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## Chapter

# Sustainable Livelihood for Rural Areas

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## Abstract

The concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ is an increasingly important word in today’s agenda on the developmental debate about rural development and poverty reduction. It is also important to note that just like development, sustainable livelihoods mean different things to different scholars and practitioners, though there is consensus that improvement in the living conditions or the livelihoods of the people is regarded as development, although there is a debate of how it could be achieved. Enhancement of the rural areas cannot be discussed without putting more emphasis on improving the quality of life and well-being of people living in those areas, exploiting land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. Education, physical infrastructure, and social infrastructure also all play an important role in developing these areas, which are by and large characterized by their emphasis on locally produced economic development strategies. This chapter will, therefore, focus mainly on the sustainability of the livelihood of rural areas. The scope will cover aspects such as sustainable livelihoods framework, strategies, approach, and the role of agricultural extension in rural areas.

**Keywords:** sustainable livelihood, livelihood framework, rural areas, extension officers, rural people

## 1. Introduction

Rural livelihood security is one of the itemized goals in countries that are developing. Achieving this goal means increasing farm household income which will translate into the improvement of both livelihood and household security and access to health services and education for rural children [1]. This chapter puts a lot of emphasis on the framework of sustainability in the livelihood of rural people. Livelihood as an idea was introduced by the Commission of Brundtland on Environment and Development, and during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the concept was expanded through the promotion of sustainable livelihood through eradication and alleviation of poverty [2, 3]. The concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ is increasingly important and remains a central debate in the sustainability of rural areas, which include people who are characterized by poverty and joblessness. Just like development, sustainable livelihoods mean different things to different scholars and practitioners, such as what constitutes improved living conditions and how they should be achieved. Sustainability is considered sustainable when stresses and shocks can be managed in such a way that capabilities, assets, and activities

are maintained now and in the future without compromising the natural resource base [4, 5]. It implies a sense of permanence that will last well into the future and consequently, it implies resilience to the turbulence of our politics, economic system, and environmental change embedded within our world [6]. The composite definition of sustainable livelihood at the household level was proposed and was comprised of:

1. tangible assets: such as (a) stores (food stock, stores of value such as diamond, gold, cash savings and, (b) resources such as land, farm equipment, livestock, land, water reservoir, well as
2. intangible assets: such as (a) access and claims (appeals and demands which can be translated for material and other practical support). (b) capabilities, (c) Activities (required for subsistence).

A sustainable livelihood would cope and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain its assets, and be able to provide opportunities for sustainable livelihood for the next generation and provides short- and long-term benefits locally and globally [2, 4]. To improve our understanding of sustainable livelihoods, we may need to ask ourselves questions such as (a) What are the livelihood resources and approaches that are constraining the realization of sustainable livelihoods for various people? (b) What are the operational means that can be employed to adopt a sustainable livelihood? (c) How can you assess who achieves a sustainable livelihood and who does not? The scope of this chapter is organized into the following crucial aspect of sustainable livelihood as sustainable livelihood framework which is composed of the social structure, livelihood assets, approach, and access to resources, including the role of agricultural extension as a change agent will be discussed.

## **2. Objectives of livelihood development in rural areas**

The objectives of rural livelihood include the following:

1. Capacity development of the marginalized people in rural areas about productivity, meaning that they should be productive in areas of need.
2. Contributing towards setting strategic directions, plans, and policies towards issues related to poverty and vulnerability.
3. Break out of the cycle of poverty, denial, and hopelessness and ensure societal emancipation.
4. Strengthening communication and working relationships with other partners to provide services to the marginalized population.

