SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Agrarian Change & Peasant Studies

IAN SCOONES

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Review comments

This is an extraordinarily important book. It should become a classic. It is a must for every development professional. It is a masterly analysis and overview of the evolution and dimensions of the sustainable livelihoods approach, and opens up new territory of political economy, political ecology and a new politics of livelihoods. Concise yet comprehensive, combining and drawing on the perspectives of many disciplines, accessible to all readers, professionally impeccable, and on top of all this, original in its analysis and extension into new fields, this book is a wonderful contribution to development thinking and action. May it be very widely read, and may it be very influential.

—Robert Chambers, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

In this uniquely comprehensive, lucid and valuable review of notions of sustainable livelihoods and their applications, Ian Scoones makes a potent argument for reinstating an expansive perspective on livelihoods, informed by the political economy of agrarian change, at the centre of current concerns with overcoming rural inequality and poverty.

—Henry Bernstein, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Ian Scoones has produced a book that is in perfect balance: immensely useful, it is also challenging; theoretically perceptive, it is wonderfully readable; historically informed, it also looks forward, proposing agendas for scholars and professionals alike. Students and practitioners will find it invaluable because it places livelihood thinking in context, explores its applications, explains its limits and — perhaps most important of all — persuades the reader that being political and being practical are absolutely not mutually exclusive options in development, whether writing about it or working within it.

—Anthony Bebbington, Graduate School of Geography, Clark University and IDPM, University of Manchester

This book offers a sanguine assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a sustainable livelihoods approach. The proposed extension of the approach builds on a political economy tradition in agrarian and development studies. Nurturing sustainable livelihoods for the poor is not just about recognizing their exceptional skill at making a living, which includes diversifying livelihoods, jumping scales and nesting home places within productive networks, but also mitigating their vulnerability to land grabs, drought and floods, natural disasters, corporate greed and venal politics.

—Simon Batterbury, University of Melbourne

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Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies: Little Books on Big Issues

Open Acess ebook edition

Preface to the 2021 ebook edition

It is nearly 30 years since Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed a sustainable livelihoods approach. It has proved useful ever since, challenging development thinking and practice by cutting across sectors, siloes and disciplines.

There have been many critiques along the way, not least when a version was adopted and then instrumentalised in numerous aid programmes. But there has been much reflection and learning too and many extensions and elaborations as a result. This book argues that linking a local, grounded livelihoods approach with wider, structural and historical insights from agrarian political economy can provide a more rounded and complete perspective, useful for academics, practitioners and activists alike.

The dynamics of change in rural settings emerge from the particularities of place and people in interaction with wider processes of structural change, both constraining and opening up opportunities for different groups. Patterns of social differentiation – across class, gender, age, ethnicity and so on – emerge. Such processes result in diverse paths of accumulation, and so in turn different livelihoods.

The applications of the approach offered in this short book are many. How should development planners link across the multiple objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, for example? Well, a sustainable livelihoods approach is a very good start. As framed by local people and in the contexts of their day-to-day livelihoods, the goals are all interlinked. Food provisioning is of course not separate from health, labour relations, gender dynamics or climate change.

Activists can equally use the approach to think about how to address land grabs or other forms of expropriation and extraction. Asking who owns what, who does what, who gets and what do they do with it allows for a nuanced understanding. Some may be benefiting, while others do not. What is the politics of this and how does this suggest routes to mobilisation in favour of the marginalised? All these questions are posed by the extended framework presented in this book and can offer practical tools for both thinking and action.

This short book offers a set of guiding questions and practical

methodologies, which I hope readers of this new open access edition will find useful. The series offers 'short books for big ideas', and the ideas here are certainly wide-ranging and challenging, but I hope the brevity provides a useful overview and sufficient inspiration to delve deeper.

The sustainable livelihoods approach in its many guises is taught in universities around the world. It has been the subject of a mountain of theses and consultancy reports. It has been useful in international programmes, local projects as well as rural struggles. There are many abuses and misinterpretations, and some argue that it has now passed its sell-by date and should be ditched in favour of other frameworks. I disagree. Revitalising and extending the approach through connecting with critical agrarian studies can, this book argues, offer a new, radical perspective on rural development.

Ian Scoones, Brighton, May 2021.

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SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Ian Scoones

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Contents

Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation Statement

The Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) has partnered with ICAS to produce the book series on Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies.

ICCO works for a just world without poverty. A world where people can claim and assume their rights in a sustainable society. Key principles are secure and sustainable livelihoods and justice and dignity for all. Sustainable agriculture and food systems are key to realizing this vision. ICCO acknowledges, together with ICAS, that the current mainstream thinking about the rural world will not lead to sustainable alternatives to agrarian systems that contribute to hunger, malnutrition, violations of right (right to food and other human rights) and unsustainable use of soils and water leading to pollution and loss of biodiversity. ICCO acknowledges that more research and exchange among scholars, practitioners and policymakers is badly needed to find answers. Answers, not just one answer. The world cannot afford anymore to simplify problems in order to develop a "one size fits all" solution leading to a silver bullet that tends to miss the target. We need a plurality of solutions; adapted to local contexts and that fuel the thinking of a diverse range of policymakers, activists and other actors in several sectors. We need diverse inputs form a broad range of people who suffer from hunger, who are kicked off their land and yet have ideas and energy to improve their livelihoods and realize their human rights.

What follows is a description of the type of agrarian system ICCO supports in order to contribute to the realization of its vision: ICCO promotes agriculture that locally feeds people, strives to add value locally and is environmentally sustainable. It promotes an agricultural system in which people are central and allows for self-determination, empowerment and governance of farmers themselves, but also in negotiation with consumers. This agricultural system allows male and female farmers to organize themselves according to their own needs and to make their own choices. It sustainably builds on the

characteristics of the local environment (soil, water, biodiversity). We also know that agricultural systems are bound with other sectors and cannot survive in isolation: we see rural-urban (re)migration and we see trade and markets. Above all we see people living in rural settings that should be able to determine their own choices, supported by a favourable (political, social and economic) environment.

To make this happen, stable, reliable and just access to and control over productive resources such as water, land and genetic material such as seeds and tubers are essential. Related to this, but also in a broader context, ICCO supports small scale producers to be involved in decision taking about their livelihoods and works for more equal power relations in and between agricultural and other systems .The ICCO cooperative acknowledges the interrelatedness between the agricultural and food systems in the global north and south and acknowledges that these interlinkages, as well as power imbalances, need to be challenged in order to sustainably feed the world.

This type of alternative agrarian systems is knowledge intensive. We need more research that is relevant to support and stimulate the further development of this type of agricultural system and promote pro-poor agrarian change. ICCO is looking for and working towards justice, democracy and diversity in agrarian and food systems. In order to make this happen, analytical tools and framework are necessary for informed collective actions and advocacy work. It is in this context that we find the book series of great importance to ICCO and its partners worldwide and to broader audiences.

— Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation
Utrecht, The Netherlands
February 2015

Acknowledgements

This book relies on the insights of and conversations with many people over a long period. It would be impossible to acknowledge them all. Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway inspired me to engage with "livelihoods thinking" in the 1980s during and after my MSc and PhD studies, while Jeremy Swift led the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) project in which the 1998 framework crystallized. That politics and institutions mattered became clear through projects on "environmental entitlements" and policy processes under the aegis of the then Environment Group at IDS, with colleagues including Melissa Leach, Robin Mearns, James Keeley and Will Wolmer. Questions of local knowledge and citizen participation were central to our collective work on "farmer first," beyond and revisited, with John Thompson and others. Linking livelihoods and development issues with the politics of sustainability has been at the core of the work of the ESRC STEPS Centre at Sussex. I have had the privilege to help lead this research, together with Melissa Leach and Andy Stirling, over the past decade. Engagement with a wider debate on agrarian political economy has been catalyzed by work on land and green "grabbing" in recent years. This has involved many colleagues from around the world, including those associated with the Land Deal Politics Initiative, the *Journal of Peasant Studies* and the Future Agricultures Consortium.

Thus, it is my engagement over three decades in numerous projects and with a multitude of colleagues, students and research partners in different parts of the world that has informed, challenged and educated me. But my greatest debt is owed to those people living in rural areas who have worked with me over the years, and perhaps especially those in southern Zimbabwe, where I have worked for nearly thirty years on land, agriculture and rural development issues. They are a constant reminder that livelihoods are complex, diverse and above all political. My field research partners in Zimbabwe, B.Z. Mavedzenge and Felix Murimbarimba, have been especially influential in my thinking.

The writing of the book was made possible by "workpoint sur-

pluses" generated by overwork at IDS, and by the reallocation of some of these as part of a sabbatical scheme during 2013–14. During this period, I tested out some of the arguments in lectures at the College of Humanities and Development, China Agriculture University, Beijing; the Department of Geography at the University of Ghana at Legon, Accra; and the IDS at Sussex. Feedback from the discussions that followed has been immensely useful, as have been the reviews by Simon Batterbury, Henry Bernstein, Tony Bebbington, Robert Chambers and Martin Greeley.

Finally, I would like to thank Nicole McMurray for helping with the formatting of the manuscript, and Jun Borras for persistently but politely reminding me over several years that the book was overdue.

Series Editors' Foreword

Sustainable Livelihoods and Rural Development by Ian Scoones is the fourth volume in the Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies Series from ICAS (Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies). The first volume is Henry Bernstein's *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*, followed by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg's *Peasants and the Art of Farming* and Philip McMichael's *Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions*. Together, these four world-class books reaffirm the strategic importance and relevance of applying agrarian political economy analytical lenses in agrarian studies today. They ensure that succeeding volumes in the series will be just as politically relevant and scientifically rigorous.

A brief explanation of the series will help put into perspective Ian Scoones' current volume in relation to the ICAS intellectual and political project.

Today, global poverty remains a significantly rural phenomenon, with rural populations comprising three-quarters of the world's poor. Thus, the problem of global poverty and the multidimensional (economic, political, social, cultural, gender, environmental and so on) challenge of ending it are closely linked to rural working people's resistance to the system that continues to generate and reproduce the conditions of rural poverty and their struggles for sustainable livelihoods. A focus on rural development thus remains critical to development thinking. However, this focus does not mean de-linking rural from urban issues. The challenge is to better understand the linkages between them, partly because the pathways out of rural poverty paved by neoliberal policies and the war on global poverty engaged in and led by mainstream international financial and development institutions to a large extent simply replace rural with urban forms of poverty.

Mainstream approaches in agrarian studies are generously financed and thus have been able to dominate the production and publication of research and studies on agrarian issues. Many of the institutions (such as the World Bank) that promote this thinking have also been able to acquire skills in producing and propagating highly accessible and policy-oriented publications that are widely

disseminated worldwide. Critical thinkers in leading academic institutions are able to, and do, challenge this mainstream approach, but they are generally confined to academic circles with limited popular reach and impact.

There remains a significant gap in meeting the needs of academics (teachers, scholars and students), social movement activists and development practitioners in the global South and the North for scientifically rigorous yet accessible, politically relevant, policy-oriented and affordable books in critical agrarian studies. In response to this need, ICAS — in partnership with the Dutch development agency Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation, or ICCO-Cooperation — is launching this series. The idea is to publish "state of the art small books" that will explain a specific development issue based on key questions, including: What are the current issues and debates in this particular topic and who are the key scholars/thinkers and actual policy practitioners? How have such positions developed over time? What are the possible future trajectories? What are the key reference materials? And why and how is it important for NGO professionals, social movement activities, official development aid circles and nongovernmental donor agencies, students, academics, researchers and policy experts to critically engage with the key points explained in the book? Each book will combine theoretical and policy-oriented discussion with empirical examples from different national and local settings.

The series will be available in multiple languages in addition to English, starting with Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Bahasa, and Thai. The Chinese edition is in partnership with the College of Humanities and Development of the China Agricultural University in Beijing, coordinated by Ye Jingzhong; the Spanish edition with the PhD Programme in Development Studies at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas in Mexico, coordinated by Raúl Delgado Wise, HEGOA Institute (Basque Public University), coordinated by Gonzalo Fernandes, and EHNE Bizkaia, coordinated by Xarles Iturbe, both in the Basque country; the Portuguese edition with the Universidade Estadual Paulista, Presidente Prudente (UNESP) in Brazil, coordinated by Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, and the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil, co-

ordinated by Sergio Schneider; the Bahasa edition with University of Gadjah Mada in Indonesia, coordinated by Laksmi Savitri; and the Thai edition with RCSD of University of Chiang Mai, coordinated by Chayan Vaddhanaphuti.

Given the context for and objectives of the Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies Series, one can easily understand why we are very pleased and honoured to have as Book 4 Ian Scoones' work on sustainable livelihoods and rural development. Together, the first four volumes are a perfect fit in terms of theme, accessibility, relevance and rigour. We are excited about the bright future of this important series!

— Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Max Spoor and Henry Veltmeyer
ICAS Book Series Editors
March 2015

Other titles in the Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies series

Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change by Henry Bernstein

Peasants and the Art of Farming by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg

Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions by Philip McMichael

Author's Preface

This short book was remarkably difficult to write. The challenge lay partly in the length requirement: it had to be short, and so much had to be said in a limited number of words; partly in the complex and fast-evolving subject material with huge numbers of sources in both the formal and "grey" literature to engage with; and partly in the mix of distance from and involvement in the material.

In the 1990s I was intensely involved in the debate about livelihoods approaches in development. Many of the research projects I was engaged in took a livelihoods approach as their central theme, including work on "environmental entitlements," as well as on the major Institute of Development Studies (IDS) project on sustainable rural livelihoods that ran from 1996–1999. But since then I had been rather disengaged. My field research on land and livelihoods in Africa had livelihoods approaches at its core, as did my ongoing work on livelihoods after land reform in Zimbabwe, but the wider debate about approaches, frameworks and policy interventions had become, to my mind, a bit stale.

Therefore I returned to this discussion with some trepidation to reflect on lessons learned and the value and limitations of livelihoods approaches a decade on. This began in 2008 at a workshop convened by the IDS at Sussex to mark a decade of livelihoods thinking; it continued in 2009 with a paper I prepared for the *Journal of Peasant Studies;* and it is ongoing since writing this book in 2013–14. The book emerged out of the 2009 paper and draws from it. The process has been at turns fascinating and challenging. I come out of it more convinced of the importance of a livelihoods approach than when I wrote the framework paper in 1998. However, I am also more convinced of the need to embrace firmly a political perspective that sees local and wider structural change as part of the same analysis.

This book then aims to bring this argument to a wide audience. It is written, I hope, in an accessible style, and while it covers a huge range of literatures and approaches, it offers only an overview and some hints at how and where to proceed. The book does not aim to be a manual or a guide, nor does it offer prescriptive frameworks or

methods to adopt. Instead, it aims to provoke questions and debate and push discussions onwards from where they had languished after the flurry of activity in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The message is clear: livelihoods approaches provide an essential lens on questions of rural development, poverty and wellbeing, but they need to be situated in a better understanding of the political economy of agrarian change. Drawing on critical agrarian studies, this book poses some new questions that challenge and extend earlier livelihoods frameworks. It also suggests four dimensions of a new politics of livelihoods: a politics of interests, individuals, knowledge and ecology. Together, these suggest new ways of conceptualizing rural and agrarian issues, potentially with profound implications for thinking and action.

Livelihoods approaches were never intended to offer a new meta-theory for development. Instead, they started appropriately at a local level, focused on particular problems. While the era of the big theory is probably over, development thinking and action still need to be underpinned with wider conceptualizations. This book explores the articulations with the practical and policy concerns of livelihoods approaches and critical agrarian and environmental studies. Here theories of knowledge, politics and political economy come to the fore, and the book shows how they enrich and extend the types of questions asked and the methods used in livelihoods analysis. I hope a more effective interaction between these often disconnected debates, combining the practical with the theoretical, can be achieved.

Inevitably, the book draws heavily on the work my colleagues and I have done over the years. The result is a bias towards case examples from Africa, although I have added other cases from my reading. Yet I know there is a far wider array of examples worldwide from which to draw. Thus, I encourage readers to think of their own cases and add to the rich panoply of field examples and methodologies that can be used in the broad church that is livelihoods analysis.

This book is written particularly for students setting out to explore the complexity of rural settings around the world. Many of the points made can be applied equally to urban contexts but again, because of my research focus, I have concentrated on rural areas. I

get dozens of e-mails each year from students from all corners of the world asking for advice on their projects. These are usually not easy to answer, as there are no simple solutions to the dilemmas posed. I hope this book will help future students in mapping a course in the exciting but challenging field of rural livelihoods studies, agrarian change and sustainability.

— Ian Scoones
Institute of Development Studies,
University of Sussex, U.K.
February 2015

Chapter 1

Livelihoods Perspectives: A Brief History

Livelihoods perspectives have become increasingly central in discussions of rural development over the past few decades. This short book offers an overview of these debates, situating them in a wider literature on agrarian change and exploring the implications for research, policy and practice. In a short book on a very big idea, the coverage cannot be exhaustive. My aim is to offer a range of insights and perspectives to help move forward debates about livelihoods, rural development and agrarian change.

A focus on livelihoods is of course not new. An integrated, holistic, bottom-up perspective centred on the understanding of what people do to make a living in diverse social contexts and circumstances has been central to rural development thinking and practice for decades. From colonial field practice to integrated rural development to contemporary aid policy, livelihoods have offered a way of integrating sectoral concerns and rooting endeavours in the specifics of local settings. Today, livelihood thinking is being reinvented for new challenges, including climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, social protection and more.

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show graphs of the number of uses of the terms "livelihoods" and "sustainable livelihoods" in books and journal articles over time. There is a growing usage, especially from the 1990s.

But sometimes in the welter of enthusiasm for livelihoods approaches, frameworks and concepts, analytical rigour and conceptual clarity are lost. What do we mean when we talk of rural livelihoods? What analytical perspectives help us in any field investigation? And what are the implications for wider frameworks of understanding that are aimed at guiding policy and practice? This book will begin to answer these questions.

Figure 1.1 The term *livelihoods* as used in books, 1950–2008 (percentage of all books scanned in Ngram Viewer from Google Books)

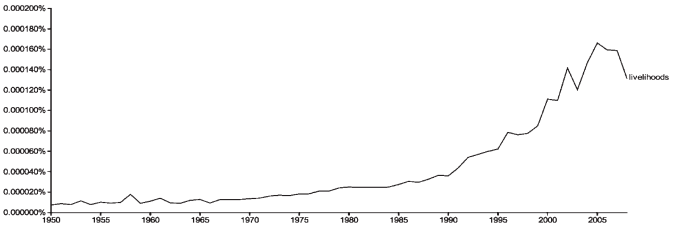
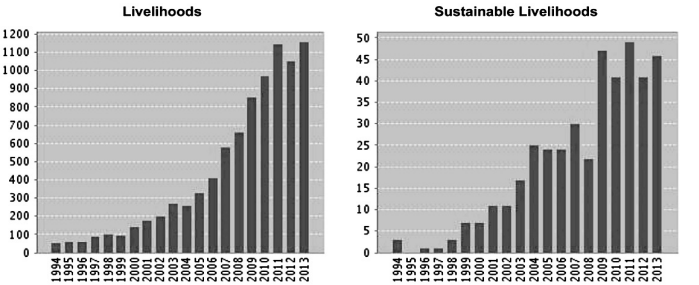


Figure 1.2 Number of published items with *livelihoods* and *sustainable livelihoods* in journal articles 1994–2013 (from Thomson Reuters Web of Science)



Livelihoods Thinking

Despite the claims of some genealogies of livelihoods thinking, such perspectives did not suddenly emerge in 1992 with the influential paper by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway. Far from it: in fact, a cross-disciplinary livelihoods perspective has a rich and important history that reaches back much further and has profoundly influenced thinking and practice.

