# Understanding the Framework of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in the Implementation of Market-led Rural Development

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# Understanding the Framework of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in the Implementation of Market-led Rural Development

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**Abstract:** Several studies have shown that market-driven rural development projects usually fall short of accurately understanding the complexity of the difficulties smallholder farmers experience in maintaining their livelihoods. It is also recommended that policies and research on rural development consider using the framework for sustainable livelihoods to examine the consequences of market-driven rural development initiatives. In order to comprehend the complexity of rural livelihoods and make policies and development programs implementing market-led rural development more empowering, this article attempts to explore the theories now accessible on sustainable livelihoods. This article offers a theoretical foundation for sustainable means of subsistence. This combines information from several sources to create more complete notions by providing a definition, potential significant justifications, and examples. The framework's basic elements identified from the literature review are the context of livelihood, assets, institutions (transforming structures and processes), strategies, and outcomes.

**Keywords:** Livelihoods; Rural livelihoods; Sustainable livelihoods; Theoretical framework.

## Introduction

Market-led rural development, which was motivated by the neoliberal paradigm that emerged in the 1970s, has long been a priority on the agenda of developing nations (DFID UK, 2005; Borras Jr et al., 2007; Haymes, de Haymes, & Miller, 2014). Neoliberalism views markets and the private sector as having a significant impact on economic growth through fostering more transparent competition among participants (Lynch, 2006). Because of this competition, people may become more inventive and market-savvy in operating their businesses so they can continue to participate in markets and earn a living (Stoian et al., 2012).

In studies of rural-led market development, particularly in developing nations, the value chain concept has been widely used. The paradigm has been frequently used in regions like Asia, Africa, and South America to study rural economic development, particularly in agriculture, and to analyze the interactions between market actors (Devaux et al., 2018; Donovan & Poole, 2018). Yet, research shows that market-driven rural development programs frequently miss the mark in capturing the complexity of the challenges smallholder farmers face in sustaining their livelihoods.

As a result, it is advised that policies and research on rural development take into account using the framework for sustainable livelihoods to analyze the effects of market-driven rural development initiatives (Challies & Murray, 2011; Elizondo, 2017; Ellis & Mdoe, 2003; Neilson & Shonk, 2014; Scoones, 1998, 2009; DFID UK, 1999; Thennakoon, 2004). This article tries to review available theories regarding sustainable livelihoods in order to understand complex of rural livelihoods to help policies and development programs implementing market-led rural development to become more empowering.

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## Method

Various literature was reviewed with the keywords: livelihoods, rural livelihoods, sustainable livelihoods, and livelihoods in rural developing countries. The relevant sources were used such as journal articles, books, articles or documents from formal institutions, proceedings, and other reliable sources.

## Result and Discussion

The sustainable livelihood framework aids in gaining a thorough understanding of how an enterprise is handled and managed from the viewpoint of a smallholder farmer's livelihood. It begins with the notion that all aspects of smallholder farmers' lives are interconnected and influence their choices regarding how an enterprise is managed. This section first examines the fundamental idea of sustainable livelihoods and how it has been applied to studies.

*The sustainable livelihoods framework*

Chambers and Conway (1992) offered the following concepts of livelihoods and sustainable livelihoods:

> *"A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long-term"* (p. 7).

For the past few decades, research on rural people's sustainable livelihoods in developing nations has been based on this notion. Since 1992, more definitions have been offered, however they all draw from the original Chambers and Conway definition (1992). For example, The concept of livelihoods provided by Liu et al. (2018, p.3) "… refers to the way people make a living, which is based on capacity, assets and activities". Elizondo (2017) integrates the concept of livelihoods on Chambers & Conway (1992) and Scoones (1998, 2009): "…the skills, assets (both material and social) and the approaches which will be used by individuals and communities in order to survive". The development of the sustainable livelihoods concept from its beginnings in 1992 is discussed in the part that follows.

*Transformation of Sustainable Livelihood Framework*

Over the past 20 years, numerous parties have employed the framework for sustainable livelihoods in research and development. The approach has also been adaptably applied in many livelihood scenarios across numerous nations. The foundational elements of the framework for sustainable livelihoods have still not changed fundamentally, but each has been improved by research and development efforts. The framework developed by DFID UK in 1998–1999 has been the one that has been utilized the most frequently to date.

The Chambers and Conway (1992) livelihoods approach defines the characteristics of a livelihood, the relationships between the framework's elements, and the causes that drove those interactions. People and their capacity for a livelihood, intangible assets (claims and access), tangible assets (stores and resources), and activities for a living are the components of a livelihood.