## **3. Sustainable livelihood framework**

### **3.1 Defining sustainable livelihood and rural areas**

The word sustainability and livelihood need to be understood, as their context within the rural setup. What comprises livelihood? If this question can be accurately

answered, it will enhance understanding. The livelihood comprises (a) capabilities, (b) assets, and (c) activities that are essential for a living. If a livelihood can be able to cope and recover from stress and shocks and maintain its assets and capabilities while taking care of natural resources is regarded as sustainable [7]. The framework of livelihood is a simplification that allows the examination of interrelations and inter-dependences of the different types of capital (natural, physical, human, financial & social) and activities implemented for a living that is used by individuals or groups or communities. It is the ability, resources, and actions that rural people require to survive [8]. Other dimensions to look at sustainability according to [7] are that Livelihoods are sustainable when they are:

- a. Economic sustainability – it is achieved when a baseline level of the economic well-being of the poor can be accomplished and maintained. The economic baseline level is situation – specific but can be considered in terms of the “dollar-per-day” targets of the international development goals, which is a region of a dollar per day.
- b. Environmental sustainability – is attained when the productivity of life-sustaining natural resources is maintained or enhanced for use by future generations.
- c. Institutional sustainability – achieved when prevailing structures and processes can continue to perform their functions over the long term.
- d. Social sustainability – is achieved when social exclusion is reduced and fairness is enhanced.
- e. Maintain the productivity of natural resources, without compromising the livelihood options of others.

To ensure sustainable livelihoods, developmental programmes should be designed to help improve the quality of life for marginalized people by providing them with livelihood opportunities and protection. These programmes were also designed to give optimism to people, and they should do the following:

- a. Have clear and significant objectives which could satisfy important felt and unfelt needs of the people.
- b. Be selected and stated concerning the important needs of the people.
- c. Emphasis on what is attainable rather than what is ideal, although one should not lose sight of the ideal.
- d. indicate the availability and utilization of resources.
- e. Be practical and workable (should state where funds, facilities, facilities, and personnel are, and how these will be utilized).

### **3.2 Livelihood assets**

Assets may be the most complex portfolio components of a livelihood. They may be tangible resources such as land, livestock, farm equipment, trees, and food stores.

They may also be intangible such as access to employment opportunities, schools, materials, health services and information. Livelihood assets are divided into (1) Natural assets, (2) Physical assets, (3) Financial assets, (4) Human assets, (5) Social assets, (6) Cultural assets [3, 9]. People's choices of livelihood strategies and the degree of their influence on policies, institutions, and processes depend in part on the nature and mix of assets available to them. The combination of these assets is needed by people to achieve positive livelihood outcomes, that is, to sustainably improve their quality of life. No single category of assets alone is sufficient to achieve this, and not all assets are equally necessary, but there are other assets that can provide more benefits, for instance, if someone has acquired land can have better access to financial capital. The land can be used as collateral for loans and for production purposes.

### *3.2.1 Natural assets*

Natural assets refer to the natural resource stocks from which resource flows and services such as land, coastal resources, clean air, erosion control, etc. upon which people are dependent for livelihood. The advantages of these stocks are both direct and indirect. Land and trees, for instance, people benefit directly as they contribute to their income and well-being. Indirect benefits they provide include nutrient cycling and protection from erosion and storms. In the context of sustainable livelihoods, the connection between natural capital, vulnerability, and the vulnerability context is closed. The livelihood of the poor is destroyed by the shocks that are created by a natural process that destroys the natural capital, for example, earthquakes that destroy agricultural land, floods and fires that destroy forests, and seasonality that changes productivity or value of the natural capital throughout the year.

### *3.2.2 Physical assets*

These assets are made up of the basic infrastructure and physical things that support livelihoods such as buildings, fences, livestock, equipment, water and sanitation, schools, and roads. Key components of the infrastructure are usually essential for sustainable livelihoods such as affordable transport systems, access to information, communications, water supply, energy, and sanitation.