In the 1820s, William Cobbett travelled across southern and central England on a horse engaged in "actual observation of rural conditions" to inform his political campaigns, all documented in his travelogue, *Rural Rides* (Cobbett 1885). Later in this book, I argue that Karl Marx in his classic treatise on the method of critical politi-

cal economy, *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973), advocated key elements of a livelihoods approach. Early geographical and social anthropological studies looked at "livelihoods" or "modes of life" (cf. Evans Pritchard 1940; Vidal de la Bache 1911; see Sakdapolorak 2014), and Karl Polanyi, who was interested in the relationships between society and markets in economic transformation (1944), was working on a book, *The Livelihood of Man*, when he died (Polanyi 1977; see Kaag et al. 2004). In the 1940s and 1950s, the work of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in what is now Zambia carried out what we would call livelihoods research. This involved collaborations of ecologists, anthropologists, agriculturalists and economists looking at changing rural systems and their development challenges (Werbner 1984; Fardon 1990). While not labelled as such, this work involved quintessential livelihoods analysis — integrative, locally embedded, cross-sectoral analysis informed by a deep field engagement and a commitment to action.

Yet such perspectives did not dominate development thinking in the coming decades. As theories of modernization came to influence development discourse, more mono-disciplinary perspectives ruled the roost. Policy advice was influenced more by professional economists than by the rural development generalists and field-based administrators of the past. Framing this perspective in terms of predictive models of supply and demand, inputs and outputs, and micro and macroeconomics suited the perceived needs of the time. The post-World War II development institutions — the World Bank, the UN system, the bilateral development agencies, as well as national governments in newly independent countries across the world — reflected the hegemony of this framing of policy, linking economics with specialist technical disciplines from the natural, medical and engineering sciences. This pushed alternative sources of social science expertise, and particularly cross-disciplinary livelihoods perspectives, to the side. While alternative, radical Marxist thinkers engaged at the macro level in the political and economic relations of capitalism in post-colonial formations, they rarely delved into the particular, micro level contextual realities on the ground.

Of course this was not universally true, and there were some important, more nuanced contributions offered by both economists and

Marxist scholars, particularly in the fields of agricultural economics and geography. The village studies tradition was an important, empirically based alternative to other rural economic analyses (Lipton and Moore 1972; Harriss 2011). In India, for example, a classic series of studies looked at the diverse impacts of the Green Revolution (Farmer 1977; Walker and Ryan 1990). In many respects these were livelihood studies, although with a focus on the microeconomics of farm production and patterns of household accumulation. In developing the distinctive actor-oriented approach of the Wageningen School, Norman Long was referring to livelihood strategies in his studies in Zambia at this time (Long 1984; see De Haan and Zoomers 2005). In the same period, from a different theoretical tradition, field studies such as the classic examination of rural change in northern Nigeria by Michael Watts (1983), *Silent Violence*, offered important insights into the contested patterns of livelihood change.

These studies served as inspirations for wider bodies of work that followed. Building on the village studies work, household and farming systems studies became an important part of development research in the 1980s (Moock 1986), particularly that focused on intra-household dynamics (Guyer and Peters 1987). Farming systems research was encouraged in a range of countries, with the aim of getting a more integrated, systems perspective on farm problems. Later, agro-ecosystem analysis (Conway 1985) and rapid and participatory rural appraisal approaches (Chambers 2008) expanded the range of methods and styles of field engagement.

Studies focusing on livelihood and environmental change were also important. Given the concern for dynamic ecologies, history and longitudinal change, gender and social differentiation and cultural contexts, geographers, social anthropologists and socio-economists offered a series of influential rich picture analyses of rural settings in this period.[1] This defined the fields of environment and development, as well as livelihoods under stress, with the emphasis on coping strategies and livelihood adaptation.

This line of work overlapped substantially with studies from Marxist political geography, but it had another intellectual trajectory that came to be labelled "political ecology."[2] At root, political ecology focuses on the intersections of structural, political forces

and ecological dynamics, although there are many different strands and variations. Political ecology is characterized, in part, by its commitment to local-level fieldwork, with understandings embedded in the complex realities of diverse livelihoods but linking to more macro-structural issues.

The environment and development movement of the 1980s and 1990s threw up concerns about linking poverty reduction and development to longer-term environmental shocks and stresses. The term "sustainability" entered the lexicon in a big way following the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987 (WCED 1987) and became a central policy concern following the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Scoones 2007). The sustainable development agenda combined, often in a very uneasy way, livelihoods concerns with the priorities of local people, the central feature of Agenda 21, and global concerns with environmental issues, enshrined in conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification. These issues have in turn been explored in cross-disciplinary studies of socio-ecological systems, resilience and sustainability science (Folke et al. 2002; Gunderson and Holling 2002; Clarke and Dickson 2003; Walker and Salt 2006).

Thus, all these approaches — village studies, household economics and gender analyses, farming systems research, agro-ecosystem analysis, rapid and participatory appraisal, studies of socio-environmental change, cultural ecology, political ecology, sustainability science and resilience studies (and many other strands and variants[3]) — have offered diverse insights into the way complex, rural livelihoods intersect with political, economic and environmental processes. These are insights from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, drawing from both the natural and social sciences. Each has different emphases and disciplinary foci, and each has engaged in rural development policy and practice in different ways, with more or less influence.

Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

Recent interest in livelihoods thinking emerged from the late 1980s with the connection of the three words: sustainable, rural

and livelihoods.[4] This connection was reputedly made in 1986 in a hotel in Geneva during a discussion of the *Food 2000* report for the Bruntdland Commission.[5] In the report, M.S. Swaminathan, Robert Chambers and others laid out a vision for a people-oriented development that had as its starting point the rural realities of poor people (Swaminathan et al. 1987). This was a strong theme in Chambers' writing, and especially in his massively influential book *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Chambers 1983). This book was influenced in turn by his earlier experiences as a district officer and a manager of integrated research studies (Cornwall and Scoones 2011). In 1987, under the visionary direction of Richard Sandbrook, the International Institute for Environment and Development organized a conference on sustainable livelihoods (Conroy and Litvinoff 1988). And Chambers wrote the overview paper (1987).

But it was not until 1992, when Chambers and Conway produced a working paper for the Institute of Development Studies, that a now much used definition of sustainable livelihoods emerged. This stated:

> A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. (Conway and Chambers 1992: 6)[6]

This paper is considered the starting point for what came to be known later in the 1990s as the "sustainable livelihoods approach." At the time, its aims were less ambitious and emerged out of conversations between the two authors. Both saw important links between their respective concerns with "putting the last first" in development practice (Chambers 1983) and agro-ecosystem analysis and the wider challenges of sustainable development (Conway 1987). The paper was widely read[7] but at the time had little immediate impact on mainstream development thinking.

Arguments about local knowledge and priorities and systemic concerns with sustainability did not have much traction in the hard-

nosed debates about economic reform and neoliberal policy of that period. Despite damningly critical books and papers, the neoliberal turn from the 1980s had effectively extinguished debate on alternatives. Discussions around livelihoods, employment and poverty emerged around the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen,[8] but the livelihoods approach remained at the margins. Of course, aspects of the participation argument for local involvement and a livelihoods focus were incorporated into the neoliberal paradigm, along with narratives about the retreat of the state and demand-oriented policy. Yet, for some, this became part of a new tyranny (Cooke and Kothari 2001). In the same way, sustainability debates became part-and-parcel of market-oriented solutions and top-down, instrumental global environmental governance (Berkhout et al. 2003). The wider concerns about complex livelihoods, environmental dynamics and poverty-focused development, however, remained on the sidelines.

But all this changed in the latter part of the 1990s and the early 2000s. The formulaic solutions of the Washington Consensus began to be challenged — on the streets, such as in the so-called Battle of Seattle at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999; in the debates generated by global social movements around the World Social Fora (from 2001 in Porto Alegre); and in academic debates, including in economics (from Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz onwards). It was also being challenged in countries whose economies had not rebounded under neoliberal reform, and whose state capacities had been decimated along the way. In the U.K., the 1997 election was a key moment in debates about development. Along with the new Labour government came the Department for International Development (DFID), a vocal and committed minister, Clare Short, and a White Paper that committed explicitly to a poverty and livelihoods focus (see Solesbury 2003).[9]

The White Paper highlighted sustainable rural livelihoods as a core development priority. Indeed, the U.K. government had already commissioned work in this area, with several research programs underway, including one coordinated by the IDS at the University of Sussex, with work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Mali. This multidisciplinary research team had been working on a comparative

analysis of livelihood change, and had developed a diagrammatic checklist to link elements of the field enquiry (Scoones 1998). In addition to pioneering work by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (Rennie and Singh 1996) and the Society for International Development (Almaric 1998), this drew substantially on parallel IDS work on "environmental entitlements." Building on the classic work of Amartya Sen (1981), environmental entitlements emphasized the mediating role of institutions in defining access to resources, rather than simply production and abundance (Leach et al. 1999).

Like the IDS sustainable livelihoods work, this was an attempt to engage economist colleagues in a discussion about questions of access and the organizational and institutional dimensions of rural development and environmental change (see Chapter 4). Drawing on work by Douglass North (1990) and others, advocates of the environmental entitlements perspective used the languages of institutional economics and environmental dynamics (especially from the "new ecology" perspective, see Scoones 1999), drawing on social anthropology and political ecology. It chimed very much with the work of Tony Bebbington (1999), who developed a capitals and capabilities framework for looking at rural livelihoods and poverty in the Andes, again drawing on Sen's classic work.

In the notionally transdisciplinary subject area of development, making sense to economists is a must. Economists had only recently discovered institutions — or at least a particular individualistic, rational-actor version — in the form of new institutional economics (Harriss et al. 1995). Social relations and culture were defined in terms of social capital (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993). With this, an opportunity had opened up to generate some productive conversation, even if it was largely on disciplinary economics' terms. Thus, both the environmental entitlements approach (Leach et al. 1999) and its more popular cousin, the sustainable livelihoods framework (Carney 1998; Scoones 1998; Morse and McNamara 2013), emphasized the economic attributes of livelihoods as mediated by social-institutional processes. The sustainable livelihoods frameworks in particular linked inputs (capitals, assets or resources) and outputs (livelihood strategies), connected in turn to outcomes,

which combined familiar territory (of poverty lines and employment levels) with wider framings (of wellbeing and sustainability) (see Chapter 2). And all this was seen as mediated by social, institutional and organizational processes.

Keywords

"Sustainable rural livelihoods" (or "rural livelihoods," "sustainable livelihoods" or simply "livelihoods") thus became shorthand for a particular approach to development research and intervention. As discussed further below (Chapter 3), there was an explosion of activity, involving research, project funding, consulting, training and more. As "boundary terms" (Gieryn 1999; Scoones 2007), these phrases, and associated concepts, methods and approaches, were able to draw people together: across disciplines, sectors and institutional silos. They created a community of practice — diverse, divergent and differentiated for sure, but nonetheless identifiable.

To give a sense of the debate, Figure 1.3 offers a word cloud of the classic Chambers and Conway (1992) paper on sustainable livelihoods.

Figure 1.3 Word cloud of Chambers and Conway (1992), from Wordle, using the core text only, with some link words removed

The word cloud shows the importance of linked concepts; for example, assets, access, resources and capability, as well as rural, income, poor, social, and also future, shocks, generations, global. Box 1 lists some of the burgeoning array of applications of a livelihoods approach in a range of settings, with some very selective references to each (indeed, each word could be linked to a whole bibliography!).

It seems livelihoods approaches are now applied to literally everything: livestock, fisheries, forestry, agriculture, health, urban

Box 1.1 Livelihoods applications

- Agriculture (Carswell 1997)
- Animal genetic resources (Anderson 2003)
- Aquaculture (Edwards 2000)
- Biodiversity conservation (Bennett 2010)
- Climate change (Paavola 2008)
- Conflict (Ohlsson 2000)
- Disasters (Cannon et al. 2003)
- Energy (Gupta 2003)
- Forestry (Warner 2000)
- Indigenous peoples (Davies et al. 2008)
- Irrigation (Smith 2004)
- Marine (Allison and Ellis 2001)
- Mobile phone technology (Duncombe 2014)
- Natural Resource Management (Pound et al. 2003)
- Nutrition and food security (Maxwell et al. 2000)
- Pastoralism (Morton and Meadows 2000)
- Resettlement (Dekker 2004)
- River basin management (Cleaver and Franks 2005)
- Rural markets (Dorward et al. 2003)
- Sanitation (Matthew 2005)
- Social Protection (Devereux 2001)
- Trade (Stevens Devereux and Kennan 2003)
- Urban development (Rakodi and Lloyd Jones 2002; Farrington et al. 2002)
- Value chains (Jha et al. 2011)
- Water (Nicol 2000).

development and more. From the late 1990s, a veritable avalanche of papers emerged, all claiming the sustainable livelihoods brand. As the approach became more central to development programming, attempts were made to link it with operational indicators (Hoon Singh and Wanmali 1997), monitoring and evaluation (Adato and Meinzen Dick, 2002), sector strategies (Gilling, Jones and Duncan 2001) and poverty reduction strategy papers (Norton and Foster 2001). But perhaps the most interesting applications were in areas where crosscutting themes could be opened up by a livelihoods perspective. Thus, HIV/AIDS discussions were recast from a health to a livelihoods focus (Loevinsohn and Gillespie 2003); diversification of livelihoods, migration and non-farm rural income was put at the centre of the rural development agenda (Tacoli 1998; de Haan 1999; Ellis 2000); and complex emergencies, conflict and disaster responses were now seen through a livelihoods lens (Cannon et al. 2003; Longley and Maxwell 2003).

Core Questions

However, this book is concerned with neither fads within the aid bureaucracy nor the fleeting moves of academic fashions, nor indeed with the approach's multiple applications in diverse settings. Instead, it concentrates on some basic conceptual questions, essential to understanding rural contexts and agrarian change, and makes the case that livelihoods approaches, drawing on but also extending elements of the applications discussed so far, have an important role to play, both as a means to understanding, but also as a basis for action.

Livelihoods in any setting are immensely complex and have multiple dimensions. Rural livelihoods of course go beyond agriculture and farming to a range of off-farm activities, including rural employment. Links to urban areas are also significant, as is migration. Livelihoods are constructed as complex repertoires (Chambers 1995) or bricolage (Cleaver 2012; Batterbury 1999; Croll and Parkin 1992), combining different elements between people and across time and space. Some people specialize, while others diversify: what Chambers refers to as the "foxes, and hedgehogs" (Chambers 1997a).

As Henry Bernstein (2009: 73) explains, many must seek their livelihoods

> through insecure, oppressive and increasingly 'informalised' wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure 'informal sector' ('survival') activity, including farming; in effect, various and complex combinations of employment and self-employment. Many of the labouring poor do this across different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, as well as wage employment and self-employment. This defies inherited assumptions of fixed, let alone uniform, notions (and 'identities') of 'worker', 'trader', 'urban', 'rural', 'employed' and 'self-employed.'

Frank Ellis (2000) has emphasized the importance of seeing rural livelihoods in terms of a diverse array of strategies, farming being only one of many, differentiated across and within households. In changing agrarian settings, the non-farm rural economy is increasingly significant as linkages are made between farm production and other activities (Haggblade et al. 2010). Flows of resources from outside the area in the form of remittances are also crucial, as are changing patterns of migration, links to urban areas, and an expanded global diaspora (McDowell and DeHaan 1997). As wider economies change, so too do rural areas. With these changes come patterns of deagrarianization (Bryceson 1996), the emergence of "footloose" labouring classes (Breman 1996) and selective depopulation of areas, with certain groups moving to towns or other regions while others are left behind (Jingzhong and Lu 2011). In some rural areas, new economic activity such as mineral exploitation (Bebbington et al. 2008) or investment in large-scale farms (White et al. 2012) results in major changes in livelihood opportunity, as smallholder farming gives way to wage employment. Wherever we look, north or south, we see major structural changes in the countryside driven by wider economic change. All are refashioning livelihoods in dramatic ways. A livelihoods approach that simultaneously acknowledges the textured, contextual specificity of particular livelihoods and also relates

to wider structural drivers is essential. This is the principal argument in the excellent but often overlooked Open University textbook *Rural Livelihoods: Crises and Response*, edited by Henry Bernstein, Ben Crow and Hazel Johnson in 1992.

For any particular setting, we need to ask, "what livelihoods are we talking about?" and so, in the words of well-known children's author Richard Scarry, explore "what do people do all day?" We also need to explore "whose livelihoods?" and so discuss social relations and processes of social differentiation. We need to ask, "where are livelihoods being carved out?" and so address questions of ecology, geography and territory. We need to explore the temporal dimension, asking about seasonality and inter-annual variation. And, perhaps above all, we need to go beyond the descriptive assessment to ask why certain livelihoods are possible and others are not. This requires an understanding of broader causes of impoverishment, disempowerment and disadvantage, but also of opportunity and enterprise, and with this the institutional and political processes that influence outcomes (O'Laughlin 2004).

These questions are not straightforward. Indeed, they articulate strongly with the core concerns of agrarian political economy that were explored by Marx, Lenin, Kautsky and others, and therefore some of the classic questions about how agrarian classes emerge and how relationships between groups under different political-economic conditions affect people's lives (Bernstein 2010a,b). In Chapter 6, I argue the need for a closer association between this longstanding tradition and the more recent focus on livelihoods.

Next, however, I turn to our understanding of livelihood outcomes: what do people get from their diverse and differentiated livelihood activities, how are these outcomes distributed and how do people frame needs, wants and desires? To do this, I locate our discussion of livelihoods in the wider literature on poverty, wellbeing and capabilities.

Notes

1 For example, for Africa, Richards 1985; Mortimore 1989; Davies 1996; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Scoones et al. 1996; Mortimore and Adams, 1999; Francis 2000; Batterbury 2001; Homewood 2005, among many

others including earlier pioneers in the tradition of cultural ecology, such as Rappaport 1967 and Netting 1968.

2 See Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Robbins 2003; Forsyth 2003; Peet and Watts 1996, 2004; Peet et al. 2010; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003; Bryant 1997.

3 Including, in the francophone literature, studies of *systemes agraires* (cf. Pelissier 1984; Gaillard and Sourisseau 2009).

4 This section draws from Scoones 2009.

5 Robert Chambers, pers. comm., although, as he points out, there are various other earlier antecedents, including a paper for a 1975 Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting entitled *Policies for Future Rural Livelihoods*.

6 As adapted by Scoones 1998, Carney 1999 and others.

7 Cited by 2671 in November 2014 according to google.scholar.

8 www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/

9 www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/whitepaper1997.pdf

Chapter 2

Livelihoods, Poverty and Wellbeing

A central concern of any livelihoods analysis is to understand who is poor and who is better off, and why. Poverty remains mostly rural and concentrated in certain parts of the world, yet patterns of inequality in livelihood opportunity are almost universal (Picketty 2014). As Paul Collier put it, the "bottom billion" is a group that requires urgent attention, and approaches that help us understand and act are important; yet why so many people in the early twenty-first century remain stuck at the bottom is a question of wider political economy and global structural relations. While there remains considerable debate about exactly how poverty is measured (Ravallion 2011a), where the poor are and how patterns of poverty are changing (Kanbur and Sumner 2012; Sumner 2012), the urgency of the development challenge is undeniable.