In this concept, the term "stores" refers to physically storable assets like food, stocks, and savings. Resources include water, agricultural equipment, and land. Livestock and trees are examples of tangible goods that can be classified as both stores and resources. Meanwhile, "*claims* are demands and appeals which can be made for material, moral or other practical support or access" (Chambers & Conway, 1992, p. 8). The ability to use facilities, resources, and services is referred to as access. Access and claims can be made by one person, a group of people, or an organization. The academics contend that a way of life can be sustained if it can adjust to shocks and strains and pass on to succeeding generations. According to this idea, every aspect of livelihoods is interconnected with every other aspect, and the framework may be used to examine several levels, including household, national, and global levels. It can be used as a development strategy by development organizations to improve people's capacity, social equity, and social sustainability. The framework is a tool used in study to comprehend livelihood dynamics in relation to specific circumstances. It can be used, for instance, to better understand why the number of children reduced in particular time and place.

Scoones and the Institute of Development Studies continued to refine the sustainable livelihoods strategy (1998). Scoones makes reference to Chambers and Conway's idea of sustainable livelihoods (1992). The contextual factors and trends, livelihood resources made up of various forms of capital (natural, human, financial, social, and others), institutional processes and organizational structures, livelihood strategies (agricultural systems, diversification, and migration), and sustainable livelihood outcomes make up the core elements of the Scoones' framework for sustainable livelihood (improved livelihoods and sustainability). Several development projects and research have been motivated by Scoones' (1998) framework to consider the use of the notion of sustainable livelihoods. The goal of Scoones' research is to better understand the application of rural development policy planning and its resulting effects. One of the development organizations that has adopted and expanded the Scoones' paradigm in their international aid initiatives in developing nations is the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID UK) (Batterbury, 2016). The organization spent a significant amount of money developing the framework for both research and development (Batterbury, 2016).

DFID UK (1999) renamed the "approach" a "framework". This was because the framework is used to plan and evaluate the contributions of development interventions and existing activities to the sustainability of livelihoods (DFID UK, 1999). It provides a map of existing issues and to understand how and why they link to each other (influences and processes that shape livelihoods). Thus, while Scoones (1992) provides what comprises each component of the framework, DFID UK claims to offer an understanding of how and why the sustainable livelihood components interact.

The sustainable livelihoods paradigm developed by DFID UK was enhanced by Dorward et al. (2003) by emphasizing the functions of markets, institutions, and technology in relation to efforts to combat poverty. The framework proposed by Dorward et al. (2003) differed slightly from DFID UK in that it was intended to be used by practitioners of rural development as opposed to serving as a framework for directing research. It does not, however, exclude the idea that it might be applied as a framework to direct research. According to Dorward et al. (2009), it is more crucial to understand the purposes of assets than it is, as suggested in the original approach, to simply measure the sorts of assets a household owns. According to Dorward et al. (2009), practitioners of rural development will be better equipped to assist households in enhancing their standard of living if they are aware of the purposes of the assets they own or have access to.

*The sustainable livelihoods framework*

The framework for sustainable livelihoods (Figure 1) consists of five key elements (DFID UK, 1999). These parts are linked to six different patterns of component interaction: The following factors affect a household's capacity to pursue various (1) livelihood strategies in order to achieve (2) livelihood outcomes, (3) the influence of the vulnerability context on the livelihood assets; (4) the interactions between the forms of livelihood assets and (5) the positions of transforming structures and processes (e.g., government, institutions, cultures, and so on) in the asset management. The nature of the assets can also be influenced by the livelihood outcomes (people may invest in specific assets when their income increases, for example), and (6) changing institutions and procedures could alter the vulnerability setting for livelihoods (for example, a development initiative even may improve the vulnerability context). Figure 1 provides a description of these patterns. The sustainable livelihoods framework created by DFID UK has been improved as a result of the numerous research that have been conducted in this field, even if its fundamental elements and patterns have been employed for decades. The five key elements that make up the framework for sustainable livelihoods are reviewed in the following sections.