### *3.2.3 Financial assets*

These are resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives. Financial resources can also be obtained through credit-providing institutions in which case liabilities are attached. Two main sources of financial capital, include: (1) available stock such as savings which are mostly preferred type of financial capital because there are no liabilities that are involved, normally they do not entail dependence on others. Savings can be held in the form of bank deposits, cash, or liquid assets such as jewellery and livestock such as cattle, pigs, goats, sheep. (2) Regulatory cash inflows: the most common types of cash inflows are pensions, other government transfers and remittances. To contribute positively to financial assets, these entries are expected to be completely reliable, even though reliability cannot be guaranteed. One-time payments and regular transfers are different, and these are options for people's investment plans. If people have more assets, they are less vulnerable to the different shocks and trends discussed above. Assets can be easily destroyed by shocks if they are not protected, and adverse trends can cause them to erode if livelihoods are not able to



adapt to change. How a single asset provides effective security depends on factors related to the functioning of social relations, markets, and others. These factors affect access to assets and what can be achieved with them.

#### *3.2.4 Human assets*

It includes knowledge, skills, good health, and the capability to work which lead people choose different livelihood strategies and attain their goals. Human capital at a household level is regarded as a factor in the quantity and quality of existing labour, which differs by household size, leadership potential, skill level, status of health, and so on.

#### *3.2.5 Social assets*

Refers to the social resources that people draw upon in the pursuit of their life goals. These are developed through formal and informal social relationships from which people can draw various opportunities and benefits in the pursuit of their livelihoods. They arise from (a) interactions they invested in through shared interest or work that increases people's ability to cooperate, (b) formal groups where membership is formalized, acceptable rules and norms are put in place to govern them, and (c) relationships of trust that enable cooperation that sometimes contribute to the development of informal safety nets among the poor. Factors described above, for instance, membership in groups and associations can increase access to and impact other institutions. Dependence or faith can also develop between people who are related by kinship. Of all livelihood building blocks, social capital is most closely linked to changes in structures and processes.

#### *3.2.6 Cultural assets*

Culture is very important in understanding people's livelihoods, and it has an important influence on key components of the sustainable livelihood framework such as livelihood strategies, vulnerability context, outcomes, resources (traditional agricultural knowledge, technology, and information on the internet are used by households when making a living [9, 10]). It is always evident to people who are in the minority operating within a larger and more powerful cultural context. Culture also includes internal forces such as beliefs, language, tradition, identity, sacred sites, ceremonies, and festivals. For example, in a clan system, livelihood strategies are infused with practices of reciprocity, exchange and redistribution, and attachment to the land that differs from the majority population. Such cultural attributes are centrally significant to people's lives, choices, and well-being [10].

### **3.3 Social structure**

Social structure is the term used to describe the totality of interrelated relationships among the various social groups and institutions that people form and to which they belong. These groups include families, schools, religious organizations, and social clubs, among others. It is the organized pattern of interrelated rights and obligations of individuals and groups in a system of interaction [11]. Rural social structures deal with the most important element of the diversity of social life. The human world consists of individuals who interact with each other to satisfy themselves. As they do that, they

assume some of the statuses and responsibilities in social life, which are associated with privileges and duties. Their social conduct of people is modelled and is associated with certain values and norms that give them orientation in social interaction. To contextualize and discuss livelihood, generally, the social structure in the tribal, rural, and urban settings plays a major role. In India for instance family is one of the most essential social institutions, which constitutes rural society. It takes care of the needs and performs functions, which are essential for the continuity, integration, and change in the social system, such as reproduction, production, and socialization [11].

Social exclusion which is the predominant fact affecting livelihood in most villages, is the process by which individuals or people are systematically denied full access to various rights, opportunities, and resources normally available to members of another group and fundamental to social integration within that group [11]. Social exclusion in rural areas can be observed in the form of landlessness, lack of credit opportunities, lack of jobs, and denied access to resources of the rural poor. In India, caste and division distinctions contribute to social exclusion when it comes to obtaining means of subsistence. How can we address such social exclusions? Can the government policy through laws combat it, especially in some villages where low-caste people are not allowed to enter certain properties owned by high-caste people, are also not allowed to draw water from the village pond or well, and are denied access to stores and other public places?