The debate over how we should assess poverty and wellbeing has raged over many decades. Everyone agrees that livelihoods are diverse, varied and multidimensional, but how should we make assessments to target interventions and develop policy? Here there is less agreement. In 2009, the Sarkozy Commission, with contributions from some of the world's leading economists, argued strongly that non-income approaches were essential.[1] The Commission advocated a focus on human development, happiness and wellbeing. As a response to this debate, Sabina Alkire and colleagues developed a multidimensional poverty index, later incorporated into the *UN Human Development Report* (Alkire and Foster 2011; Alkire and Santos 2014), which was itself a product of a capabilities perspective derived from the work of Amartya Sen (see below).

Others have argued that to come to terms with real people's livelihoods, we need to go further still, and delve into intra-household dynamics, particularly gender issues, and wider questions of distribution, access and voice (Guyer and Peters 1987). In this view, equality, empowerment and recognition are important attributes

(Fraser 2003). A sense of belonging, freedom from violence, security, community engagement and a political voice are, adherents argue, essential attributes of wellbeing (Chambers 1997b; Duflo 2012). They also hold that various indicators must be combined to gain an appreciation of poverty, with all its multiple dimensions.

Yet Martin Ravallion, a former lead economist at the World Bank, has countered these calls to add to the burgeoning basket of indicators, arguing that such composite measures are confusing, based on a series of judgements and not good for comparison. Instead, a more honest and transparent approach would stick to limited measures centred on income while accepting the limitations, or aim for a simple "dashboard" approach that does not attempt to combine unlike features of a complex reality in a single measure (Ravallion 2011b,c).

The debate continues. This chapter offers some insights into the various options for assessing livelihood outcomes. Each have their pros and cons, and any livelihood assessment must consider these. Such measures emerge from our conceptualization of poverty, livelihood and wellbeing. A focus on material factors will emphasize income, expenditure and asset holdings, while a broader view, focused on what Amartya Sen calls "capabilities" (Sen 1985, 1999), will extend the array. An emphasis on wellbeing rather than poverty, for example, highlights psychological and relational qualities of livelihoods, as well as the material, and so must encompass wider attributes (McGregor 2007). A social justice perspective that emphasizes "freedoms" extends the vision further to issues of empowerment, voice and participation (Nussbaum 2003).

A normative focus on poverty also requires us to look at who is rich and why. Poverty and ill-being do not emerge in isolation, and the relationships between rich and poor and patterns of inequality within a society, and indeed over time, are important for understanding livelihood outcomes (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Here the perspectives of history and political economy also become important, as does an exploration of the processes of differentiation that result in inequalities.

The following sections explore how each of these underlying perspectives informs the way we understand and in turn measure

and assess livelihood outcomes. Each approach has a different focus, emerging from different intellectual and disciplinary traditions, and each suggests different methodological challenges. I argue that all are valuable in different ways, and many can be usefully used together to provide a more complete understanding of livelihood outcomes.

Livelihood Outcomes: Conceptual Foundations

Here I suggest four different approaches to livelihoods and their outcomes. All offer a multidimensional view, but each is rooted in a different conceptual tradition (cf. Laderchi et al. 2003).

The first approach focuses on the individual, and on maximizing what economists call utility. This approach looks at the tradeoffs between different options, and between individuals, and explores how welfare outcomes are achieved. Welfare economics has a long tradition, stretching from the nineteenth-century studies of Charles Booth (1887) and Seebohm Rowntree (1902) in Britain that explored livelihood change in poor urban neighbourhoods. Such analyses argued for welfare protection schemes, later institutionalized as the welfare state. Since those earlier, more qualitative livelihood studies, welfare economists have formalized their analyses to look at allocation approaches that maximize utilities. An individualist, utilitarian approach draws on long traditions of moral philosophy, from Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and others, that justify human action to maximize utility and reduce negative effects.

A second approach has its roots in arguments about social justice, fairness and liberty, drawing for example on the arguments in the *Theory of Justice* by John Rawls. The "capabilities approach" (Sen 1985, 1990; Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Nussbaum and Glover 1995; Nussbaum 2003) focuses on wider freedoms and human development. Amartya Sen argues that a person's life is made up of a combination of "doings" and "beings" (what he calls "functionings"), and capabilities are then realized through a person's freedom to choose among these elements of a valued life. This again focuses on the individual but in a broader sense, looking at a range of factors that improve human development. Martha Nussbaum goes as far as to list "central human capabilities." These include: life (being able

to live to the end of a human life of normal length); bodily health; bodily integrity (to be secure against violent assault); reproductive and sexual choice; practical reason (being able to conceive of a good life); affiliation (being able to live with and toward others); play; and control over one's environment. While presented as universal, such facets, of course, are culturally defined and will vary, but the point is that the scope is broad and conceptions of a good life go far beyond simple individual maximization of utilities.

A third, overlapping approach focuses more on the subjective, personal and relational aspects of a person's life. Happiness, satisfaction and psychological wellbeing, it is argued, arise from a range of factors, including a person's relations with others (Gough and McGregor 2007; Layard and Layard 2011). Thus, low self-esteem, depression and lack of respect from others will have major impacts on wellbeing. Such factors are not necessarily appreciated in more utilitarian assessments, or indeed in some capability approaches, yet they are crucial in any rounded perspective on livelihoods.

A fourth approach is relational in a wider social and political sense. Wellbeing, it is argued, is improved in societies that are more equal, and where opportunities exist for advancement. Above a certain basic level of income, highly hierarchal, divided and unequal countries show a comparatively shorter life expectancy along with a greater prevalence of a whole host of social and health problems, for example (Wilkinson and Picket 2010). This perspective requires that individual livelihood outcomes be evaluated in a wider social and political context, as inequality may impede broader development. Inequality is bad for everyone, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett argue, but especially for the relatively poor.

These four perspectives on livelihood outcomes are, as discussed, rooted in deeper philosophical assumptions about the objectives of development, the conduct of human life and our moral and ethical foundations. Each of these conceptual foundations in turn suggests a different way to measure livelihood outcomes. The following sections provide an overview of some of the vast number of choices.

Measuring Livelihood Outcomes

Poverty lines: Income and expenditure measures

The poverty line is part of an approach widely used by microeconomists to assess the number of individuals and households living above and below this threshold. The poverty line is based on an assumption about basic needs and usually has a monetary value. Such approaches are important in targeting social support and protection programs. For example in India, the poverty line serves as the basis for deployment of huge government programmes. Yet it is mired in controversy over assumptions, data and implications (Deaton and Kozel 2004).

Indeed, there is much debate about the efficacy of such measures given the multiple measurement challenges (Ravallion 2011a). These are highlighted in the ongoing debate about whether to use income or consumption measures of poverty. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Income measures for example, while the most direct measure of income wealth/poverty, suffer real problems of recall, with sensitivities associated with certain sources of income. As well, they are often rather variable, with incomes coming only at certain times, making it difficult for single measures to capture this. By contrast, consumption measures are relatively easy to collect and are less prone to variations, although certain purchases may only be occasional. They may not, however, capture all aspects and key tradeoffs (Greeley 1994; Baulch 1996).

However, any of these quantitative measures of livelihood outcomes are nevertheless narrowly focused on an individualist utilitarian view, and they clearly miss a lot.

Household living standard surveys

Living standards surveys have provided a quantitative basis for assessing livelihood change at a household level. The living standard measurement surveys (LSMS), which were established in 1980 by the World Bank and used in a number of countries, have provided a longitudinal approach according to a number of indicators (Grosh and Glewwe 1995). These are largely focused on assets, income and expenditure, but they also extend to schooling, health and other human development indices. They expand the poverty line approach

but still focus on the quantifiable and measurable, and on households as the unit of analysis.

As with other household survey approaches, including many of the poverty line measures, the focus on the household will inevitably miss out on intra-household dimensions (Razavi 1999; Kanji 2002; Dolan 2004), but also on relations between households, as part of household "clusters" (Drinkwater et al. 2006). There has been a longstanding debate about the limitations of the household as a unit of analysis (Guyer and Peters 1987; O'Laughlin 1998). A household is often defined as a group of people "eating from the same pot," focusing on the domestic organization around food provisioning. However, livelihoods may be constructed across other dimensions too. This is especially true with households linked through polygamous marriage, with child-headed households or with migration patterns in which rural and urban homes are closely tied. Equally, close kin in a village or a cluster of homes may share many assets, even food provisioning, often making the household unit rather obscure.

Human development indicators

Human development indicators are used prominently as part of the Human Development Report compiled each year by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Antecedents include the physical quality of life index that highlighted literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy (Morris 1979) and basic needs approaches (Streeten et al. 1981; Wisner 1988). The Human Development Index was first published in 1990 and included life expectancy, schooling and GDP per capita at purchasing power parity. Since then, there have been attempts to extend and improve such indices.

Sabina Alkire and colleagues (see above) combine two health indicators (malnutrition and child mortality), two education indicators (years of schooling and enrolment), six living standard indicators (including access to services, household wealth proxies, etc.) and compute an overall indicator based on household data. Each cluster of indicators is weighted equally as in the Human Development Report. This approach, they argue, allows for multidimensional comparisons both within and across countries. Such indicators tend

to offer a national or regional picture but again are often derived from household data and so suffer the same limitations.

Wellbeing assessments

As already noted, one of the critiques of standard approaches to poverty assessments has centred on the narrow focus on the material aspects of income, expenditure and assets. Even broader multidimensional approaches can ignore some of the less tangible dimensions, as they are equally reliant on quantitative household data collected from standard surveys. Wellbeing approaches, therefore, argue that a combination of physical/objective, relational and subjective dimensions is important for any assessment (Gough and McGregor 2007; McGregor 2007; White and Ellison 2007; White 2010). Such approaches establish a wider set of livelihood needs beyond living standards, health and education, including, for example, psychosocial aspects. A more rounded wellbeing approach, focused very often on individuals within households and wider communities, it is argued, provides a more complete perspective on livelihoods. While drawing on the capabilities approach of Sen, it is essential to negotiate the diverse meanings of wellbeing and how it is experienced (or not). This in turn requires an acceptance of the political tradeoffs between different conceptions of wellbeing (Deneulin and McGregor 2010).

Quality of life measures

One particular aspect of wellbeing approaches is their focus on psychological dimensions, including notions of life satisfaction, esteem and self-worth (Rojas 2011). Lack of hope can be seen as the most debilitating of poverty traps, with impacts on motivation, investment and ability to improve livelihoods (Duflo 2012). Some have argued that a single measure of happiness is possible (cf. Layard and Layard 2011). Bhutan, for example, has developed an index to track happiness as part of a national effort linked to Buddhist cultural-religious commitments. Others argue that the psychological dimensions of wellbeing, like the material, are multiple and cannot be subsumed in a single index. They suggest a diversity of measures, as in the OECD's Better Life Index, for example.[2]

Employment and decent work

Another potential indicator focuses on livelihoods generated through employment, both formal and informal. The International Labour Organization, for example, emphasizes the generation of decent work, defined in terms of creating jobs, guaranteeing rights, extending social protection and promoting dialogue.[3] This may include on- or off-farm work, domestic labour or more formal employment. A qualitative assessment of the work, in terms of pay and conditions plus other criteria such as flexibility, rights and so on, allows a calculation of numbers of decent work days to be generated. This represents, of course, a very different measure from that focusing on income or consumption poverty lines, but it potentially reflects another important dimension of livelihoods, and focuses appropriately on work and employment of different sorts.

Evaluating Inequality

All these measures and assessments of livelihood outcomes can be evaluated in terms of their distribution. Gini coefficients, for example, measure the divergence from even distributions, while other statistical measures offer similar indicators.[4] Similarly, diversity measures may help assess the relative importance of different elements of a portfolio of options. They may also encourage debate about broadening out such options as part of livelihood "pathways" (cf. Stirling 2007).

Such assessments can take place at different scales, from within households to national and regional levels. As discussed earlier, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010) in their book *The Spirit Level*, evaluated inequality across a range of criteria to look at national outcomes, finding that inequality had a major impact once a certain basic threshold of wealth had been crossed. A focus on inequality suggests attention to the structural features of society that influence livelihood outcomes, via complex psychosocial and behavioural effects.

Here a class-based analytical approach can help illuminate how certain livelihood options are possible for some while others are not. What does marginality mean in relation to wider power relations in

society? Analysis of such features as land distribution and agrarian structure, asset ownership patterns and labour regimes may help illuminate such assessments. These basic questions from a Marxist tradition are at the heart of a political economy analysis of livelihoods, a theme that I return to at multiple points in the chapters that follow.

Multidimensional Metrics and Indices

All of these measures and assessment approaches have their use. They also, as observed, have their limitations. Is it possible therefore to combine the best of them into single metrics and indices to capture the multidimensional character of poverty, livelihoods and wellbeing?

This has been a long-running debate but one that has risen to prominence recently, particularly with advocacy for the Multidimensional Poverty Index approach (Alkire and Foster 2011; see above). With its broader ambit, allied to Sen's capabilities approach, advocates argue that it thus is able to identify failures of functioning in an operational way (Alkire 2002).

While currently the most prominent, this approach is not the only attempt at a multidimensional assessment. Indeed, there has been a proliferation of indices and rankings of all sorts attempting to combine different measurements in a single number. While acknowledging the complexity of livelihoods and the diverse sources of poverty and ill-being, there are a number of problems with such approaches.

Sensitivity to the assumptions made and the weights allocated is inevitable, and so indicators may act to conceal as much as they reveal. They are always impositions of the analysts' view and understanding of the world, and so are necessarily expert-driven and outsider-defined. The resulting measures are therefore somewhat arbitrary and often reflect a liberal, Western outlook. Equally, in choosing indicators it is difficult to know what data to include and what to exclude. And with multiple indicators combined, the line between those who are poor and those who are not disappears, and policy decisions become difficult (Ravallion 2011a). Advocates counter that assumptions are always presented clearly and transparently, and that

simple rankings have better policy traction. This allows for a greater diversity of measures to be considered, rather than a simplistic and narrow reliance on income indicators.

There is no easy resolution to this debate. What is chosen, of course, reflects different personal, disciplinary and institutional preferences, and as with so much, there are trends, fads and fashions in poverty measurement and wellbeing assessment. However, we must be wary of the political power of certain measures and remain alert to the assumptions and simplifications being made. This is why any livelihoods assessment must be rooted in local contexts and build understandings from this base, rather than accepting at face value survey data and the associated rankings and indicators that emerge from it. A multi-method, cross-disciplinary approach is always the most robust for livelihoods analysis (Hulme and Shepherd 2003; Hulme and Toye 2006), and why it is important to know about the potentials as well as the limitations of the approaches outlined above.

Whose Indicators Count? Participatory and Ethnographic Approaches

A recurrent critique of most of the measurement approaches highlighted above is that they impose views of the world, and thus views of livelihoods and poverty, by choosing which data will be collected and how it will be combined. This applies as much to single poverty line measures as to aggregative multidimensional approaches. Such a paternalistic approach to measurement may in turn feed into similarly paternalistic responses, with assumptions about who the deserving poor are and what they need (Duflo 2012).

Ethnographic accounts of living in poverty in different contexts provide an alternative way of framing the problem. Tony Beck (1994) in his book *The Experience of Poverty: Fighting for Respect and Resources in Village India*, describes in great depth the experience of poverty from the perspective of villagers in West Bengal, India. He emphasizes the daily struggles, negotiations and bargaining that occur around gaining access to common property resources and managing livestock, for example. Beck also points out that in these circumstances, respect is as important as resources. He highlights

power relations between rich and poor, and men and women, as well as the views of poor people towards the rich, and of those whose oppression and violence create poverty (Beck 1989). Understanding livelihoods from such lived experiences — from an emic perspective — and focusing on perceptions, social relations and power dynamics has long been the goal of social anthropological studies. Yet the translation of such intimate and personal experiences by an outsider is always prone to bias and misinterpretation.

In a classic longitudinal study from western Rajasthan, India, N.S. Jodha (1988) compared standard poverty measures with more qualitative indicators of wellbeing from participatory studies for two periods, 1963–66 and 1982–84. Households deemed poorer by standard poverty metrics were considered better off when more qualitative assessments of economic wellbeing were used. This minority view on poverty assessment — and indeed development economics more generally (cf. Hill 1986) — points to the wider frame suggested by livelihoods studies.

There were a number of things missing from the conventional measures: access to common property resources, harvesting of minor crops and various forms of informal work. In addition, farmers emphasized other important changes that resulted in substantial improvements, including reduced dependence on landlords, increased mobility, greater access to cash and acquisition of consumer durables. While all of these changes significantly improved wellbeing in farmers' eyes, they were not captured in the standard surveys. Jodha highlights some of the areas missed in conventional approaches (Table 1) and argues forcefully for a mixed method approach.

In the 1990s, participatory approaches to poverty assessments became popularized through the World Bank's major effort *Voices of the Poor*, which assessed poverty in debt-ridden, poor countries (Narayan et al. 2000). This study attempted to capture lived experiences through a massive "listening" exercise across twenty-three countries. The results were inevitably mediated and synthesized (Brock and Coulibaly 1999), but the perspectives offered — crucially by the World Bank — offered a very different view of livelihoods and poverty, one that highlighted violence, insecurity, identity and esteem, among other facets.

Table 1: Missing out on rural livelihood complexity (adapted from Jodha 1988: 2427)

Concepts and Norms	Aspects Covered	Facets Bypassed
Household income	Cash and kind inflows (including values of major nontraded items).	Ignores time context and transaction partner context of income generating activity; disregards flow of low-value self-provisioning activities with significant collective contribution to sustenance of the people.
Farm production	Production from all farm enterprises.	Series of intermediate activities (often considered consumption activities), which facilitate the final output from farm enterprises in self-provisioning societies.
Food consumption basket	Volume and quality of formally recorded food items.	Ignores seasonally varying streams of self-provisioning items/services.
Household resource endowment	Only privately owned land, labour and capital resources.	Ignores household's collective access to common property resources, and also to power and influence.
Factor/product market	Competitive, impersonal interactive framework.	Ignores distortions, imperfections, etc., due to factors like influence, power, affinities and inequities.
Farm size grouping	Based on owned and operated landholdings (often standardized for productivity and irrigation).	Ignores totality of asset position including household's access to common property resources, its workforce, which determines a household's ultimate potential to harness land resources and environment for sustenance.

Concepts and Norms	Aspects Covered	Facets Bypassed
Labour input	Labour as standard unit, expressed in terms of person-hour days etc. (differentiation based on age and sex not withstanding).	Disregards heterogeneity of labour of same age/sex in terms of differences in stamina and productivity; ignores differences in intensity of effort between a self-employed worker and a hired worker. (Inappropriate imputation of value of the labour of self-employed worker is based on the wage rate of hired or attached labourer).
Capital formation	Acquisition of assets.	Ignores accretionary processes.
Depreciation of assets	Bookkeeping reduction in the worth of the asset.	Ignores continued usability and recyclability.
Efficiency/productivity norm	Quantity and value of final produce of an activity (based on market criteria).	Ignores totality of the system directed to satisfy multiple objectives rather than a single criterion.

Such approaches have inspired more recent efforts focused on the post-2015 development agenda, including the Participate initiative, which attempted to capture views from the ground and feed into the global process,[5] and *My World*, a web interface for sharing views on a range of criteria from the global public.[6]

Wealth ranking — or the variants of success, poverty and wellbeing — is a sophisticated field-based approach. Since poverty and wellbeing ranking are multidimensional and complex, rather than picking apart the elements and generating insights according to assessments of consumption, income, employment equity, etc., why not throw the question back to the people themselves? Wealth ranking was developed as a simple way to generate discussion about differential patterns of wealth in a community; it involved a card-

sorting exercise with community members based on a household list (Grandin 1988; Guijt 1992). An initial discussion ascertains the local terminology for wealth (or any other criterion of interest), and then a selection of informants sort cards into groups, with an overall ranking generated by combining scores. The results can then be used to devise sampling strategies, but more importantly, the discussions arising from the ranking process can reveal a huge amount about the criteria (often quite unexpected) that define local perceptions of wealth.