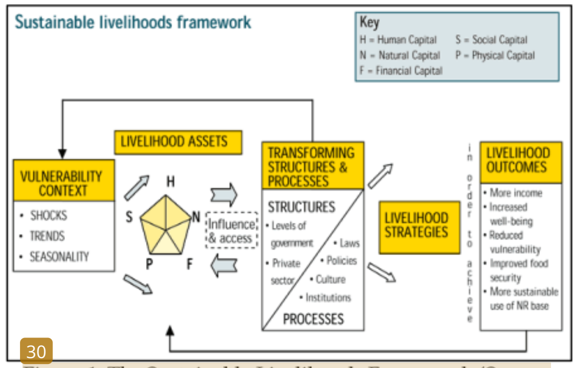


Figure 1. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Source: DFID UK,1999; and Elizondo, 2017)

*a. Vulnerability Context*

According to some academics, the "vulnerability context" refers to outside forces or the environment in which people live and how they affect rural households' and communities' livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998, 2009; Tao & Wall, 2009; DFID UK, 1999). According to some, these elements could alter or uncertainty in people's livelihoods (Bonnin & Turner, 2012). As people consider how to predict when the change might happen, the external influences or vulnerability context may refer to an existing situation as well as one that will take place in the future (Morse & McNamara, 2013). For instance, the framework for sustainable livelihoods is used to evaluate people's mitigation methods to deal with the effects of climate change. Climate change is an external issue that influences people's enterprises, such as crop farming (Butler et al., 2014).

It is suggested that there are various benefits of knowing vulnerability context in rural development activities (Scoones, 1998). Researchers have suggested that comprehending the context of vulnerability may be useful in assessing people's resilience to external shocks. For instance, Chiwaula, Witt, and Waibel (2011) contend that people's levels of vulnerability affect how well they are able to handle stresses and shocks from the outside world. Additionally, the researchers contend that a community's level of vulnerability and its level of poverty are related, and that the more vulnerable a group of people is, the poorer they are (Chiwaula et.al., 2011). The amount of vulnerability and poverty is also said to be influenced by access to and ownership of assets used for a living, and the most vulnerable and impoverished households are those with the weakest asset portfolios (Chiwaula et.al., 2011).

Researchers have suggested that a number of external factors in the place where people reside put them at risk. According to Dorward, Anderson, and Paz (2005), rural residents are vulnerable because of their erratic and sporadic income, which is frequently influenced by seasonality, markets, and employment prospects. Thus, environmental factors like trends, shocks, and seasonality frequently have an impact on rural populations (DFID UK, 1999; Dorward, 2005; Elizondo, 2017).

Trends can change people's livelihoods and influence how they adopt strategies to deal with them (DFID UK, 1999; Elizondo, 2017). For instance, development interventions can encourage poor farmers to increase farm output in order to meet rising commodity demand (Vandamme, D'Haese, Speelman, & D'Haese, 2010). Trends also include technological, population, and policy tendencies. Farmers must adapt to these changes due to the rising demand for agricultural products and the availability of development initiatives (Vandamme et al., 2010).

Another type of vulnerability is shock, which refers to unforeseen events like floods or droughts as well as socioeconomic shocks like those brought on by armed conflicts and economic decline (DFID UK; 1999). Examples of shocks are flooding or landslides that cause damage to rivers or bridges (physical assets), which then affects how people adapt their livelihoods to the disaster or damage (Morse & McNamara, 2013).

Seasonality is a significant background for vulnerability in many poor nations (Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, & Longhurst, 2013). The term "seasonality" in the context of sustainable livelihoods refers to recurring patterns associated with the seasons, such as the yearly shifts in the wet and dry seasons that take place in many equatorial nations (Devereux, 2013). Because impoverished farmers must deal with the seasonal volatility in these factors, seasonality puts them at risk (Devereux, 2013). Their ability to deal with change will influence how successfully they handle this (Devereux, 2013). Especially if rural development projects are implemented without taking into account the issues these farmers confront as a result of seasonality, seasonal fluctuations might make vulnerable individuals more susceptible (Devereux, 2013).

*b. Livelihood Assets*

According to some academics, "livelihood assets" are essential for sustainable livelihoods (Kent & Dorward, 2012; Morse & McNamara, 2013; DFID UK, 1999). It has been stated that the importance of assets for sustaining a livelihood outcome from researchers' perception that people require a variety of assets to sustain a livelihood (Morse & McNamara, 2013; DFID UK, 1999). The elements of the framework for sustainable livelihoods that are most frequently researched are livelihood assets.

The idea of livelihood assets is defined in a variety of ways. A household's means of survival are assets and activities (Chambers and Conway, 1992, p.5). Bebbington (1999, p. 22) extended on this idea by stating that assets are a way to give life purpose. According to Morse and McNamara (2013) and DFID UK (1999), capital endowments are also known as assets and are described as people's strengths that are applied to create results (DFID UK, 1999, sec. 2.3). According to multiple studies, the development of assets is connected to wellbeing and a household's capacity to expand output from various businesses (livelihood outcomes) for rural residents in some developing nations (Dorward et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2018; Pour, Barati, Azadi, & Scheffran, 2018).