Livelihood is generally discussed in the context of tribal, rural, and urban settings. The social structure also plays a role in contextualizing livelihood. In India for example, family is one of the most important social institutions which constitutes rural society. It caters to the needs and performs functions, which are essential for the continuity, integration, and change in the social system, such as reproduction, production, and socialization [11]. Another method is the people's movement, and in several villages, like-minded people have come together to fight against the prevailing unjust customs of social exclusion. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) also have a major role in fighting social exclusion to provide livelihood means to the beneficiaries. The farmers' cooperative societies are contesting for better prices, better storage, and transport facilities. The self-help groups and micro-credit unions run by NGOs play an important role in saving the rural and urban poor from the money lenders who charge exorbitant interest.

### **3.4 Sustainable livelihoods approach**

Livelihood strategies aim to achieve livelihood outcome, and it empowers the poor so that they are not seen as victims but as decision-makers with their own sets of priorities. It tries to gain a realistic and genuine understanding of people's strength in terms of capital endowment or assets and how they can change them into positive livelihood outcomes. The approach is grounded in a trust that people cannot rely on one single category of assets, on its own it cannot sufficiently yield all varied livelihood outcomes that people seek [12]. It requires a range of assets to achieve a positive livelihood, especially for poor people, whose access to a certain category of assets is usually inadequate. Consequently, they must look for ways to maintain and combine assets they have in innovative ways to make sure they survive. However, there are also some criticisms, such as the lack of guidelines for classifying people as "poor"; insufficient attention to the processes and informal structures that influence access within the community, and the maybe possibility of lack of capacity to conduct analytical research that is important of sustainable livelihood approach to development.

### 3.5 Access to resources

Accessibility to resources in a village setup could be through institutions, which are determining rules and regulations, land tenure, and market. These institutions include but are not limited to non-government organizations (NGOs), local administration, and state agencies. Social and political organization also play an influential role in decision-making processes, and therefore they cannot be overlooked, for example, civil society is the people and peoples' movements that influence access to resources. Social relations include gender, class, age, and ethnicity. It is how gender, ethnicity, culture, history, religion, and kinship affect the livelihoods of different groups within a community.

### 3.6 Strategies

The range and combination of activities and choices that people undertake to achieve their livelihood goals are regarded as livelihoods [3, 13]. Prominent broad clusters of livelihood strategies are:

- a. Agriculture: Agriculture plays a major role in livelihood in rural areas, the more output per unit area through capital investment or extensification (more land under cultivation), the better for the livelihood of the community.
- b. Diversification: when the diversification of the livelihood strategy is great, the higher resilience to the shocks, trends, and seasonality conditions within the vulnerability context. You diversify to a range of off-farm income-earning activities, or you move away and seek a livelihood, either temporarily or permanently working in urban areas or elsewhere, or more commonly, you pursue a combination of strategies together or in the manageable sequence [14].
- c. Migration: This is the movement of rural people from rural to urban areas, some rural people will migrate to urban areas to look for greener pastures and abandon their rural lives, and some would migrate and return home, weekly, every second week, or monthly to check their agricultural production activities, and this happens mostly to those who planted fields crops such as maize or those who have livestock.

Humanitarian and development organizations should seek to promote those frameworks that offer the greatest diversity of choice and flexibility in livelihoods. Organizations should therefore pay attention to expanding access to a number of different capital investments and supporting improvements in the structures and processes that determine livelihoods. These endeavours should be complemented by the social safety nets available to those unable to achieve their life goals through the market system. The outcome of the livelihood strategy should address some of the following:

- a. Poverty reduction or poverty alleviation.
- b. Livelihood adaptation refers to adapting to stresses and shocks of livelihood.
- c. Livelihood vulnerability refers to the ability of a livelihood to cope with and recover from stresses and shocks.



- d. Livelihood resilience refers to adaptation and coping with stresses and shocks.
- e. Improvement of well-being and capabilities, which refers to what people can do and be with their entitlements).