For example, a series of wealth ranking exercises were carried out as part of a long-term livelihood study in Mazvihwa communal area of southern Zimbabwe (Scoones 1995; Mushongah and Scoones 2012). Both a men's group and a women's group carried out rankings of the same selection of households, first in 1988, and again in 2007. They highlighted gender differences between group rankings, with men and women offering different understandings of wealth. The repeat rankings showed how criteria had changed, with the more recent rankings compared in transition matrices. In no ranking was there a narrow focus on material assets or income. Rather, there was a broader perspective on wealth that was more akin to notions of wellbeing, as highlighted in the literature. Additionally, changes in rank of individual households showed shifting livelihood fortunes over time, with some improving while others remained stable or declined. The reasons for such transitions were explored in the workshops and compared across ranking groups. Important insights into livelihood change can be gained by offering a composite rank, combining a range of criteria (which are clearly different across time and between ranking groups). Repeat applications of wealth ranking approaches as part of longitudinal studies, as in the Zimbabwe case, show how livelihoods change, and often not in predictable ways. Contingency, chance and conjuncture are all at play as people move up and down in rankings. Equally, the criteria change over time as different aspects of wellbeing are highlighted. This textured approach to livelihood analysis over time is important in any setting (cf. Rigg et al. 2014).

There are of course limits to such a ranking method. First, the focus on households as the units of measurement potentially ignores

intra-household dynamics, although ranking participants are often at pains to highlight the importance of particular individuals and the differences within households. Second, such a measure is not comparable as criteria shift and baselines change, so any understanding has to be relative, not absolute. Third, the relationships between households are not always revealed, although the positioning of an individual household within a cluster may be important in defining certain attributes of wealth or wellbeing due to the mutual aid that results.

However, such ranking approaches have a role to play as part of a wider toolbox for understanding livelihood change and patterns of differentiation. In Chapters 7 and 8, I introduce additional methods for delving into the specific details of livelihood practices, through ethnographic approaches or through a political economy approach, which looks at the wider structural and relational features of rural societies.

Poverty Dynamics and Livelihood Change

Our interest in livelihood outcomes is often focused on change over time. A single snapshot, however multidimensional, is of less interest than the trends, transitions and transformations in livelihoods. Research on poverty dynamics (Baulch and Hoddinot 2000; Addison et al. 2009) highlights the importance of asset thresholds in poverty transitions (Carter and Barrett 1996) and the way livelihood outcomes change over time, but in an uneven way. Again, the most suitable approach involves mixing qualitative and quantitative methods (White 2002; Kanbur 2003; Kanbur and Shaffer 2006).

The descent into poverty can be sudden, while getting out of poverty can be a gradual process, often taking many years. An approach that shifts attention to livelihood vulnerability (Swift 1989) and resilience (Béné et al. 2012) highlights the factors that offset the impacts of long-term stresses or sudden shocks (Conway and Chambers 1992), and allows us to explore how people can "step up," "step out," "hang in" or "drop out" (Dorward 2009; Mushongah 2009; see Chapter 3).

An important distinction exists between transitory and chronic

poverty. Chronic poverty can be characterized by a number of intersecting traps, including insecurity, limited citizenship, spatial disadvantage, social discrimination and poor work opportunities (Green and Hulme 2005; CPRC 2008).

Over time, using longitudinal panel surveys, life histories and other qualitative techniques, thresholds can be identified that demarcate transitions between different livelihood strategies. Assets can be particularly important in defining such dynamics (Carter and Barrett 2006).

It is this active response to changing vulnerabilities that influences how livelihoods unfold. Naila Kabeer's work in Bangladesh (2005) demonstrates how households' movements up livelihoods ladders are often incremental. For example, people may start with: raising smallstock then move to larger livestock; sharecropping, then later leasing and subsequently purchasing land; or driving rented rickshaws, then driving their own, then buying and hiring out rickshaws as a business. More often though, people suffer setbacks and lose assets, and so must move between ladders and change livelihood strategies over time. It is this dynamic interplay between different highly gendered livelihood strategies, as well as particular traps, that characterize changes over time.

William Wolmer and I described diverse livelihood pathways emerging across field sites in Africa thus: "livelihoods emerge out of past actions, and decisions are made within specific historical and agro-ecological conditions, and are constantly shaped by institutions and social arrangements" (Wolmer and Scoones 2002: 27). The notion of livelihood pathways suggests that quite different livelihoods may emerge from similar settings, as different people respond in different ways and are informed by their own experiences and histories (de Bruijn and van Dijk 2005). Different livelihood *styles* may thus emerge (de Haan and Zoomers 2005), reflecting an array of cultural repertoires.

The ability to respond effectively to shocks and stresses is essential to reducing vulnerability (Chambers 1989). Vulnerable livelihoods result from a lack of resilience and an absence of the adaptive capacities required to respond to variable contexts. A focus on coping strategies has long been part of livelihood studies (Corbett 1988;

Maxwell 1996) but this has been extended, particularly in the context of climate change, to a wider understanding of adaptive capacities and resilience (Adger 2006). Such flexible, responsive, opportunistic livelihoods are highlighted in studies of long-term livelihood change. The work of Michael Mortimore (1989) and Simon Batterbury (2001) in the African Sahel, for example, highlights how responsive adaptation has been central to livelihoods, and how shoring up such capacities is essential for development.

Wider structural constraints also impinge: coping and adaptation has its limits, especially for the poor and vulnerable. Thus, institutional and political factors that generate social exclusion or adverse incorporation may limit possibilities, keeping people poor and vulnerable (Adato et al. 2006; CPRC 2008). This is why transformative intervention may be required to unlock potential by shifting such structural constraints; for example, social protection measures focused on asset transfers, including land redistribution (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004).

Thus, in considering livelihood transitions, transformations and pathways, quite different indicators of outcome are needed, including ones that address the ability to respond to external shocks and stresses. A much more dynamic perspective is required to examine outcomes over time.

Rights, Empowerment and Inequality

Livelihood transformations may also come in the form of rights and empowerment. Many argue that livelihoods improve when rights are enhanced through empowerment and inclusive participation (Moser and Norton 2001; Conway et al. 2002). They point to a rights-based approach to development and a focus on livelihood rights as central to positive livelihood outcomes. This focuses on eliminating categorical exclusions of silencing, disenfranchisement and discrimination linked to class, gender, sexuality, race or (dis)ability, for example. It advocates going beyond an individualistic approach to poverty and livelihood assessment to one that is more relational (Mosse 2010), that highlights issues of voice, participation and empowerment as central to livelihood outcomes (Hickey and Mohan 2005).

Many of the approaches discussed above focus on outcomes at the individual and household level. A political economy approach to livelihoods and agrarian change (see Chapter 6) provides a broader view, focusing on distributional issues, and in particular on patterns of accumulation and differentiation in rural societies (Bernstein, Crow and Johnson 1992).

A livelihoods approach informed by political economy thus must look at the structural features that influence such processes and outcomes, including the patterns of ownership of land, labour and capital as defined by different class positions. The wider economic and political processes of capitalism, especially in its contemporary globalized neoliberal form, highlight who has power over whom, and with what consequences (Hart 1986; Bernstein 2010a). Modern capitalism requires a relational approach to poverty that examines how "classes of labour," "fractured" for example by gender, ethnicity, religion and caste, are formed, and how they gain access to opportunities for production and reproduction (Bernstein 2010b).

Conclusion

Each of the approaches to livelihood outcomes introduced very briefly in this chapter are underpinned by different philosophical assumptions about the objectives of development: what it takes to assure a good life. A discussion of outcomes and their assessment therefore helps us define what we mean by a livelihood — a key move in any livelihoods analysis.

Assessment approaches range from quite narrow, individualistic measurements of income patterns or consumption poverty in a population to more qualitative assessments of wellbeing and human capabilities, and further to broader structural analyses of relational patterns of accumulation and differentiation, and the distributional relationships between groups. These approaches are only illustrative of a wider variety: more could be added, and the categorization could be different. Nonetheless, all offer useful insights in different ways.

Despite the petty turf wars in academia, there is of course no right way of assessing livelihood outcomes: each approach offers a different, and inevitably partial, lens on a complex issue. As discussed,

how the analysis is framed influences which measures and metrics are chosen. Interrogating such framings, asking what we mean by livelihoods, what is important for a good life and so on is a crucial step, and one that requires active participation by those involved. Different frames will lead to very different results, and impositions by researchers from outside, or indeed powerful people from within communities, are clearly insufficient in any rigorous analysis. Equally, triangulating between various approaches and measures offers a useful way of looking at tradeoffs, differences and the implications of underlying assumptions. In Chapter 8, I return to the issue of methods for livelihoods assessment, but first we need to ask how livelihoods approaches add to our understanding and how different elements are incorporated in an heuristic framework.

Notes

1 www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm
2 www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/
3 www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--de/index.htm
4 web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:20238991~menuPK:492138~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html
5 www.ids.ac.uk/project/participate-knowledge-from-the-margins-for-post-2015
6 www.odi.org/projects/2638-my-world

Chapter 3

Livelihoods Frameworks and Beyond

The previous two chapters have shown that livelihoods are complex, multidimensional, temporally and spatially varied and socially differentiated. They are affected by multiple factors, from local conditions to broader structural political economic processes. It is not easy to get a handle on what is going on, for whom, where and why.

A broader framework can be helpful for understanding such complexity, as well as for thinking about how to act on it. A framework is only a simplified heuristic model of how things might interact. It offers a hypothesis about how elements are related and what happens between them. It is a guide to thinking rather than a description of reality. Livelihoods frameworks proliferated in the late 1990s in a confusing array. Just search Google images for "sustainable livelihoods" and you will see.

By far the most popular — with multiple versions and interpretations — was the one that became the DFID sustainable livelihoods framework (Carney 1998, 2002; Ashley and Carney 1999; Carney et al. 1999). As mentioned earlier, this was derived from the framework produced by a research team (Scoones 1998). Asking a simple set of linked questions, this framework served as a guide for research in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Mali:

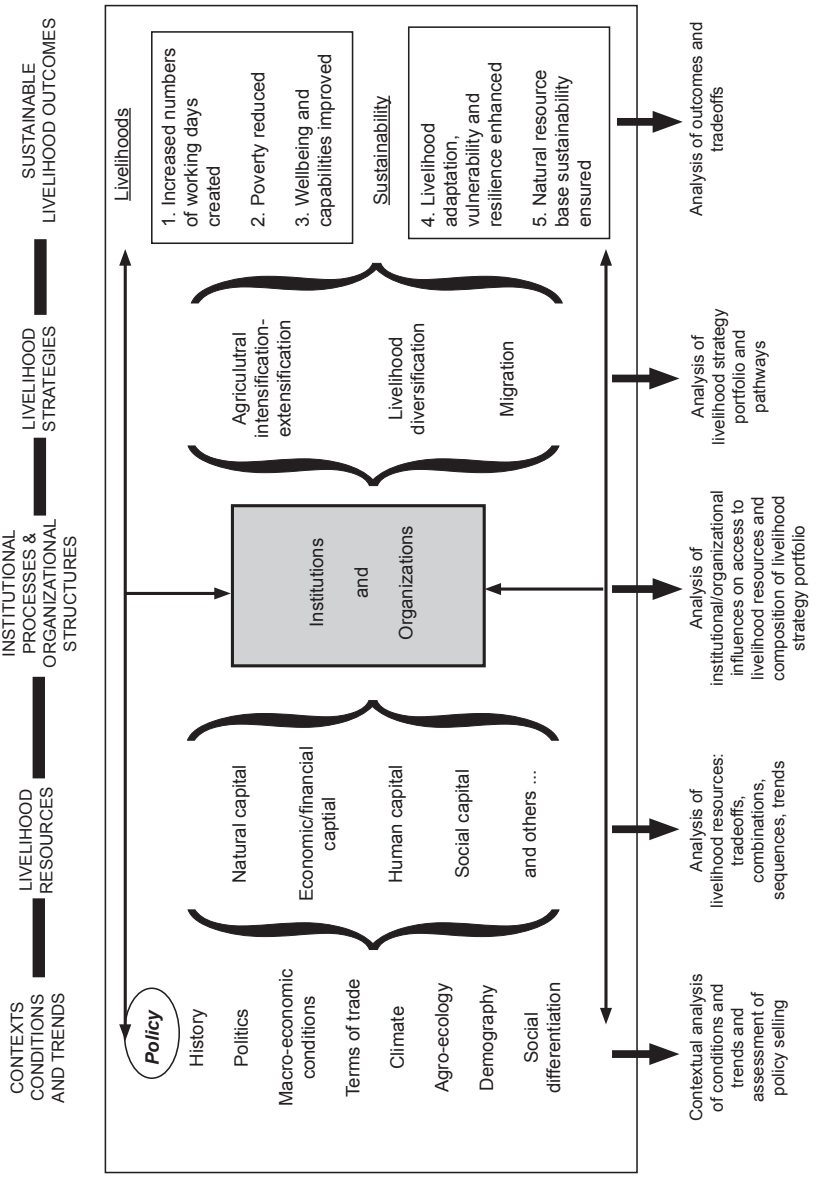
> Given a particular *context* (of policy setting, politics, history, agro-ecology and socio-economic conditions), what combination of *livelihood resources* (different types of 'capital') result in the ability to follow what combination of *livelihood strategies* (agricultural intensification/extensification, livelihood diversification and migration) with what *outcomes*? Of particular interest in this framework are the *institutional processes* (embedded in a matrix of formal and informal institutions and organisations) which mediate the ability to carry out such strategies and achieve (or not) such outcomes. (Scoones 1998: 3)

The framework (Figure 3.1) thus links livelihood contexts with resources, the building blocks of livelihoods, to strategies (differentiating for a rural context agricultural production, off-farm diversification and migration out of the area) and outcomes (across a range of indicators, as discussed in Chapter 2). As indicated by the shaded box, institutions and organizations are the key element in the framework, as they put in place the processes and structures for mediating the assets deployed, the strategies pursued and the outcomes achieved for different people. The framework is thus a simple diagrammatic checklist aimed at structuring field research in a systematic manner for a series of cross-disciplinary research teams.

The move from diagrammatic checklist to framework — or more precisely the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, with capital letters, or the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, with an acronym, SLA — happened in 1998. With the establishment of the Department for International Development (DFID) in the U.K., and a sustainable livelihoods approach to tackling poverty enshrined in a White Paper, the old Natural Resources Department transformed itself into a Livelihoods Department, later with its own Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office. An advisory committee was also established, led by Diana Carney, then of the Overseas Development Institute in London. The committee consisted of DFID staff from a range of departments as well as outsiders from the research and NGO community, including myself. The committee deliberated on the way forward — how would a sustainable livelihoods approach work? And how could a substantial amount of new development funding be channelled to livelihoods-focused poverty reduction? A simple, integrative approach was needed that would tie people into this conversation, and become a way of explaining — and realizing — the idea.

With money and politics behind the idea — and now an attractive and well-marketed framework with guidance sheets, an online learning guide and a growing methods toolbox shared through the web-based Livelihoods Connect[1] network — the concept could travel, gaining momentum — and large doses of misapplication and misunderstanding along the way. Together with DFID, the NGO community was important too. Oxfam, CARE and others brought

Figure 3.1: The sustainable livelihoods framework (Scoones 1998)



fresh ideas and field experiences for elaborating a livelihoods approach. The UN, through the Food and Agriculture Organization, also became interested, as did UNDP, which created a diverse array of livelihoods approaches (Carney et al. 1999). Interest snowballed in the coming years. A cadre of professional livelihoods advisors was built at DFID and other organizations, and the consultancy trade in livelihoods approaches flourished. Comparative assessments of various approaches across agencies soon emerged, highlighting the differences in interpretation and application of various versions of "the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework" (Hussein 2002).

The livelihoods advocates represented a broad group across bilateral agencies, the UN and NGOs, all committed to a bottom-up, people-centred, integrated approach to development. There was little to argue with, it seemed. But the bandwagon had gained too much momentum and the critical friction of debate was lacking. Internal debates about the pros and cons of different aspects of the framework continued, but there was less effective deliberation over the wider issues.

In subsequent chapters, I will look at these debates to show how the livelihoods approach can be expanded, refined and reinvigorated. In the next four sections of this chapter, I will focus on debates about the livelihoods framework(s), which throw light on some of the conceptual and methodological challenges of livelihoods approaches to research and development.

Livelihood Contexts and Strategies

What is more important: what people actually do or the factors that constrain or enable their actions? The answer, of course, is neither, but there has been a long-running debate in studies of livelihoods between proponents of a focus on individual agency (of farmers, herders, forest dwellers etc.) defining a range of flexible adaptive strategies and proponents of a focus on wider structural political-economic forces that influence what is or is not possible.

As discussed in Chapter 1, many livelihoods studies from the 1980s and 1990s focused on the former, celebrating the rich diversity of livelihoods and the amazing ingenuity of asset- and income-poor

people to create livelihoods in difficult settings. Groundbreaking studies such as Susanna Davies' (1996) book *Adaptable Livelihoods* and Robert Netting's (1993) *Smallholders, Householders* looked at how farmers adapted, innovated and survived under harsh conditions. Many others, especially in Africa, followed in the village studies tradition (Wiggins 2000). All were based on micro-level village studies, drawing on the disciplines of social geography, human ecology and anthropology.

For many of these studies, "context" was external and sometimes quite remote. The research was often undertaken far from the centres of power, where local agency dominated over wider political processes. Such studies were perhaps a reaction against what were seen as the overly structural and deterministic Marxist analyses of rural change that preceded them. The focus on local knowledge and agency pushing against a dominant and domineering force of the state or external development was a recurrent theme (Richards 1985; Long and Long 1992).

Yet, demoting an analysis of such structural features — the role of the state and elites, the power of business interests, the influence of neoliberal capitalism, the forces of globalization or the terms of trade, for example — to a simple "context" box is clearly limiting. For context is not exogenous but influences all aspects of livelihoods. The myth that isolated, remote places were uninfluenced by colonialism, structural adjustment, changing trade regimes or the state is absurd and dangerous. All livelihood resources, strategies and outcomes are influenced by such processes, as are the institutions and organizations that mediate them. The connections between "context" and the rest of the framework are all-encompassing, allowing for far too many arrows in a simple framework diagram. As a result, the micro-focus of much livelihoods analysis forgot this element, and wider structural features were often ignored.

Simon Batterbury (2008) has named this tension between local agency and practice and wider structure and politics the Mortimore-Watts debate, referring to two very influential geographers. Both had worked on livelihoods issues in northern Nigeria, tackling the challenge from different ends of the agency-structure spectrum (Watts 1983; Mortimore 1989). Both approaches are deeply in-

sightful, but it is the combination of perspectives that is especially powerful. Much livelihoods analysis, and associated frameworks, has veered to the local agency and practice end of the spectrum, relegating structural relations and politics to "context." This, as this book argues, is a mistake.

Livelihood Assets, Resources and Capitals

Second, a vibrant debate has occurred around the understanding of livelihood assets or resources as *capitals*. The U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) version of the framework highlighted an "asset pentagon" with five capitals (Carney 1998). This has caused more problems than any aspect of the livelihoods framework. First, there is the objection from some that the term "capitals" reduces the complexity of livelihood processes to economic units, and in turn suggests that these are both comparable and measurable. Drawing in the language and terms of economics was of course a strategic move in the early development of the livelihoods framework, and economists quickly grabbed hold of the idea. Yet such simplifications can present problems. Since these capitals are neither comparable nor easily measurable, the idea of mapping the relationships between them in a diagrammatic pentagon was revealed as a blind alley, down which many resources and much time were wasted.