The majority of experts divide resources that a household has access to into five categories: human, social, natural, physical, and financial assets or capitals (Elizondo, 2017; Morse & McNamara, 2013; Scoones, 1998, 2009; DFID UK, 1999). These are reviewed as follows:

**Human Capital**. The quantity and quality of labor (skills, knowledge, capacities, and good health) available in a household is known as human capital (DFID UK, 1999; Morse & McNamara, 2013; Elizondo, 2017). Mensah (2011) classifies human capital as a manpower asset that comprises the age distribution, family size, gender composition, number of households, labor force, and so on. Because it affects how other assets might be handled for greater results, human capital is crucial (DFID UK, 1999). In a case study on cattle ranching in Indonesia, it was discovered that inadequate livelihood asset management was caused by low quality human capital (limited education and skills) (Budisatria & Udo, 2013; Gayatri & Vaarst, 2015).

**Social Capital.** Social capital is defined as “resources available to individuals and groups through social connections and relations” (Turner, 2007). According to the researcher, social capital can maximize the economic advantages for rural residents in non-financial ways (Turner, 2007). These ideas have to do with how members of a group or community connect or form networks with one another as well as the power dynamics that exist within the community (Minato et al., 2012; DFID UK, 1999). Some literature defines social capital as associations, formal or informal organizations, associations, vertical and horizontal networks, and connections based on reciprocity and trust (Elizondo, 2017; DFID UK, 1999). For instance, certain private tourism businesses in emerging nations were eager to establish trusting bonds with the local people, which resulted in the people's continuous encouragement for their businesses (Lapeyre, 2011; Stronza, 2010).

Furthermore, the growth of the tourism industry gave locals more chances to increase their income by finding work or by selling goods to visitors (Lapeyre, 2011; Stronza 2010). In these instances, it was discovered that the private businesses upheld a robust network with locals through fostering trust and assuring transparency with the communities (Stronza, 2010). Social capital is crucial for improving community members' livelihoods since it can open up new chances for employment and lead to better livelihood outcomes.

**Natural Capital**. Resources that are found naturally in the environment where households live and work are referred to as natural capital (Elizondo, 2017). Natural resources that have an impact on rural livelihoods, such as water, soil, biodiversity, and environmental services, are referred to as natural capital (DFID UK, 1999; Mensah, 2011). According to Scoones (1998; 2009), who defines sustainable livelihoods, in order to attain sustainable livelihoods, natural resources should not be depleted because rural residents rely heavily on them for their economic activities, particularly those that are connected to the agricultural sector. For instance, it has been noted that cattle farmers who work wetlands earn more money from their herds of cattle than those who work dry ground (Priyanti et al., 2012). This is due to the fact that farmers in wetlands have better access to water, which allows them to cultivate their crops and forages more effectively than farmers in dry land environments (Priyanti et al., 2012). For instance, it has been noted that cattle farmers who work wetlands earn more money from their herds of cattle than those who work dry ground (Priyanti et al., 2012). This is due to the fact that farmers in wetlands have better access to water, which allows them to cultivate their crops and forages more effectively than farmers in dry land environments (Priyanti et al., 2012). Hence, compared to farmers in dryland areas, farmers can better raise their cattle and have surplus forage that they can sell in the feed market (Priyanti et al., 2012).

**Physical Capital.** According to literature, physical capital is the rural livelihoods' supporting infrastructure (Morse & McNamara, 2013). Experts claim that physical capital includes things like physical infrastructure (like buildings or roads), transportation, and production tools (including machines, power, and communication facilities) (Mensah, 2011; Morse & McNamara, 2013; Tao & Wall, 2009; DFID UK, 1999). Additionally, physical capital is vital to serve the basic necessities of rural people such as school buildings, government offices, sanitation (clean water installation, drainage, toilets, bathing facilities), healthcare, and so on (Stoian et al., 2012). According to Fischer and Qaim (2012), constructing a bridge between farms or communities and marketplaces can reduce the time and distance that farmers must go to markets, which lowers their transportation expenses for selling their produce.

