

I am away from Australia in the UK, and about to give a talk about DfID's aid funding for sustainable livelihoods, 1997-2002. DfID made a mistake in 2002 by cancelling this approach to aid, focussing on household and local support, and refocussing on national level political and economic reform and "capacity building", largely in line with neoliberal economic agendas and 'good governance'. This has not been terribly effective. I call on AUSAID not to do the same, and to actually support project activity with poor people, not just national level reforms in isolation from rural and urban realities on the ground. East Timor has been a sad case in our hemisphere, where so much effort has been spent trying to get the state to perform effectively, without at the same time providing direct assistance to the poorest of the poor, who remain chronically disadvantaged.

The 'in Australia's interest' clause is inappropriate for Australian aid and should be removed.

CSIRO have received money from the Australian government to support agriculture and food production in West Africa. This sounds like a positive move.

Here is the text of my talk tomorrow. Thanks
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Sustainable Livelihoods: arrival, departure, and persistence

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"Sustainable livelihoods approaches" and "sustainable livelihoods" (SL) were identified with British development research and policy from the mid 1990s. Building on the thinking of Amartya Sen, Norman Long, Robert Chambers, Tony Bebbington (1999), Ian Scoones and others, research was linked directly into policy. An SL approach drove DfID's aid agenda for 5 years from 1997, and was central to the revitalization of Britain's aid effort, attracting spending of c£200m. The subsequent rejection of the approach by DfID management, and the winding down of associated portfolios and projects, is well known in the UK (Batterbury 2008). From 2002 a new focus emerged on programme-based aid, capacity-building and direct national budget support: "Going out into the field to understand the assets that people build upon and the real constraints they face has been abandoned in favour of engaging at a national level." wrote Clark & Carney (2008). Some livelihoods work has remained but SL ideas were apparently too expensive, uncomfortable, unworkable, or radical in the aid environment of 9 years ago. Sustainable livelihoods approaches also hit neoliberal economic development where it hurts – by focusing on the rural poor and their persistent vulnerability, as traced to markets, politics and economic growth. So perhaps the writing was on the wall.

This rapid policy-cycling was premature for the following reasons.

- a) the persistence of rural poverty since 2002, made worse by food shortage and land grabs;
- b) the failures of subsequent *national* poverty reduction strategies, poor progress on sectoral, targeted MDGs, and good governance agendas ;

- c) the huge resurgence of concern over environmental drivers of vulnerability, and the realization that the environment (and climate change) matters for every sector and every life; and
- d) the maintenance of neoliberal, market-driven economic agendas and policies, that continue to adversely affect the 'subjects' of development and lead to inequality.

And yet, SL have spread virally, and gone global – DfIDs' work helped contribute to many other SL initiatives. These persist, as this seminar series (building on one held in Oxford, 2008) testifies. Monitoring generally suggests positive outcomes. If the new global challenges are now "finance, food, fuel and climate" (IDS Reimagining Development, 2010) then all four sit in a dialectical relationship to sustainable livelihoods. Livelihood researchers did not, as Scoones (2009) argued, take their eye off the ball and miss these big issues at all – the approach is necessarily transnational, linking 'big' or structural forces to places and people, as geographers and anthropologists have always done (Bebbington and Batterbury 2001). Here is the record of SL thinking on the big issues:

- a) Response to financial downturns and to climatic threats is well understood, particularly where it involves asset juggling to support welfare and reduce vulnerability. Hundreds of studies document livelihood responses and their environmental dimensions in the African Sahel, for example. We know what we have to do, even if the 'drivers' are not local.
- b) Bad governance imperils sustainable livelihoods. But East Timor is the prime example of a governance reform agenda taking place since 1999 while rural people remained marginalised and lack assistance, which has proven very sad for a well-meaning government. Both approaches are needed in parallel.
- c) Even as livelihoods diversify, as in rural Africa, people retain an attachment to 'place' and to local assets. They are not 'isolated' economic agents free to go where the growth is (Bebbington 1999).
- d) The debate about securing world food production cannot ignore the efforts of rural households, whose ability to continue production requires mitigating structural constraints, whether environmental, institutional, or along a commodity chain.
- e) The new land grabs for food and biofuels destroy place based livelihoods, and certainly create more inequality. Documenting local effects is urgent.

These are all issues "rooted" in place, but extending into networks and traversing scales, landscapes and livelihoods (Bebbington and Batterbury 2001). The SL approach treats the big issues or "drivers" in a non-sectoral way, through understanding of environment, politics, the economic environment, and institutional mapping, all deemed core to sound development policy. The approach has expanded from initial trials in Africa and South Asia and is now used in western societies where social protection exists (Davies et al, 2008), and in other linguistic traditions (Gaillard & Sourisseau 2009).

For researchers, SL approaches help interrogate the vulnerabilities, and human capabilities, in rural development situations while working across the social and natural sciences. For practitioners, there is the promise of a more informed, and holistic, approach to project implementation, searching out entry points to livelihood support. For rural people there is the

promise of targeted assistance, although modest, and much new knowledge. For Amartya Sen, there is the satisfaction that he was right. Again.

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