Others pointed out that five capitals were limiting, and that there were other resources that could be drawn on, whether political capital or cultural capital. Others objected to the term capital, particularly natural capital, as a route to collapsing complex nature into a singular, potentially tradeable, asset, with assumed equivalence to other forms of capital, and so erasing power (Wilshusen 2014). Still others found the definition of certain capitals confusing. "Social capital" was the prime culprit. A deluge of work in the 1990s claimed that understanding social capital as the density of relationships was critical for understanding development (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993) while others vociferously claimed that it was not (Fine 2001; Harriss 2002). Similarly, very different uses of the term caused confusion, with some referring to Bourdieu (1986), who viewed capitals in terms of processes, appropriated in the context of different structures

of domination and subordination (Sakdapolorak 2014). Others have dwelt on a much more economistic version, where capitals are seen as things, often as exchange commodities.

Beyond all of these disputes — which for many outside the field must have seemed rather inward-looking — there are good reasons to look at the things to which people have access. This is more than the classic trio of land, labour and capital. It also includes various social and political resources, as well as skills and aptitudes central to any human endeavour. In addition, it is not only the differential distribution of such assets that is important, but also how they are combined and sequenced (Batterbury 2008; Moser 2008), and also what power relations are implied.

Around the same time that the various frameworks were being developed, a broader view of assets was also being advocated. Tony Bebbington saw assets as "vehicles for instrumental action (making a living), hermeneutic action (making living meaningful) and emancipatory action (challenging the structures under which one makes a living)." Thus,

> a person's assets, such as land, are not merely means with which he or she makes a living: they also give meaning to that person's world. Assets are not simply resources that people use in building livelihoods: they are assets that give them the capability to be and to act. Assets should not be understood only as things that allow survival, adaptation and poverty eradication: they are also the basis of agents' power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources. (Bebbington 1999: 2022)

Thus, assets are about what people have but also what they believe, feel and identify with. Assets are also political resources. Predictably, however, in a discourse dominated by aid agencies, it was the more instrumental, economic and material focus that remained at the core of the discussion and defined much subsequent action on the ground, despite this wider, more nuanced, debate.

Livelihood Change

Some applications of livelihoods approaches have been rather static: a snapshot of assets, resources and strategies. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, we must first understand how livelihoods change is crucial for examining outcomes; this requires us to focus on livelihood transitions, trajectories or pathways (Bagchi et al. 1998; Scoones and Wolmer 2002 and 2003; Sallu et al. 2010; van Dijk 2011).

Andrew Dorward and colleagues (Dorward 2009; Dorward et al. 2009) have developed a framework that differentiates between people who are "stepping up" (accumulating assets and improving livelihoods based on their core livelihood activities), "stepping out" (also doing well but diversifying to new activities, including some in new locations), and "hanging in" (barely surviving, struggling and failing to accumulate and improve their lot). Josphat Mushongah (2009) added "dropping out" for those who are moving towards destitution and exit. Originally developed to explore people's aspirations, the simple typology can usefully be linked to an assessment of livelihood dynamics, showing how different people are forging a variety of alternative trajectories.

Politics and Power

One of the recurrent criticisms of livelihood approaches is that they ignore politics and power. This is not strictly true. Livelihoods advocates encompass a broad church, and there has been some important work that has elaborated what is meant, in different variants of different frameworks, by "transforming structures and process," "policies, institutions and processes," "mediating institutions and organizations," "sustainable livelihoods governance" or "drivers of change" (cf. Davies and Hossain 1987; Hyden, 1988; Hobley and Shields 2000; Leftwich 2007). These reflections have addressed the social and political structures and processes that influence livelihood choices. Power, politics and social difference — and their governance implications — have been central to these concerns. William Wolmer and I commented on how livelihoods approaches have encouraged a reflection on these issues:

> This arises in particular from looking at the consequence of development efforts from a local-level perspective, making the links from the micro-level situated particularities of poor people's livelihoods to wider-level institutional and policy framings at district, provincial, national and even international levels. Such reflections therefore put into sharp relief the importance of complex institutional and governance arrangements, and the key relationships between livelihoods, power and politics. (Scoones and Wolmer 2003: 5)

The earlier IDS studies mentioned above[2] stressed the idea of institutions and organizations as mediating livelihood strategies and pathways. These were socio-cultural and political processes that explained how and why diverse asset inputs linked to strategies and outcomes. They were subject to power and politics; questions of rights, access and governance were centred within them (Chapter 4). Thus, a different explanatory angle, with a different disciplinary emphasis, was being offered in the same framework. This angle emphasized complex processes and required in-depth qualitative understandings of power, politics, institutions and thus a very different type of field research.

The various frameworks did not help either. Clearly an argument could be made that power was everywhere — from contexts, to constructions and access to capitals, as mediating institutions and social relations, guiding underlying choices of strategies and influencing options and outcomes. Some tried to make politics more explicit, adding political capital to the list of assets and emphasizing that social capital implied attention to power relations. But such additions do not really deal with the complex intersections of the structural bases of power — in political interests, competing discourses and embedded practices. Rather, they diminish such complexity to a lowest common denominator metric (Harriss 1997). Thus, the regular pleas to consider power and politics often fell on deaf ears, and an instrumental application proceeded as normal, but with a livelihoods label, although with a greater appreciation of policy processes (Keeley and Scoones 1999; IDS 2006: see Chapter 4).

Unfortunately, such debates about politics and power remained at the margins. While various people made the case for the impor-

tance of such political dimensions, dominant concerns were elsewhere — largely focused on a fairly instrumental poverty reduction agenda framed by economics. Today, even the vestiges of 1990s livelihood thinking are barely detectable, and a linear, instrumental view of evidence and policy reigns supreme.

What's in a Framework?

Nevertheless, in the last fifteen years or so, the livelihoods frameworks, and associated debates, have played a discursive and political role. They had significant power and influence, commanding attention and resources in diverse settings. They acted to draw a diverse community of researchers, practitioners and policymakers together into a loose network, bound by a commitment to do development differently but also by a shared language of frameworks and associated nomenclature.

At the same time, there was a contested politics inherent in the deployment of such frameworks. In some ways, a framework can act to disguise fundamental epistemological debates and political commitments, smoothing over dispute and dissent. Presenting an outwardly neat and tidy image, especially in diagrammatic form, the ruptures were covered over with a boundary politics that served to include and co-opt, rather than support debate and discussion. This was not entirely a bad thing. By bringing people together — often unlikely allies — new conversations could happen. Initial resistance aside, sectoral and disciplinary boundaries could eventually be brought down and new insights, methods and practices could then flow.

All of this happened to greater and lesser extents, and in fact is still happening in certain quarters. A huge number of Master's and PhD projects have taken some version of the livelihoods framework, applied it and critiqued it. This is, as Thomas Kuhn (1962) famously described, the emergence of "normal science" after the "paradigm shift." The result has been a maturing of discussion, and a greater nuance and qualification in application. Unfortunately, the fickle nature of the aid machinery is impatient with the slow evolution of normal science. Indeed, within DFID and some other agencies,

new frameworks and buzzwords have emerged that often discount previous learning (Cornwall and Eade 2010). No doubt, just as livelihoods approaches had a life before 1992, debates will shift, buzzwords will be reinvented, and livelihoods approaches will return in new incarnations.

The purpose of this book, however, is not to dwell on these cyclical fads and fickle funding trends but to advance the debate, learning from and building on the past. Certainly all of the debates highlighted above have been important, and each links to wider social science concerns in important ways.

Thus, for example, the debate on livelihood contexts and strategies highlighted the long-running tension in the social sciences between structure and agency, and usefully drew out the importance of simultaneous attention to both (cf. Giddens, 1984). The discussion of assets and capitals pushed us to understand the limits of a materially focused approach. It taught us to look beyond to a wider frame (Bebbington 1999), and to see capital accumulation and exchange as processes imbued with power (Bourdieu 1986). The question of whether to regard social capital as a measurable asset or a process embedded in social relations/institutions has reflected a much wider discussion in the social and political sciences about institutions in development (Mehta et al. 1999; Bebbington 2004; Cleaver 2012). The debate about livelihood trajectories has focused on how pathways of change are created and sustained within complex systems (Leach et al. 2010) and how livelihood dynamics often depend on key features such as asset thresholds (Carter and Barrett 2006). And finally, as the next chapter explores in greater depth, the debate about how politics and power are understood in livelihoods analysis has pushed a more complete unpacking of the "black box" (actually grey) of institutions and organizations, and also a reinvigoration of institutional and political analysis around livelihoods and development with a focus on politics and values (Arce 2003).

Conclusion

We can find a useful way forward if we do not get hung up on the particular, often rather tediously parochial, details of each of the

frameworks. We should use them instead to open up debate about definitions, relationships and tradeoffs, all linked to wider, more fundamental social and political theoretical concerns. Originally designed as a cross-disciplinary heuristic and checklist, such a framework should not be expected to do more. With an open mind, and a conceptually informed approach, the livelihoods framework(s), I would argue, can assist in any enquiry. It can prompt questions and open debate — but it should come with a prominent health warning.

Notes

1 www.livelihoods.org

2 See Carswell et al. 1999, Brock and Coulibaly 1999, Shankland 2000, Scoones and Wolmer 2002.

Chapter 4

Access and Control: Institutions, Organizations and Policy Processes

As hinted in the previous chapter, a central but often missed feature of livelihoods frameworks and analysis is the role of institutions, organizations and policies in mediating access to livelihood resources and defining the opportunities and constraints of different livelihood strategies. In other words, these processes, governed by institutions, organizations and policies, have a major impact on what people are able to do and on the livelihood outcomes that result.

So what then are institutions, organizations and policies? How should we understand the processes that so influence livelihood outcomes? The first section of this chapter focuses on institutions and organizations. A brief section on policy processes follows. The chapter is tied together by a re-emphasis on the importance of politics in influencing livelihood strategies and outcomes.

Institutions and Organizations

Everyone talks about institutions and organizations but how do we define and understand them? Douglass North (1990) offered a simple, useful definition. Institutions are, he argued, "the rules of the game," while organizations are "the players." Thus, for example, in a rural setting, institutions of marriage, customary inheritance and local land tenure affect who has access to land, while organizations such as the church, the chieftaincy, local government and national land registries provide the organizational settings for implementing the rules.

Of course it is not quite so simple, as multiple rules may apply, some formally defined in law, others more informal; and these are in turn governed by a variety of overlapping organizations. In the real world, there is no neat relationship between institution and organization, between rule and player.

Thus, returning to the example of rural land access, land may be gained through formal allocation by the government's land department, say as part of a land reform programme. This may favour women or immigrants, for example, as part of empowerment and resettlement programmes. At the same time, land may be acquired through inheritance or via the allocation of a traditional leader or chief, although this may only be possible if the applicant is a man from a local lineage. Thus, depending on who you are, different institutions apply and different organizations are relevant. Further, institutions and organizations are thus socially embedded, located in a particular cultural, social and political context. They are not neutral arbiters of access but rather, highly politically charged ones.

In the case above, land access via a government programme is associated with formal institutions and is governed by particular laws or policies. By contrast, access through the traditional leaders may be informal, part of "customary law" (Channock 1991). Such law is associated with accepted local practices, routines and customs (Moore 2000). Of course, what is considered customary and traditional can change (Ranger and Hobsbawm 1983) and be influenced by local power relations. Informal institutions and organizations are thus highly fluid and open to the jostling of power at the local level. This is not to say that formal institutions are static and uninfluenced by power struggles: far from it. But the influences on laws and policies, as discussed below, take on a different form and are generally — but not always — more visible, transparent and accountable.

When multiple institutions and organizations, both formal and informal, govern access to resources and so to livelihoods, this is sometimes referred to as "legal pluralism" (Merry 1988). In such contexts, people may choose the route that suits them best, or they may hedge their bets and try multiple channels. In other words, they may shop around between institutions and organizations, try their luck, reduce their transaction costs and improve their chances for a good outcome. In the context of legal pluralism, this is known as "forum shopping" (von Benda-Beckmann 1995) and is an important part of constructing a livelihood (Mehta et al. 1999).

Problems arise when designed institutions are imposed where institutions are assumed not to exist or to have been eroded, and do

not take account of the existing plurality. Rural development and natural resource management efforts are replete with examples of user associations, management committees and so on that have been developed without an effective understanding of existing patterns of use and access, nor of their institutional underpinnings. Frances Cleaver (2012) offers a case from the Usangu Plains in the Ruaha River Basin of Tanzania. Here development experts diagnosed the problem as a failure of "traditional" institutions leading to conflict between resource users, including agriculturalists and pastoralists. Land use plans were developed, bylaws drawn up and committees established. But like so many other community resource management efforts, these plans did not work (Cleaver and Franks 2005). The social and political bases for disputes were not addressed, nor were the existing norms and practices recognized. Instead, new institutions were imposed as if nothing had been there before. Rather than operating as planned, a form of negotiation emerged over time, and new arrangements were constructed through what Cleaver terms "bricolage": a complex combination of elements, pieced together incrementally. These arrangements did not fit neatly into a hierarchical decentralized management arrangement nestled within local government structures. In fact they did not fit at all, but they did begin to work, and they also had to adapt constantly, as new issues arose. For example, claims on water in the wetlands grew as new irrigators carved out their enterprises. This competed with existing agriculture as well as livestock use. The new irrigators represented a particular social group, and so the power dynamics of addressing emerging water conflicts was complex. But negotiations produced solutions. While guarding against inheriting existing practices and thereby reinforcing inequalities and injustices, a bricolage approach akin to bargaining in the bazaar can provide better results than could an approach with standardized, monolithic institutional designs, more like the compliance of the cathedral (cf. Lankford and Hepworth 2010).

Thus, textured, field-level knowledge about institutions and organizations, both formal and informal, is critical. Translating this into assured access on multiple fronts — for land, markets, off-farm employment, services and so on — to make up a livelihood is a

big challenge. The institutional and organizational complexity of most rural settings throughout the world means that negotiating livelihoods requires much time, effort and skill. In many settings, the main players are not state-based organizations but projects, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, religious organizations and local traditional elites. All have, as Christian Lund (2008 and 2006) puts it, "state-like" qualities, enforcing regulations and providing services.

Multiple power relations among diverse players thus influence access to resources for livelihoods. It is further affected by a series of rules — often unclear — and results in a range of accountability relationships. While this may be confusing, non-transparent, time-consuming and influenced by highly unequal patronage relationships, the best approach may be to go with the grain and accept the realities of what are sometimes termed "neo-patrimonial systems"[1] (Booth 2011; Kelsall 2013). Disregarding such complexities and relying on poorly functioning state delivery systems may result in a worse outcome (Olivier de Sardan 2011). With respect to land access, working with traditional land allocation and tenure arrangements to enhance tenure security may be much more effective than designing a costly external land administration and registration system, even if this is, in design if not practice, less messy, complex and politically charged.

The field of institutional economics offers one way of understanding how people choose between various options (Toye 1995; Williamson 2000). The basic argument is that we will choose the least costly option, accounting for the various costs associated with negotiating transactions, including search and information, bargaining and policing and enforcement. A rational choice would be one that reduces transactions costs, offsetting the potentially high costs of bargaining, negotiating, bribery and so on. Trust in institutions is a key factor. Indeed, game theory suggests that among people who are well known to each other, trust increases the more they interact. Accordingly, investments in institutions governing access will increase in relation to the value of the resource.

Thus, again in relation to land, institutions for governing land access — such as land use committees overseeing fencing, patrolling and fining for misuse and trespass — are much more likely to work

well if the land being protected is valuable. In a rangeland setting, for example, it makes more sense to invest institutionally (through rules) and organizationally (through committees) in protecting key grazing resources, such as dry season grazing reserves, riverine areas or wet valley bottoms than trying to manage the open range (Lane and Moorehead 1994).

Access to virtually all resources important for livelihoods is governed by institutions and organizations of some sort. Garrett Hardin in his oft-quoted paper on the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968) made the mistake of assuming that "the commons" were open to all. Elinor Oström and colleagues at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University showed that in many contexts, common property resource management actually operated according to quite strict rules governed by well established, if sometimes informal, organizations (Oström 1990). Oström defined a series of eight institutional design principles for common property systems, including requirements to: define clear group boundaries; match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions; ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying them; make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected; develop a community-based monitoring system; use graduated sanctions for rule violators; provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution; and build responsibility for governing the common resource from the local level to the wider system. These, she argued, must operate from local to global scales and are essential for understanding how sustainable livelihoods can be achieved (Oström 2009).

Of course, these design principles are a simplification emerging from largely economic analyses of individual choices about fixed, bounded resources, and reflected in collective action around common resources. They thus miss out on some of the complexity inherent in the social and political negotiations across scales that go on, and on the importance of taking into account the ecological variability of resources.

For example, Lyla Mehta and colleagues argued that ecological, livelihood and knowledge uncertainties combine to reshape institutions (Mehta et al. 1999). Equally, a focus on a local, bounded

resource misses out on the connections across scales that must take place as people construct livelihoods. As Tony Bebbington and Simon Batterbury (2001) argue, in an increasingly globalized world, livelihoods are constructed across spaces, between urban and rural, and in the context of migration across regions and nations. The institutions and organizations influencing such transnational livelihoods are not easily analyzed within a localist framing, and must encompass a whole range of geographies. Indeed a fixation on scales or levels thus obscures the way people and resources move between places and across scales, constructing ever more complex livelihood pathways (Leach et al. 2010) in a networked, globalized context.

Further, as scholars of land and tenure have shown, institutions are not fixed but continuously invested in as part of ongoing social and cultural processes (Berry 1989 and 1993). While institutions may have formal characteristics, they are often hybrid arrangements, made up of diverse, often ambiguous, informal rules that are continuously negotiated. Institutions are thus deeply socially and culturally embedded, and so not amenable to simple design. This embedding, of course, often occurs within deeply unequal social relations, which are then replicated and reinforced in institutional arrangements (Peters 2004, 2009).

Understanding Access and Exclusion

Institutions and organizations are thus critical to understanding how some people gain access to resources and livelihoods while others are excluded. Extending the work of Amartya Sen, the "environmental entitlements" framework argued that institutions mediate access to resources, and it is access rather than simply resource abundance that explains some of the key resource management and governance dilemmas in the field (Leach et al. 1999). Such institutions are governed by an array of formal and informal processes, often overlapping. As I have already discussed, these processes have highly differential impacts, influenced by power relations. Gender, age, wealth, ethnicity, class, location and an array of other factors influence who gains access and who does not (Mehta et al. 1999).

Which theories can help us understand these processes? In

their highly influential paper, Jesse Ribot and Nancy Peluso (2003) outlined a "theory of access" that drew on and extended much of the literature already discussed. They see gaining, controlling and maintaining access in relation to a bundle of powers that go well beyond property rights. Access can be conditioned by a range of overlapping mechanisms including access to technology, capital, markets, labour, knowledge, authority, identity and social relations.

Another useful framework for thinking about such issues is provided by Derek Hall, Phillip Hirsch and Tania Li, based on their extensive research in Southeast Asia (Hall et al. 2011). They highlight the diverse powers of exclusion, and so emphasize struggle and conflict and the exertion of force in excluding people from land and resources. This nuances our understandings of "enclosure," "primitive accumulation" or "accumulation by dispossession" by asking why and how such processes occur and who they affect (Hall 2012). They argue that there are four interacting processes of exclusion: regulation, markets, force and legitimation.