**Financial Capital**. Due to its greater versatility than the other four categories of capital, financial capital is one of the most significant resources for rural lives (DFID UK, 1999). Financial capital can be easily swapped for other types of capital, such as the acquisition of physical capital, and has the financial resources needed to deal with extreme events (Pandey et al., 2017). This capital can take on various forms, including cash, bank savings, insurance, international financial transfers, or liquid assets like cattle and jewelry (DFID UK, 1999). Farmers can anticipate their financial needs and build up funds in a bank or hold easily liquidable assets like animals or gold (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). Rural residents keep liquid assets as a significant form of insurance or savings (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). The key advantage is that liquid assets may be easily sold and turned into cash when rural residents need money right away (Lubungu et al., 2015).

*c. Transforming structures and processes*

This part of the framework was referred to as "Transforming Structures and Processes" by DFID UK (1999) and Elizondo (2017). In order to attain specific results, the Transforming Structures and Processes have an impact on how resources are used and which livelihood strategies are chosen (Elizondo, 2017; Mensah, 2011; DFID UK, 1999). Because of this, scholars concluded that the livelihood assets and altering structures and processes are essential elements of the framework for sustainable livelihoods (Murugani & Thamaga-Chitja, 2018; Neilson & Pritchard, 2009). (Pokharel, 2010). There are two parts to transforming structures and processes. Firstly, shifting structures are seen as "the hardware"—the commercial and public organizations—that "set and implement policy and legislation, deliver services, buy, sell, and perform all manner of other operations that affect livelihoods" (DFID UK, 1999, sec. 2.4.1.). Secondly, changing processes or software components affect how structures, organizations, and people work (DFID UK, 1999). Policies and laws created by companies, institutions, and cultures are examples of software types (DFID UK, 1999).

*d. Livelihood strategies*

The fourth element of the sustainable livelihood's framework is livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998). A household's employment of a range of livelihood activities to attain its livelihood goals is referred to as a livelihood strategy (DFID UK, 1999; Tao & Wall, 2009). Some academics claim that livelihood strategies are a variety of options and actions to utilize resources through the intermediary of institutions to accomplish livelihood outcomes (Diniz et al., 2013; Scoones, 2009). Building on the original definition of livelihood strategies, Dorward et al. (2005) define them as " ….the way that asset and activity functions and attributes relate to people's reliance on particular asset and activity mixes" (p. 9).

Depending on the resources they have available to them to support their livelihoods, rural people pursue a variety of livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998; Tao & Wall, 2009). Poor asset endowment, according to some authors, may constrain farmers' livelihood strategies in terms of achieving better results (Dorward et. al., 2009; Mensah, 2011). According to Scoones (1999), people in rural areas have a variety of options for generating their own income, including agriculture (including farming in crop, livestock, agroforestry, and other areas, non-farming activities, diversification (mixing on-farm and/or off-farm activities), and migration.

*e. Livelihood outcomes*

Livelihood outcome is a component of the sustainable livelihoods framework that is defined as the outputs that result from the livelihood strategies used by a household (DFID UK, 1999; Dorward et al., 2009; Bonnin & Turner, 2012; Elizondo, 2017). Scholars can investigate the connection between outcomes and other framework elements using the sustainable livelihoods framework. The researchers claim that institutions, livelihood strategies, and wealth endowment are closely related to outcomes. According to some researchers, households with an appropriate asset endowment responded to market-led development initiatives better than those that are poor and have a restricted asset endowment (resulting in improved livelihood outcomes as a result of the initiatives) (Budisatria & Udo, 2013; Devaux et al., 2018).

The literature discusses how smallholder farmers' wealth (outcome) and reactions to development programs are related. Smallholder farmers' wealth makes it possible for them to engage in development initiatives and expand their businesses because, in contrast to poor farmers, they do not struggle to meet their fundamental necessities (Devaux et al., 2018). According to Devaux et al. (2018), wealthy farmers are better equipped to utilize the support offered by development initiatives to support their output, whereas poor farmers are more concerned with meeting their essential consuming needs.

## Conclusion

By attempting to comprehend the larger motivations behind smallholders' decisions about the management of their assets or livelihood activities, this body of literature hopes to add to the conceptual framework of sustainable livelihoods. There are other factors that need to be taken into account in addition to production and selling because the research's context is the rural community on the inside of a market mechanism (smallholder farmers, for example, as producers).

In order to capture a comprehensive element of livelihoods that influence the management of smallholder businesses, the sustainable livelihoods framework is frequently employed (production, marketing, livelihood assets, institutions, and so on). The theoretical framework addresses the elements and evolution of the framework for sustainable livelihoods. The sustainable livelihoods framework has been developed in part by scholars and organizations. This framework's foundational elements include the context of livelihood, assets, institutions (transforming structures and processes), strategies, and outcomes.

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