### **3.7 The role of agricultural extension and livelihood in rural areas**

The deployment of agricultural extension by government departments or the private sector is happening mostly in rural areas where agriculture is one of the main sources of livelihood. The purpose of this deployment is for agricultural extension officers to induce change and intervene in production-related matters. Therefore, the extension officers should employ a participatory approach to ensure that all role players geared towards improving the living standards of people or farm families in rural areas are accommodated in any plan designed to improve the livelihood of the people in rural areas. According to [15, 16] Agricultural extension is primarily concerned with rural extension and with the livelihoods of farmers and their families. It should be noted that the main occupation of rural people is agriculture, they are farmers, pastoralists, or fishermen. Their activities include animal production, plant production marketing of food, non-food agricultural products, and transformation. They also deal with diverse cultural, social, and economic factors affecting their livelihood [17]. Agricultural extension has a very important role to play in sustainable agricultural development. The responsibilities of extension must be broad in content and holistic, that is, they must go beyond agricultural technology transfer. The normal task of transferring and disseminate appropriate agricultural technologies and good agricultural practices to farmers would not be sufficient. To understand the importance of agricultural extension, it is always better to understand it within the context of three main elements, namely: (a) Knowledge, (b) Communication, and (c) Farm Family [8]. The role of extension officers should therefore encompass the following:

1. Assist farmers to get a clear vision of their development (their current situation versus their desired situation).
2. Assist farmers to identify and overcome problems and should involve the people when addressing their problems [8].
3. Introduce new technologies (new varieties, breeds, etc.)
4. Help farmers to make better use of resources and technology.
5. Assist farmers to put new information into use.
6. Act as a link between research and farmers and provide information on new promising research results [15].
7. Create opportunities for farmers to market their produce.
8. Design appropriate programs that are relevant to people involved in agriculture. These programmes are the sources of justifying funding, reveal types of activities or actions to be implemented, and provides a guide of what is to be achieved for the rural people.

9. Design an all-inclusive set of activities designed with a target client base in mind that focuses on the continuous education and development of clients. The educational component is meant to generate specific outcomes for the client base.
10. Employ a participatory approach that will ensure that all relevant people are involved in all activities of agriculture production. People can only believe in a programme that recognizes and includes them from the beginning to the end.
11. More innovative methods must be developed to identify systematically farmers' felt and unfelt needs, and to help formulate and set agricultural research agenda based on such needs. Needs in this context would include social, economic, cultural, and spiritual.

The main objective of agricultural extension in rural areas is to change farmers' outlook towards their problems. The function of the extension is not limited to physical and economic achievements but also to the development of the rural people themselves, as they discharge their duties, they must operate under the following extension principles as outlined by [8]:

1. Extension works with people, not for them
2. Extension is responsible to its clients
3. Extension is a two-way link
4. Extension works with different target groups
5. Extension cooperates with other rural development organizations
6. Equitable Services delivery to farmers
7. Efficient/Effective Services Delivery
8. Decentralization, Local Decision Making
9. Demand Led Extension Services
10. Working primarily with Farmer's Groups
11. Strong Extension Research Linkage
12. Capacitating Extension Personnel
13. Appropriate Extension Methodology
14. Integrated Extension Support Services
15. Coordinated Agric. Extension Services
16. Improved Environmental Support

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Sustainable livelihoods are crucial for people living in rural areas, but for their sustainability strategies, policies, and approaches are required to ensure equitable distribution of rural resources. Institutions such as the government and private sector are all important but need coordination at the village level for them to cooperate and coordinate efforts of development and sustainability. To achieve this goal, the agricultural extension system must change their approach towards the development of rural people. The extension officers should undergo a rigorous re-skilling and orientation programmes, that will make them fit for rural setup the extension systems must also begin to organize and train the rural poor to successfully pursue new crops, livestock, fisheries, and/or other enterprises appropriate to local resources, conditions, and market opportunities [1]. The definition of sustainable livelihood, the components of sustainable livelihood framework such as assets, access to resources, and strategies need to be known before any plan to assist the people in rural areas can commence.

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