With livelihoods — including identity, citizenship as well as material aspects — so bound up with issues of access and property, it is important to understand the ways in which control is exerted over land and resources — including new routes derived from a heightened commodification and increasing violence. For such processes of territorialization and enclosure transform labour and production (Peluso and Lund 2011). In turn, access and rights to land and resources are intimately bound to patterns of institutional authority and expressions of citizenship (Sikor and Lund 2010). Livelihoods, resource access, property, authority and citizenship are thus all mutually constituted.

Therefore, in the case of carbon forestry projects in Africa, for example, ownership of trees and so carbon, through a marketized process of selective enclosure, is redefined in terms of new property relationships and reconfigured authority over forested areas. The result is often a ceding of rights to project developers and commercial speculators, as well as allowing for particular types of local elite capture. Such interventions, through a bewildering array of complex requirements that allow carbon to be monetized and exchanged, create a certain set of project practices, regimes and technologies of

governance. These in turn recast the relationships between people and forests, often in fundamental ways, and so the types of livelihoods that become possible, excluding certain forms such as hunting, gathering and the grazing of animals in particular areas (Leach and Scoones 2015).

Institutions, Practice and Agency

Much of the livelihoods literature focuses on struggles over access to material resources, and institutions and organizations are seen as the mediators. As discussed above, this is an important perspective and central to any analysis. However, what is sometimes missed from this framing of institutions is a sense of how they carry with them a politics of meaning, reflecting different subjectivities, identities and positionalities of the actors concerned.

A struggle over land or water is not just about access to the material resource but also a range of other less tangible factors. Land is intimately linked with history, memory and cultural meanings. Similarly, water is associated with spirits, ancestors, myths and legends. In Western India, for example, Lyla Mehta describes water as indelibly bound in cultural and symbolic meaning (Mehta 2005).

Beyond the cultural and social dimensions of livelihoods, there are also very personal emotional ones that in turn influence institutions. Esha Shah (2012) discusses the role of "affective histories" — deeply ingrained habits, feelings and emotions — that influence livelihood practices and behaviours. She argues that farmer suicides in rural India can be explained less in terms of structural conditions of agrarian crisis precipitated by globalization and liberalization, or the immediate material scarcities influencing people's lives, but more from how such crises and scarcities are perceived, and felt. These are reflected in emotions of fear, alienation, hopelessness, as well as fate or stigma, and so are influenced by imaginings of the self and by historically ingrained identities and social hierarchies.

Thus, even if someone is not short of food in material terms, feelings of alienation, experiences of marginalization and fears of destitution and loss of dignity may have a major impact. Collective imaginations and memories reinforce this, driving people towards

suicide. While an extreme response, the point more generally is that the "affective" can influence livelihoods as much as the structural and material, and always in interaction with them, and should not be ignored in livelihood analyses. This, in turn, requires researchers to appreciate and understand these subjective worlds, and to enter the real dramas of life situations.

A focus on people as knowing subjects emphasizes agency (Giddens 1984) and subjectivity (Ortner 2005). In search of livelihoods, people feel, think, reflect, seek and make meaning. Such practices are always culturally framed and may be deeply internalized parts of an unconscious social knowledge that limits action: what Pierre Bourdieu (1977 and 2002) refers to as "habitus."

Tania Li (1996) coined the term "practical political economy" to emphasize the role of human agency in improving people's livelihood conditions. She emphasized the multiple, creative cultural ideas and daily practices deployed to reshape institutions and policies across scales. Thus, practice and performance, whether tacit and internalized or explicit and knowing, is the basis for much action. This may become routinized as part of social institutions, rules and norms, as well as in forms of language. These socially embedded negotiations are part and parcel of livelihoods, but because they are so deeply ingrained, they are often not grasped. Practices thus create institutions, just as institutions create practices.

With such a perspective, we can see how institutions are not fixed or designed, nor are they the result of simple, rational responses to economic incentives. Rather, they are dynamically reconstituted, reproduced and reshaped by the continued actions of multiple, located actors (Ortner 1984). Diverse contested meanings for different resources come into play in this process. As knowledgeable, strategic actors with multiple subjectivities, such a focus on livelihood practices thus sheds light on how institutions are created and operate. It also offers a more dynamic perspective on the co-created relationships between people, livelihoods and institutions.

Difference, Recognition and Voice

As Nancy Fraser has so cogently argued, alongside material redistributions, a focus on recognition and participation is essential if a more emancipatory politics is to be realized (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Feminist perspectives point to the importance of focusing on the lived bodily experience (Grosz 1994) and on seeing bodies as constituted through power and situated in places (Harcourt and Escobar 2005). Gendered productive and reproductive roles have profound effects on livelihoods. Access to resources can be understood in relation not just to material struggle but also to the interactions of bodies and emotions.

Extending the tradition of feminist political ecology (Rocheleau et al. 1996) to a study of access to drinking water in Bangladesh, Farhana Sultana (2011: 163) points to "emotional geographies where gendered subjectivities and embodied emotions constitute how nature–society relations are lived and experienced on a daily basis." Of course gender intersects with a range of other dimensions of difference, requiring inter-sectional analyses in relation to livelihoods (Nightingale 2011). Contemporary theory suggests we need to consider "de-centred" subjects, ones that offer a more complex perspective on identity (Butler 2004).

All this is an important message for those engaged in livelihood studies, as forms of domination may not just emerge from inequalities of access to particular livelihood resources. In fact, they may be more in the social and political sphere, relating to how different people are viewed, recognized, identified and appreciated — in relation to gender, sexuality, disability, race, caste or any other dimension of difference.

In a study of livelihood responses to climate change in Andhra Pradesh in India, Tanya Jakimow (2013) collected detailed life histories across different social groups, documenting both livelihood aspirations and activities over time. Her interviews focused on key junctures and on the changing role of different institutions in influencing livelihoods and climate adaptation responses. An ethnographic and biographical stance therefore enlivens our broader economic and structural understandings of institutional processes,

and also adds depth and nuance to our understandings of how livelihoods are constructed and how they change in complex, dynamic contexts.

But just as in the case of perspectives on livelihood outcomes (Chapter 2), there is no single right way of understanding institutions and livelihoods. A complementary approach that combines analyses from institutional economics, socio-legal studies, legal anthropology, political sociology, political economy/ecology and the ethnography of practice, for example, could provide the greatest insight.

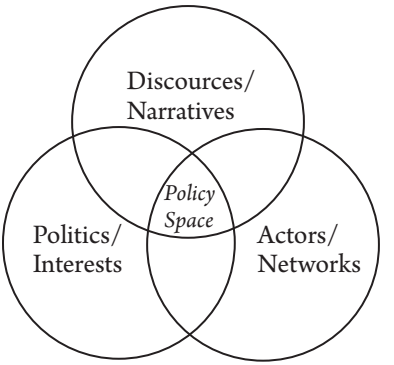
Policy Processes

All of these institutional dimensions are affected by policy. In development, there is much talk of policy but limited understanding of what it is. Formally, and in many textbooks, policy is presented as the official statements, regulations or laws associated with government intentions. Policies are agreed through political debate and implemented through the bureaucracy A linear view that is often promulgated sees agenda setting, policy assessment and prioritization leading to implementation and evaluation in sequence. Of course such a neat, linear view is a gross simplification. Indeed, most policy processes are nothing like this. They are, as Edward Clay and Bernard Schaffer (1984: 192) put it many years ago, "a chaos of purpose and accidents." Policy processes are messy, contested and above all, political (Shore and Wright 2003). They are influenced by contexts, affected by individuals and are the result of complex negotiations.

This is well recognized by most policymakers. Of course decisions are made in the coffee room or through informal discussions; of course interest groups lobby and influence; and of course the process of implementation requires discretion, revision and change along the way. So how then do we make sense of such processes?

A simple analytical framework (Keeley and Scoones 2003; IDS 2006) can help us in this task. This framework distinguishes the power of narratives (how policies are talked about, and how different forms of knowledge and expertise are deployed), the power of actors and networks (how different people and their networks

Figure 4.1: Three key elements of policy processes



come together to influence policy change) and the power of politics and interests (how interest groups form and affect policy outcomes through negotiation, bargaining and political competition). Each of these overlapping perspectives, encapsulated in a simple diagram (Figure 4.1), allows us to understand policy change through different dimensions of power, and different scales and disciplinary foci.

For example, political science has long argued that bargaining and negotiation between interest groups in society is the essence of policy politics. By contrast, a more actor-oriented approach would highlight the agency of individual policy players, their networks and the power relations embedded in them (Long and van der Ploeg 1989). Power emerges through politics of knowledge, representing a more fluid, pervasive form of discursive power defining forms of what Michel Foucault calls "governmentality" in policy processes (cf. Foucault et al. 1991).

In the centre of the diagram are policy spaces (cf. Grindle and Thomas 1991) that may open up or close down depending on the configuration of narratives/discourses, actors/networks and politics/interests in any particular policy process. We can then understand policy change by examining these three interlocking dimensions and define what policy spaces exist, both for existing policies but also, potentially, for new ones. The framework can be used to determine the *status quo*, but also as a prognostic tool to

explore possibilities and to design tactics and strategies for change. Disrupting and transforming existing policy regimes is not easy, given the power and persistence of mainstream narratives associated with the actors and interests that support them. But to shift policy thinking, and so unlock alternatives, may require hard work on constructing alternative narratives and creating new alliances and coalitions that dislodge or co-opt incumbent interests.

Policies must not be seen as separated from what happens on the ground. Too often policy analysis happens in the abstract, and adopts a linear, managerial frame. Yet policy is intimately bound to practice and the complex negotiations around implementation. It is these processes that stabilize policy models, through mobilization of narratives and networks, ideas and practices. As David Mosse (2004) argues, policies must always be seen in relation to the institutions and social relations through which they are articulated.

What does this have to do with livelihoods and rural development? As we have seen, policies, often via complex, overlapping institutional arrangements, can have a huge impact on livelihood opportunities. For example, a dominant policy focus on large-scale agricultural investment may undermine support for smallholder agriculture. This will be especially so when the policy is supported by arguments that it is modern and efficient, generates employment, can attract foreign investment and compete in world markets, and is backed by powerful commercial interests.

Such a large-scale agriculture narrative is currently supporting a series of land grabs. It is promoted by influential figures, such as Paul Collier, who argued in the widely read magazine *Foreign Policy* that "the world needs more commercial agriculture, not less. The Brazilian model of high-productivity large farms could readily be extended to areas where land is underused" (Collier 2008). The World Bank too wishes to awaken the sleeping giant of Africa through commercial agriculture across the Guinea savannah regions (Morris et al. 2009). With investors and financial speculators looking for cheap options, and as prices for fuel, feed and food commodities rose, interest in land increased. Local alliances also formed between government officials eager for foreign exchange investment (and sometimes the possibility of a bribe) and local

traditional leaders who may have thought they could gain from such deals (Wolford et al. 2013). A powerful multi-scale coalition was formed, varied according to setting but cohering around a strong, expert-accredited narrative. The result, as we have seen in the last few years, has been displacement of existing livelihoods, disruption of access rights and, in many cases, a lack of alternative local employment and economic growth to compensate (White et al. 2012).

There is an alternative and well-connected argument for smallholder agriculture, local people's land rights, and in some quarters, food sovereignty (Rosset 2011). Indeed, it is often supported by strong arguments about the efficiency of smallholder agriculture (Lipton 2009) or the benefits of agro-ecological alternatives to large-scale industry (Altieri and Toledo 2011). But pitted against a strong coalition of investors, private sector agribusiness players, national governments and local elites, such alternatives have only limited purchase and are often dismissed as naïve and populist.

Of course not all external investment and land deals are bad, and some of the narratives associated with the large-scale land deal position have justification. The real world is of course more complex than the usual default policy debate constructed around a set of simple dichotomies — large versus small, external versus local, food production versus cash crops, backward versus modern, for example. Such dichotomies obscure the very complexities that good livelihoods analysis seeks to expose, even if they do provide a useful set of campaign hooks for either side. An alternative strategy is to first look at what works when and where, and then create an alternative narrative focused on the best of smallholder production opportunities and also seek ways in which they may be complemented by external investments (Vermeulen and Cotula 2010). Such a stance, while it may be ultimately realistic and pragmatic, is prone to co-option and dilution in the face of extremely powerful forces. A careful context-specific analysis of policy processes is therefore essential if we are to promote livelihood rights.

This highly contracted discussion of a very complex example illustrates, I hope, how a sophisticated investigation of policy processes is a core part of livelihoods analysis. Whether we are talking about a

micro issue — say irrigation water supply in a particular area — or hooking into wider global discussions — say crop breeding priorities and genetic modification — such an approach helps us unpack how policies are constructed, and the forms of support they get in any context. Policy spaces that are either opened up or closed down through such processes are also livelihood spaces, with some benefiting from a particular policy move while others lose out.

Unpacking the Black Box

The "black box" of institutions, organizations and policy is, as this chapter has shown, well worth unpacking. While central to the livelihoods frameworks discussed in Chapter 3, too often it is skirted over or given a superficial nod.

What the institutional and policy element of the livelihoods framework really represents is an attention to power and politics, and the social and political relations that underpin them. This may refer to the politics of globalized processes mediated through national regimes or the much more micro-level politics of inter- and intra-household relations. Such processes determine what livelihoods are possible and what are excluded, and a sophisticated analysis of the diverse perspectives on institutions, organizations and policies is essential. This means going beyond narrow economistic frames to understand the social and cultural dimensions that influence not only simple costs and benefit incentives but also what happens where and why.

Note

1 Where a person's office or position is used for personal gain through patron-client links, rather than a strict separation of public and private sphere (see Clapham 1998; Bratton and van der Walle 1994).

Chapter 5

Livelihoods, the Environment and Sustainability

The terms livelihoods and sustainability have become intimately intertwined, especially around the concept of sustainable livelihoods. Although there were antecedents (Chapter 1), this concept was popularized by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway in their 1992 paper. As noted in Chapter 1, they argued "a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base" (1992: 5). This puts livelihoods at the heart of dynamic systems, involving changing external pressures — whether long-term stresses or more sudden, episodic shocks. The argument also connects livelihoods with natural resources and insists that sustainability means not undermining the natural resource base. Chambers and Conway went on to argue that sustainability must also address intergenerational questions, with tradeoffs between use now and use into the future at the heart of a livelihoods analysis. They also highlighted global interconnections, emphasizing how livelihoods and lifestyles in one part of the world can influence options in another, both now and in the future, through the transboundary effects of climate change, among other environmental drivers of livelihood opportunity.

These issues at the heart of the sustainability agenda are therefore central to any consideration of livelihoods. Yet, as we have seen in earlier chapters, much of the debate about livelihoods and its application to development practice has not, in fact, taken these factors into account, despite the rhetorical nod towards sustainability in the "sustainable livelihoods" label. Work in poor, marginalized areas tends to focus on immediate needs, poverty reduction and humanitarian and disaster relief. Here, quite rightly, the present overwhelms the future, and questions of longer-term

sustainable development sometimes get short shrift. This is a recurrent theme in development, as efforts to integrate relief and development continue to elude professional practice (Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell 1994). Concerns with global climate change have however shifted the debate, and today there is greater concern with issues of resilience building, climate adaptation and longer-term responses to change (Adger et al. 2003; Nelson et al. 2007; Bohle 2009). Yet here too concerns have been artificially divided between more short-term and immediate adaptive response and long-term mitigation. The same divide exists between local coping and response mechanisms and the more global political challenges of reducing carbon emissions and slowing climate change.

Despite many attempts to pin it down, sustainability as a concept has never attached itself to a particular viewpoint. At its most generic, following the Brundtland Commission (WCED 1987), it is the combination of economic, social and environmental factors. Beyond this sustainability must always be negotiated. It is inescapably a political concept, and one in which debate and deliberation, often with competing and conflicting views, must be at the centre (Scoones 2007). As a boundary term (cf. Gieryn 1999), sustainability has served a useful purpose — everyone thinks they understand it. However, few actually do completely or in the same way. Thus, it encourages a conversation across disciplines, from the natural to the social sciences, and between policy domains; from economics (from discussions of the "green economy" to "natural accounting") to environmental science (from global climate change forecasting to ecosystem modelling) to the wider social and political science (and questions of knowledge, politics and questions of who wins and who loses) (Scoones et al. 2015).

From its earliest incarnation as a concept for the management of forests to its much wider deployment as the signifier of political agreement between nations, at major U.N. conferences from Stockholm to Rio to Johannesburg and back to Rio. The term has certainly travelled and gained both political and policy purchase (Lele 1991; Berkhout et al. 2003). However, as with other boundary terms, its meaning can be elusive and open to diverse interpretations, and thus can be easily captured. The hyphenation of sustainability

with virtually every other word going, including livelihoods, is witness to its reach but also to its potential lack of meaning.

So, how can sustainability be brought more centrally into debates about livelihoods? How can it capture both local and global dimensions, the long term and the more immediate? This chapter offers some pointers, and provides a brief route map to some of the key debates.

People and the Environment: A Dynamic Relationship

Interest in the relationships between environments, people and development long pre-dates the recent policy debates around sustainable livelihoods (Forsyth, Leach and Scoones 1998). These fundamental relationships were at the centre of the writings of Thomas Malthus, notably in his 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population.* He was concerned with the consequences of expanding human populations, advocating population control lest resource demand outstrip supply and result in hunger, strife and social chaos. Fears about resource limits took hold in the early 1970s, precipitated in part by the oil crisis and a sense that the world was running out of resources. The publication of a series of high-profile books on the subject coincided with the growth of an environmental movement in the North, and included Paul and Anne Ehrlich's apocalyptic vision in *The Population Bomb* (1970), as well as *The Ecologist* magazine's manifesto, *Blueprint for Survival* (Goldsmith et al. 1972). Perhaps the most influential was the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), which employed systems models to look at resource use and the economy, and argued that the brake had to be put on current patterns of economic growth. Today, similar arguments are made around "planetary boundaries" (Rockström et al. 2009), although with considerably better data and insight into the drivers of global environmental change.

The Malthusian framing of environmental collapse due to population growth and environmental destruction is a familiar one, but it does require some unpacking. As Johan Rockström and colleagues show convincingly, there are clear planetary boundaries (they identify nine), and some of these have been surpassed, especially in rela-

tion to climate, biodiversity loss and disruption of the nitrogen cycle. This has a potentially massive impact on livelihood opportunities the world over, and some important political implications for how a "safe operating space for humanity" is conceived and distributed (Leach et al. 2012, 2013). While not ignoring the important warning signals about environmental change coming from the physical and natural sciences, we also have to be alert to how such arguments construct responses, and to their impacts on different people's livelihoods.

Resource Scarcity: Beyond Malthus

Arguments about resource scarcity are often used in policy debates about resource allocation and livelihoods. But what resources are scarce for whom? And what are the political consequences of such scarcities, from global to local levels? This debate is highlighted in contemporary discussions about land (or water or green) "grabbing" (Chapter 4). Constraints on resources in one part of the world are used to justify acquisitions of land, water or biodiversity in another. For example, land deals are struck by companies (and governments) from parts of Asia where high levels of economic growth have fuelled demand for a range of food, energy and mineral resources from Africa or Southeast Asia, where land, mineral and water resources are deemed underutilized or to be lying idle (White et al. 2012; Cotula 2013). Of course, this begs several questions: how are such scarcities or abundances constructed, by whom and to what political ends (Mehta 2010; Scoones et al. 2014)? Is the growth in consumption justified, and at what cost? Is the land being acquired actually not used, or are pastoralists or shifting cultivators using it? And how are the benefits and costs of such deals distributed with a new commoditization of resources?

A more political framing of scarcity would argue that scarcities are always relational and constructed in particular social-political settings, thus affecting different people in different ways (Hartmann 2010). Our understanding of environment-people interactions must take this into account, as the narratives that underpin policy are always drawing on but not necessarily challenging them. This is not to deny that real, absolute changes occur. Climate change is very real,

as are deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, declining water tables and so on. But we must also appreciate how such changes are understood from sometimes dramatically different standpoints.

In a classic book, *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (1996) explain how environmental change narratives in Africa, which often draw from the classic Malthusian doom-and-gloom storyline, are very persistent. This is a point made more broadly by Emery Roe (1991) for development in general. The simplicity of narratives helps, but they also become deeply embedded in institutions, education and training systems and policy machinery. This institutionalization of narratives occurs over a long time, often spanning colonial and post-independence periods. Further, despite numerous attempts to critique, challenge and dislodge them, they have a persistence that has less to do with their scientific underpinnings (often very shaky, or at least limited and constrained to particular instances and settings), and more to do with the political power of the narrative. Thus, sustainability debates are constructed around such narratives, and they are more knee-jerk responses than deeper analyses of the complex, dynamic intersections of people and environments in particular places.

As in all good storylines, these narratives have victims and saviours, good guys and bad guys, and simple, often heroic, external solutions to problems. Culprits are created — slash-and-burn cultivators, backward pastoralists, woodfuel collectors, charcoal burners, hunters and gatherers, for example — and demonized in policy narratives, often with little substantive evidence. The culprits are often the poor, the marginalized and those whose livelihoods lie outside the norms of the settled, civilized agriculturalists or urban dwellers. In the process, livelihoods are criminalized and outlawed and people are denied access to the resources on which they have long depended. Fences are erected to protect biodiversity in parks, as part of what has been dubbed "fortress conservation" (Brockington 2002; Hutton, Adams and Murombedzi 2005); anti-poaching units are established to track down hunters and stop illegal grazing; fires are banned as part of cultivation practices; and herders are stopped from using key resources, such as wetlands or riverine areas, in the name of soil erosion protection.

While well-meaning, such measures are often seriously misguided and unscientific. Take fire regulations:in savannah and many forest ecosystems, fires are a natural part of ecosystem processes and have long sustained rich, biodiverse vegetation (Frost and Robertson 1987). Banning fires (and so shifting cultivation, honey collection and transhumant grazing) means not only undermining livelihoods, but also creating greater vulnerabilities to fire in the future (for example, through buildup of grass) and reducing biodiversity by creating even-age woodlands, for example. This in turn creates conflicts between those tasked with environmental protection and local people, as Iokiñe Rodriguez documents for Venezuela (Rodriguez 2007).

Non-Equilibrium Ecologies

Ecosystems are thus not static blocks of "natural capital" (cf. Chapter 3) to be preserved (or traded — see McAfee 1999). Rather, they are complex, dynamic and always changing. Insights from "non-equilibrium" ecology are thus important as they challenge the static managerial notions of protection, control, carrying capacity and limits (Behnke and Scoones 1993; Zimmerer 1994; Scoones 1995 and 1999). Non-equilibrium ecologies require a management approach that is more sophisticated, responsive and adaptive (Holling 1973), taking into account the inevitable shocks and stresses and treating resilience and sustainability as emergent properties from dynamic systems (Berkes et al. 1998; Folke et al. 2002; Walker and Salt 2006). This is nothing new for natural resource ecologists and local people who are resource managers of complex ecosystems. Indeed, this is how ecosystems have been managed around the world for millennia, especially in the tropics, where variability in rainfall, temperature, fire, disease and other ecosystem drivers is higher than in the more stable, temperate regions. However, in part due to the power of simplifying narratives about resource control and management discussed above, most management and policy regimes have not adopted such responsive, adaptive approaches to forests, rangelands, biodiversity or water. Instead a top-down approach, centred on ideas of limits and control, has been at the core of resource management the world over.

This mismatch between ground realities and policy regimes causes major frictions, sometimes even outright conflict. It helps neither the cause of sustainability nor the achievement of sustainable livelihoods. However, neither does a romantic, idealistic vision of local environmental guardianship and protection, as promulgated by some. For example, there is a popular eco-feminist reading of women as having natural caring qualities and abilities to manage resources sustainably (Shiva and Miles 1993). While in some cases this is unquestionably true, its assertion as a generalized, essentialist feature belies the complex political ecologies at the heart of gender differentiated resource access and control (Jackson 1993; Leach 2007). Equally, an appreciation of local or indigenous knowledge, including peoples' spiritual connections with land and resources, may be overly idealistic. We may be presented with a simplistic, universal vision (Haverkort and Hiemstra 1999) that ignores local knowledges as part of local histories, experimentation and struggle between different people over resources and their control (cf. Richards 1985; Sillitoe 1998). Such narratives of local people as saviours are just as problematic as their casting as culprits and villains. A much more nuanced, differentiated analysis is required. Some people may be exploiters of nature, others guardians. How they ultimately behave has more to do with their social relations and local political positioning than their identification as local or indigenous people or as women *per se*.

Sustainability as Adaptive Practice

Some of the most inspiring work on rural livelihoods has focused on local practices, situating them in a wider social and political analysis, and with historical depth (cf. Chapter 1). The day-to-day practices of different people — men, women; young, old; rich, poor; migrants, indigenes — reveal the ways we adapt to environmental change, always experimenting and innovating; sometimes intensifying existing practices in response to local scarcities, at other times changing livelihoods altogether. Paul Richards has offered a particularly nuanced account of how rice farmers in Sierra Leone have adapted to change, deploying local knowledge in sophisticated ways and

often challenging the approaches foisted upon them by outsiders (Richards 1986). Mary Tiffen, Mike Mortimore and Francis Guchuki (1994) offered a very detailed environmental and social history of the Machakos district in Kenya. They showed how increases in population over time were associated with less erosion. Contrary to the dominant Malthusian narratives on erosion and soil degradation and in fact thanks to agricultural intensification spurred by a growth in markets, people were investing in soil conservation on a massive scale. As Esther Boserup (1965) had earlier argued, demographic pressure spurred innovation and intensification. A similar story is told for the Kano Close Settled Zone in northern Nigeria, where a remarkably intensive production system has emerged in a dryland area, again linked to urban markets (Adams and Mortimore 1997; cf. also Netting 1993). Across the wider Sahel, Chris Reij and colleagues (1996) show how innovations in soil and water conservation have occurred and spread to other areas, allowing effective responses to drought and climate change. In Central America, the intensification of production systems on hillsides has been widely documented, showing how combining soil erosion control with cropping system innovation has been a key livelihood response (Bunch 1990). And in a similar way in Indonesia, the classic home gardens of Java show how layered gardening systems provide a massively productive, integrated style of production in contexts of high demographic pressure (Soemarwoto and Conway 1992).

Whether in terms of new technologies, changes in management practices, spatial redesign or shifts in marketing and wider livelihood strategies, these responses have emerged alongside changes in economic, social and political relations. They cannot simply be transferred, as some would wish, as part of technology programmes. This is why so many attempts at replication have failed. Yet, such adaptations and more fundamental transformations in context and over time give us insights into how environmental limits and boundaries, often very real, are negotiated, and how they do not always result in conflict and collapse. In fact, transformative opportunities can exist, although they may not be easily achievable due to an array of constraints and blockages that are more often institutional and political than environmental (Leach et al. 2012).

Livelihoods and Lifestyles

Much of the core literature on adaptation and sustainability comes from marginal settings, where poor people use remarkable ingenuity and skill to respond to new stresses and shocks. Yet the relationship between livelihoods and sustainability is also relevant in richer parts of the world. Here the challenges are not scarcity and want but surplus and overconsumption. The unsustainability of the aspiring middle classes, north and south, wedded to consumerism and economic growth, is well documented. Here the focus is on lifestyles rather than livelihoods.

The consequence of such lifestyles across generations is a key issue for livelihoods analysis. Whose sustainable livelihoods are we talking about: those living now or future generations? As noted already, Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway (1992) pointed to intergenerational livelihood sustainability and the importance of asset inheritance, including the environment, across generations. However, this theme, and its implications for sustainability, has not received much attention in the livelihoods literature that has blossomed since the 1990s. Much of the focus, as discussed elsewhere in this book, has been on immediate, pressing responses to poverty and environmental change, rather than on the future and future generations. However, as more people throughout the world move out of poverty, leave behind the day-to-day challenges of survival and focus on accumulating goods that improve their lives and lifestyles, such issues should move up the agenda.

The relationship between environmental sustainability and economic growth — perhaps the core policy dilemma of our age — is primarily about livelihood and lifestyle choices. Some argue that only a zero growth strategy is feasible if future generations' wellbeing is to be protected. As Tim Jackson (2005 and 2011) argues, prosperity without growth — and living better on less — is possible but requires hard choices. It calls on us to rethink our ideas about prosperity and reject our obsession with the gross domestic product metric as the sole measure of progress. The advantages of becoming richer show diminishing returns against variables such as life expectancy and satisfaction, and it is factors such as inequality within societies — and so patterns of opportunity, exclusion, exploitation and domination

— that come to have the largest impacts on perceptions of wellbeing in richer societies.

This requires a wider debate about livelihood outcomes, their tradeoffs and their consequences. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many ways of defining outcomes: by focusing on specific measures of income or consumption poverty or by taking a wider view of human capability and wellbeing. Debates about livelihoods and sustainability must be centred on how we define the "good life" and thus livelihood outcomes, and finally on what livelihoods and lifestyles will achieve these. These are choices, and will be different for different people in different places. For those in extreme, chronic poverty, a focus on raising incomes and accumulating assets will likely be primary; for others the choices are broader and need not be focused solely on material gains but on other dimensions of wellbeing. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, opening up debates about outcomes can produce surprising results. Contrary to the expectations of "poverty experts," those living in poverty may value dignity, security and freedom just as much as material goods. This is why opening up a broad discussion with people about wealth, wellbeing and successful, sustainable livelihoods — as in the participatory ranking approaches outlined in Chapter 2 — can be enormously revealing.

All this requires us to address head-on the politics of sustainability, individually, locally and globally (Scoones et al. 2015) and create new assemblages of livelihoods, technologies and policies that generate more sustainable futures. Whether this means switching to low input or agroecological agriculture (Altieri 1995), food sovereignty and local economic development (Patel 2009; Rosset and Martinez-Torres 2012), "transition towns" combining low carbon living with new economic arrangements (Barry and Quilley 2009) or simply changing consumption patterns (Jackson 2005) will depend on contexts and choices.

Ensuring sustainable livelihoods for the (increasingly urban) middle classes across the world is a looming challenge, one that will require some radical new thinking. But the rural livelihoods frameworks, and many of the associated methods developed for very different settings (Chapter 8), remain just as relevant. Contexts and livelihood strategies, of course, are different but the mediating roles

of social institutions, cultural practices, politics and policies remain just as significant. For it is from these that new directions for livelihood pathways will emerge that deliver both improved wellbeing (and capabilities) as well as sustainability. This will ensure that future livelihood pathways can be carved out within a safe operating space that respects environmental boundaries or limits, while delivering livelihoods and lifestyles that respond to desires and expectations. This will not be an easy path, and it will be intensely political, but livelihoods approaches may offer useful conceptual and practical tools to assist with the journey.

A Political Ecology of Sustainability

Whether in relation to resource use or consumption, it is this dynamic, negotiated response of livelihoods within complex systems that allows for a more sophisticated perspective on sustainability. The metaphor of a pathway is useful here, as it suggests the route to sustainability has to be sought, that there is no single pathway to the chosen destination (Leach et al. 2010; www.steps-centre.org). Such pathways to sustainability are thus constructed through the dynamic interplay of social, technological and environmental processes, and require multiple innovations in socio-technical transitions (Smith and Berkhout 2005; Geels and Schot 2007). Therefore, discussions of direction (where are we heading and how do we define sustainability?), distribution (who wins and who loses from a particular choice of pathway?) and diversity (what options exist and how are they combined?) are all crucial (STEPS Centre 2010).

As sustainabilities are negotiated by different people in different places in the context of their livelihoods, it is these political questions that are ultimately crucial. Political ecologists have long argued that politics constructs ecology, just as ecology constructs politics. Thus, we have to be aware of how dynamic ecologies create pathways but also constrain them. It is both environmental shocks — such as a devastating earthquake, typhoon or disease outbreak — and long-term environmental stresses — such as climate change, with its shifts of temperature, rainfall pattern and so on — that affect which pathways are taken. Equally, political choices influence ecologies. Thus,

attention to a political economy of resources is essential in tandem with a better appreciation of ecological dynamics.

Wider structural drivers, for instance, may be changing patterns of ownership and control, or creating new market dynamics that influence the commodification and marketization of resources. These in turn result in processes of accumulation for some, and dispossession for others. In the context of this particular moment of financialized, globalized neoliberal capitalism, market relations often dominate, and have extraordinary reach (Harvey 2005). Markets for land, forests, minerals and water resources have long existed. Today, however, there are also markets for carbon, biodiversity and even particular species, whereby valued resources in one part of the world are protected as part of global offset exchanges that allow exploitation elsewhere (Arsel and Büscher 2012; Büscher et al. 2012; Fairhead et al. 2012).

For example, in global forest carbon trading and REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) schemes, carbon in a forest or soil is assumed to be commensurable (the same, and so exchangeable) with that emitted in another part of the world. Thus, sequestering carbon in fields and forests, according to some well-specified standards, means credits can be sold to offset climate impacts elsewhere, with net positive results for climate mitigation benefits. Millions of hectares across the world are subject to such schemes. The consequences vary, both for the level of carbon sequestration (often lower than expected due to leakage and non-permanence) and assumed community benefits (again, often lower as new resource valuation arrangements result in displacement, dispute and conflict) (Leach and Scoones 2015). New market relationships governing resources thus are having new impacts on rural livelihoods, requiring perspectives that take into account such dynamics and their global connections.

This new commodification of nature, as part of a "green economy" aimed at protecting "natural capital" by creating markets and therefore value, has far-reaching consequences for the politics of sustainability (McAfee 2012; Corson et al. 2013). Indeed, it is driving patterns of accumulation by conservation, as offset schemes and payment for ecosystems services projects unfold (Büscher and Fletcher

2014). These processes thus shape pathways to sustainability — and in particular their direction, distribution and diversity. They do this in fundamental ways, going beyond the long-established analysis of the political economy of resource access and control in debates about sustainability and livelihoods (Leach et al. 1999; Ribot and Peluso 2003; Peluso and Lund 2011; see Chapter 4).

Sustainability Reframed: Politics and Negotiation

Given these debates, how should we connect the concerns of sustainability with livelihoods? The definition introduced earlier still applies, but it needs to be extended to encompass the political dimensions outlined above. Stresses and shocks must be coped with and recovered from; assets and capabilities must be maintained and enhanced; and the natural resource base on which so many livelihoods depend must not be undermined. But we must focus not only on individuals' livelihoods, and the localities in which they are played out, but on how these are negotiated in the context of a globalized political economy of market relations, processes of commoditization and financialization and highly contested resource access and control.

Thus, we must look at how livelihood resources and the livelihood strategies and outcomes (including wider capabilities) to which they give rise (Chapter 2) are facilitated or constrained by wider structural drivers. These may be the "boundaries" defined by environmental limits, but they may also be the social and political boundaries set by, for example, uneven distribution of resources, the operation of global markets or the capture of resources by elites.

Livelihood sustainability is thus negotiated in this maze of opportunities and constraints. A sustainable pathway is a choice — one among many, and one that is not always possible given the limited political agency and voice of many. Sustainability reframed in this way is thus about the power to negotiate pathways to sustainability: around knowledge and what is meant by sustainability in any context; and around access and control of resources, market relations and the ability to choose different directions. Attention to the political economy of livelihoods and environments is thus a central theme, one that will become more concrete in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Livelihoods and Political Economy

Livelihoods unfold in particular contexts and are profoundly influenced by power and politics. Chapter 4 focused on the institutional, organizational and policy processes that affect livelihood strategies and outcomes, while Chapter 5 focused on the political negotiation of pathways to sustainable livelihoods. But there is a broader context too, within which we must situate any livelihoods analysis. This is the context of long-term, historical patterns of structurally defined relations of power between social groups, of processes of economic and political control by the state and other powerful actors, and of differential patterns of production, accumulation, investment and reproduction across society. In other words, the political economy of livelihoods.[1]

Unity of the Diverse

While Karl Marx and other classical political economists were interested in these broader patterns, and in the historical processes defining the changing relationships between capital and labour over time, they were also interested in the underlying, diverse determinations that gave rise to these patterns. In his treatise on method mentioned in Chapter 1, *Grundrisse*, Marx argued that a critical political economy approach that aims to expose the "rich totality of many determinations and relations" also helps expose a "concrete" understanding that thus emerges through iteration between conceptual abstractions and detailed empirical observation: "The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (Marx 1973: 100–101). To avoid "a chaotic conception of the whole," he explains how he employed a dialectical method that moved

> analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the

> journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as a chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. (1973: 100)

Thus, he argued, we can better understand the world by looking at both material/structural and relational aspects.

Such a grounded political economy approach allows for the detailed description of a diversity of livelihood strategies, and an evaluation of longer-term livelihood trajectories and their structural conditioning and shaping. This approach also focuses on the political and economic alliances being forged between different classes, and so the structuring of the wider political economy. As Henry Bernstein argues (2010a: 209), it is this movement between the specifics of diverse livelihood contexts and the wider abstractions and tendencies associated with a relational and dynamic understanding of class that offers important insights into longer-term trajectories of agrarian change and processes of differentiation. Bridget O'Laughlin (2002, 2004) echoes this argument in her appeal to go beyond the descriptive, purely empirical method in livelihood analysis towards a more theorized conception of livelihoods within structural contexts. Hers is not an appeal for a meta-theory; that era has almost certainly passed (Sumner and Tribe 2008). Rather it is a call for attention to the tensions, contradictions and opportunities that arise between the highly specific, diverse, complex and contextual and the wider structural, historical and relational forces that continuously shape and reshape what is possible for whom. This allows us to move beyond mere description to explanation, to link the specific to wider patterns and processes, and to show which "determinations" are important and how they interrelate.

How then might such a multi-faceted approach be carried out? In a study of land reform sites in Zimbabwe, a class analysis of agrarian dynamics was linked to a description of livelihood strategies (Scoones et al. 2010, 2012). Based on a sample of around 400 households and a description of fifteen different livelihood strategies, ranging from those which were, following the typology, introduced earlier, developed by Andrew Dorward and colleagues (2009, see

Chapter 3): "stepping up" (accumulating and investing), to those who were "stepping out" (diversifying), to those who were "hanging in" (surviving by various means) and to those who were "dropping out" (becoming destitute and migrating away). The study concluded that there was a significant group of households "accumulating from below" (Necosmos 1993; Cousins 2010), whereby they were generating assets and investments from farm production and other local economic activities. The study comments:

> This includes both an emergent rural petit bourgeoisie (accumulating assets, hiring in labour, selling surplus produce etc.) and a larger group of petty commodity producers. Some of these households are more successful than others, as, for many, a dominant focus of livelihood strategies is on reproduction, with only perhaps intermittent accumulation. Worker-peasant households, able to link off-farm income with successful agricultural production, are also evident .... By contrast, there are also many so-called semi-peasants and worker-peasants who often are selling their labour to others, at least on a seasonal, temporary basis, and are failing to accumulate, with many barely able to reproduce themselves. They must either leave the area or survive through often desperate means. Between these two extremes are a mixed group.... We [therefore] see multiple class identifications, ranging from those who are on the upward track and rapidly accumulating (and so moving from petty commodity production towards being part of a rural petit bourgeois) to those who are surviving, while not doing badly, but through a variety of means (petty commodity production, off-farm diversification, employment etc.). (Scoones et al. 2012: 521)

Importantly, the study distinguishes between those "accumulating from below" and those reliant at least in part on accumulation "from above," through patronage and other means. This is important in the overall assessment of agrarian dynamics given the very different nature of political and economic alliances and commitments to the land involved. The study concludes that "emerging class dynamics

in the new resettlements are complex, often highly contingent and not easy to categorize neatly; and with age, gender and ethnic differences cutting across these dimensions made even more so" (Scoones et al. 2012: 521).

Following land reform, just as in any other rural setting, processes of class formation have occurred. These are differentiated in their relations with capital and labour, with some accumulating, others being "middle peasant" petty commodity producers, and others unable to reproduce. Labour markets, often highly informal, are key and highly dynamic, with poorer groups selling labour while others hire in.

The smallholder family farm is always changing and never the ideal type imagined by agrarian populists. In all cases, farm labour is combined with other forms of diversified activity, both in the locality and outside. As capitalism changes, particularly in the context of globalization, there are inevitable shifts in relationships between classes. Equally, such classes are fractured by dimensions of gender, generation, ethnicity and so on, and capital has different effects on different groups (Bernstein 2010b).

Whether these "social facts" of class result in forms of collective political action and struggle over livelihoods between groups will depend on a variety of contextual circumstances (Mamdani 1996). In the Zimbabwe case, patterns of class formation following land reform have been highly dynamic and are still unfolding, with dimensions of ethnicity in some areas in particular playing into a wider process (Scoones et al. 2012). Whether new forms of collective political action form through this, developing a strong advocacy for small-scale farming livelihoods, remains to be seen (Scoones et al. 2015).

Class, Livelihoods and Agrarian Dynamics

Agrarian class dynamics necessarily take on a particular character in different places, depending on historical patterns of land alienation, capitalist penetration and settler colonization (Amin 1976; Arrighi 1994). In his book in this series, Henry Bernstein outlines a number of paths of agrarian transition, ranging from the English to the American, Prussian and East Asian paths, each involving different characteristics

of transition. These include transitions from feudalism, the emergence of capitalist farmers from peasant smallholders, and the impositions of the state, through taxation for example, resulting in other types of transition (Byres 1996; Bernstein 2010a: 25–37).

Empirical examination of diverse cases demonstrates that the "ideal types" vary widely in practice, reflecting diverse, contingent conditions. For example, in former settler colonies of southern Africa, parallel processes of proletarianization and the emergence of successful petty commodity production create important hybrid class categories such as "worker-peasants" or the "semi-peasantry" (Cousins et al. 1992). In Latin America, the transition from landlord-run *hacienda* farming following land reform resulted in the semi-proletarianization of rural dwellers. This was accompanied by a transfer to large-scale commercial farms and plantations, and a limited emergence of small-scale petty commodity production (de Janvry 1981). In India, the shift from landlordism spurred a massive growth in peasant populations, with many benefiting directly or indirectly from the Green Revolution, especially in areas where irrigation was possible (Hazell and Ramasamy 1991). But equally, as land parcels declined, and in places where Green Revolution benefits could not be realized, there has been a massive growth of labouring populations, with varying ties to the land (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009).

Rural dwellers therefore may be farmers, workers, traders, carers and others, with links spread across the urban and rural divide. Classes are not unitary, naturalized or static. The Zimbabwe case study introduced earlier outlined fifteen different livelihood strategies, encompassing a huge array of livelihood activities in one province (Scoones et al. 2010, 2012). Given this diversity of hybrid livelihood strategies and class identities, how does accumulation take place? Based on work in rural South Africa, Ben Cousins (2010: 17) argues:

> Successful accumulation from below would necessarily involve a class of productive small-scale capitalist farmers emerging from within a larger population of petty commodity producers, worker-peasants, allotment-holding wageworkers and supplementary food producers.

Thus, multiple livelihood strategies coexist and create a particular agrarian dynamic that has a broader effect on social relations, politics and the economy. If a productive group of small-scale capitalist farmers can accumulate from below, they will require labour. Thus, employment is generated for worker-peasants who may have a plot of land to till in addition to part-time work. Wageworkers also exist but may be offered small allotments by farm owners, or retain one in their rural or urban homes.

As accumulation occurs, so too does differentiation, creating winners and losers. This pattern of differentiation will vary depending on people's ability to extract surplus. Differentiation occurs, of course, not only along the axis of class but also of gender, age and ethnicity. Each of these dimensions of difference intersect, influencing livelihood change over time.

Indeed, it is only with this dynamic, longitudinal perspective, rooted in an understanding of agrarian change, that longer-term trajectories of livelihoods can be understood. For livelihoods are not isolated and independent but tied to what is happening elsewhere, both locally and more broadly. A wider political economy perspective is thus essential to any effective livelihoods analysis.

States, Markets and Citizens

The relationship between citizens, states and markets is at the core of any political economy analysis of livelihoods. Again in different parts of the world, and at different historical moments, these relationships shift. Yet, at key moments in agrarian and indeed wider economic and political change, these interactions, tensions and conflicts fundamentally shape livelihoods.

Karl Polanyi (1944), for example, was interested in the historical tensions between market and society, and the forms of politics that result. In *The Great Transformation* — a book centrally about livelihoods — he noted the disembedding of markets due to the rise of economic liberalism from the late nineteenth century in Europe. He showed how this precipitated a crisis of capitalism and society, which ultimately led to conflict and war. The rise of market liberalism, he argued, had profound implications for livelihoods, in terms

of production and labour, but also, crucially, of ability to care and protect. A double movement resulted, he argued, whereby the free marketeers, claiming that all facets of economic life and livelihoods require commodification, were at loggerheads with the protectionists, who were arguing for a moral, ethical and practical regulation of market forces. Labour, land and money, Polanyi argued, were fictitious commodities and could not be marketized, so rooted are they in society's functioning. Such forms of commodification would only result in instability, conflict and loss of livelihoods, as well as destruction of communities, landscapes and nature, he argued.

Given contemporary crises in capitalism and society, it is not a surprise that Polanyi's works have been turned to again. Yet, as Nancy Fraser (2012; 2013) argues, we should be wary of simply counterposing market and society, assuming that a social protectionist move to re-embed markets under social regulatory control is all that is required. For, as she notes, social arrangements have within them forms of domination that would simply be replicated. Social, market and human relations are always historically constructed, and have a live politics. A third movement is required, Fraser argues, that challenges such historically embedded forms of domination. Rather than assuming that a benevolent state acting on behalf of society will provide the necessary counterbalance, Fraser calls for an emancipatory movement rooted in the public sphere of civil society.

What does this mean for livelihoods thinking? Clearly, the relationships between states, markets and citizens are central. Essentialized, static, ahistorical versions of each can be problematic. Forms of domination may be deeply rooted, and any progressive move must challenge them. Livelihoods the world over are caught up in the crises of capitalism, with the multiple effects on labour, care and environment. A political approach to sustainable livelihoods thus must address these issues head on.

Thus, according to Fraser (2011), there is a need to connect the critique of commodification to the critique of domination. For example, an environmentalist critique of the rampant economic appropriation of resources should not result in a form of hard-line environmental protectionism that excludes, marginalizes and undermines livelihoods. Equally, an argument for social protection and the

enhancing of livelihoods in the care economy should not simply leave unaddressed the conditions of inequality and exploitation that exist.

Conclusion

A political economy of livelihoods therefore must encompass all of the dimensions highlighted above, and embed this analysis in a theorization of state, society and nature relations appropriate to contemporary conditions. Indeed, it must link the sort of micro-understandings of who does what in particular places — the standard fare of livelihoods analysis — with a wider appreciation of the structural, contextual and historical drivers that shape opportunities and define constraints (cf. Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001; Batterbury 2007). In the next chapter, I turn to some examples and an extended framework for livelihoods analysis that prompts us to ask the right questions in ways that take a political economy perspective seriously.

Note

1 This analytical stance relates more to Marxist traditions of political economy than the governance or political incentives that have recently influenced development studies (cf. Hudson and Leftwich 2014), and in terms of livelihood studies, draws inspiration from Bernstein et al. 1992, among others.

Chapter 7

Asking the Right Questions: An Extended Livelihoods Approach

Getting to grips with the sort of political economy of livelihoods issues outlined in Chapter 6, we need to ask the right questions. Henry Bernstein offers a very useful set of basic questions — what Michael Watts referred to as the "Bernstein *haiku*" (Watts 2012). These can be linked very directly to a conventional livelihoods analysis, deepening and extending the earlier analytical framework.

Four core questions can be asked (Bernstein et al. 1992: 24–25; Bernstein 2010a):

- *Who owns what (or who has access to what)?* This relates to questions of property and ownership of livelihood assets and resources.
- *Who does what?* This relates to the social divisions of labour, the distinctions between those employing and employed, as well as to divisions based on gender.
- *Who gets what?* This relates to questions of income and assets, and patterns of accumulation over time, and so to processes of social and economic differentiation.
- *What do they do with it?* This relates to the array of livelihood strategies and their consequences as reflected in patterns of consumption, social reproduction, savings and investment.

In addition to these four, we can add two more (see www.iss.nl/ldpi), both focused on the social and ecological challenges that characterize contemporary societies:

- *How do social classes and groups in society and within the state interact with each other?* This focuses on the social relations, institutions and forms of domination in society and between citizens and the state as they affect livelihoods.

- *How do changes in politics get shaped by dynamic ecologies and vice versa?* This relates to questions of political ecology, and to how environmental dynamics influence livelihoods. These in turn are shaped by livelihood activities through patterns of resource access and entitlement.

Taken together, these six questions, central to critical agrarian and environmental studies, provide an excellent starting point for any livelihoods study seeking a link to the political economy of wider agrarian change dynamics. As explored further in the next chapter, the original livelihoods framework can therefore be reinvigorated with these questions, pushing the analysis into a more critical appreciation of agrarian dynamics. Figure 7.1 offers an extended version of the livelihoods framework, with these six questions inserted, highlighting frequently ignored aspects of the original framework. This is not an attempt to promote a new framework that all must follow. Rather, I encourage you to make up your own version! The important thing is to think hard about questions, relationships and connections in the analysis and, as the next chapter urges, innovate around methodological combinations to answer them.

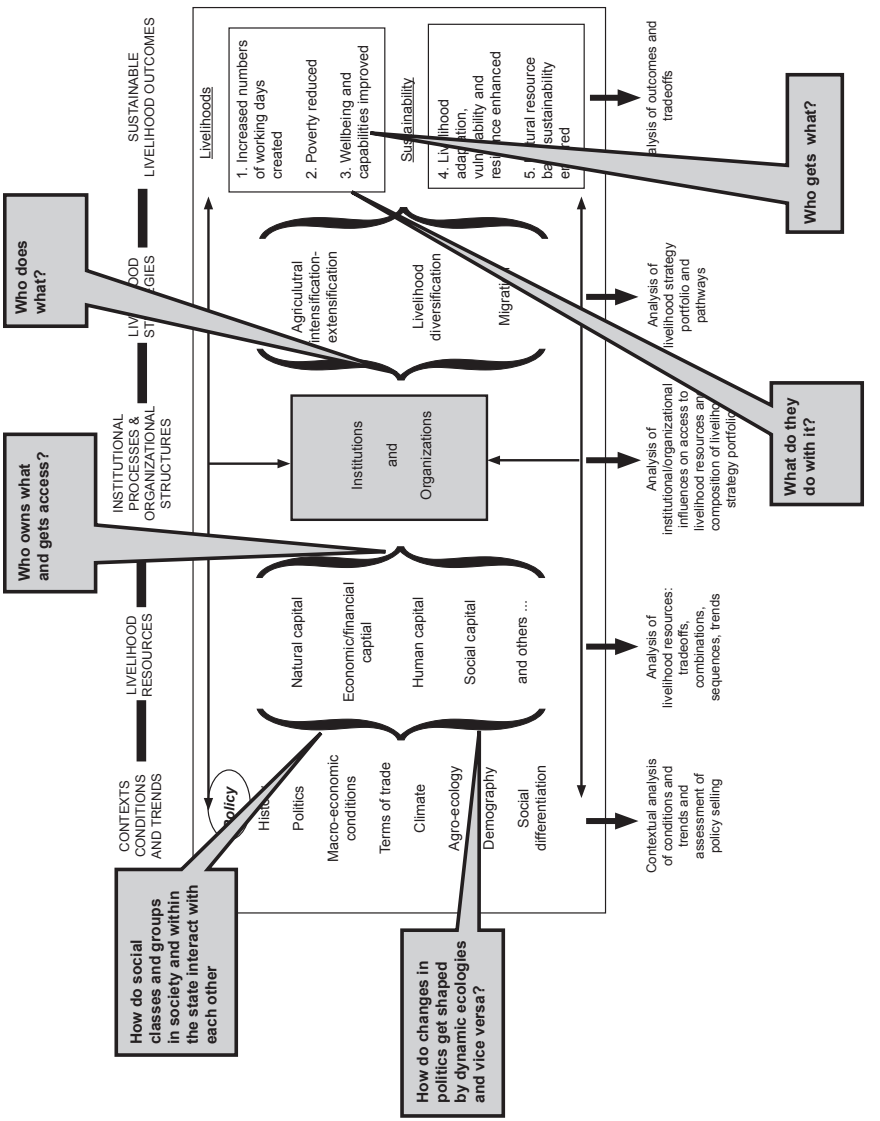
Political Economy and Rural Livelihood Analysis: Six Cases

The following sections illustrate such an approach. Six cases demonstrate how detailed, long-term, micro-level livelihood analysis (Marx's multiple determinations) can lead to a wider understanding of agrarian change. The original sources were of course not organized in relation to the six key questions, but all offer a nuanced account based on sustained field engagement with a particular place. There are many other excellent examples, and these were chosen as a cross-section of contexts and as useful illustrations — and hopefully inspirations.

Case 1: The tribal areas of Western India (Mosse et al. 2002; Mosse 2007, 2010)

This case focuses on *adivasi* (tribal) communities in the forested uplands of Western India, where agriculture and forest-based livelihoods are increasingly linked to a migrant labour economy spurred

Figure 7.1 An extended livelihoods framework *[from Scoones 1998]*



by rapid economic expansion in India's growing cities. The types of social relations that emerge from capitalist economic development reinforce patterns of disadvantage and foster exploitation, dispossession and alienation.

Who owns what? Land rights in forest areas have been undermined by a series of external interventions, starting in the colonial era with the demarcation of forest boundaries and continuing to the present, particularly in the economic reform era of state-backed expropriation of land and minerals. This has undermined traditional livelihood strategies, prompting the loss of assets and resulting in increased poverty.

Who does what? Adivasi farmers grow grain crops for local markets. As processes of incorporation continue, such markets have become more volatile, and farmers have been forced to migrate seasonally to sustain livelihoods. Migration opportunities have increased massively, particularly in construction trades in nearby cities, but wage employment is underpaid and mediated by exploitative arrangements with labour recruiters.

Who gets what? There has been a pattern of increased differentiation, as formerly remote areas have become subject to market forces and capitalist penetration. There are growing patterns of persistent poverty and high levels of vulnerability among some groups. Larger landholders, moneylenders and labour recruiters have profited. The result is a growing inequality.

What do they do with it? Small-scale farmers sell subsistence grain to cover debts. Casual, unskilled labour offers low wages and poor conditions, but it does allow family members to send money back to their villages, and sometimes invest in rural production. Those who exploit the social relations of production and markets can benefit from these new forms of inequality.

How do groups interact? Social relations are characterized by exploitation and dispossession. Market actors, state bureaucrats, labour recruiters and others can exploit local *adivasi* farmers, and may dispossess them of assets. There are forms of categorical exclusion from political representation, and *adivasi* movements have emerged to voice concerns. Yet structural disadvantage, often highly gendered, results in extreme forms of exclusion, sometimes resulting in conflict.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? Previously forested areas have been largely denuded, often through commercial exploitation by outsiders. The upland areas are dry and marginal, and so agricultural production is prone to drought. Such ecological vulnerabilities have increased as locals' access to the resource base has declined.

Case 2: Upland Sulawesi, Indonesia (Li 2014; Hall et al. 2011)
This case focuses on the upland areas of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, where swidden cultivation has been abandoned in favour of small-scale cocoa production. International market demand has restructured landscapes and livelihoods through changed social relationships. Some, both locals and migrants, have accumulated wealth, while others have been dispossessed, forced to take up wage labour on farms they formerly owned. This process has emerged spontaneously, without external imposition, but it reflects the diverse consequences of human agency and the culturally and historically mediated change that constructs livelihoods.

Who owns what? Local farmers own two- to three-hectare plots of cocoa, previously collectively held swidden land. The planting of cocoa trees has resulted in individualization of land holdings, and growing landlessness. Individualized, enclosed plots are also sold, often due to distress and urgent financial need. Migrants and wealthier locals are among those buying up land, increasing patterns of differentiation in land holding.

Who does what? Traditional swidden cultivation combined grain production (rice and maize) with cash crop production (earlier tobacco, later shallots). Cash crops were sold on the market to allow for the purchase of coastal products. Women focused on farm production while men often migrated to the coast for seasonal work. The cocoa boom has reduced reliance on migration and boosted incomes for those who have retained land. Those who have been excluded, or who have sold land, have turned to local wage labour on cocoa farms.

Who gets what? Rapid differentiation has occurred through enclosure and commoditization of land and crops. This resulted in some accumulating significantly, while others became landless wage labourers. The influx of migrants to some sites has resulted in differ-

entiation between locals and migrants, with many locals losing out.

What do they do with it? Investments by those profiting from the cocoa boom have included improved housing, transport and other trappings of coastal modernity. As noted, those dispossessed must now rely on wage labour, with wages again spent on basic commodities.

How do groups interact? Local circuits of power, rooted in historical, cultural and economic processes, and reflecting people's agency, have influenced who gets what and for what reason. The result has been growing tensions and conflicts between groups, as older men accumulate while younger people lose out. Women have often found new roles in cocoa production and marketing, but not always. Conflicts have arisen that are not easily resolved in a hybrid legal system, where customary and official law contradict.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? Extensive upland areas, characterized by swidden systems with several years of forest fallow, have been transformed into a largely monocropped commercial tree system, with limited remaining forest area. The previous swidden system had come under pressure due to in-migration, but also to regular pest and disease outbreaks that affected key crops, thereby increasing incentives to switch to cocoa.

Case 3: The Ecuadorian Andes (Bebbington 2000, 2001)

This case focuses on the Ecuadorian Andes, where diverse livelihood strategies, across multiple locations, have managed to sustain rural homes, and crucially, indigenous identities. Following land reform, people accumulated and invested in rural homes, often through income from migration. In some areas, opportunities arose for irrigated horticulture, textile manufacture and trading, especially supporting a growing tourist industry. Patterns of differentiation have occurred but a sense of place and cultural connection have remained important.

Who owns what? Land reforms in 1964 and 1973 allowed small-scale farming to take off, and the grip of the *haciendas* and the church declined. People moved from dependent wage-labour relationships to independent production. Harsh conditions and lack of access to resources meant diversification of livelihoods was essential.

Who does what? People combine small farm production with

migration. This is highly gendered, with (younger) men migrating to the coast. The men, however, maintain a link with their home area and invest migration proceeds, particularly in housing. Some have access to valued land, such as irrigated valley bottoms, and are able to establish horticultural production; others have diversified into petty trading, textile manufacture and tourism services.

Who gets what? Farm incomes have declined, and are highly variable. