAAS of the University of the Western CAPE, and CARE. The editor is Tsiliso Tamasane and he can be contacted at [tsiliso@khanya-mrc.co.za](mailto:tsiliso@khanya-mrc.co.za), tel 082 499 5497. Previous newsletters are available at the Khanya website, [www.khanya-mrc.co.za](http://www.khanya-mrc.co.za). We welcome contributions, of events, relevant documents, comments etc.*

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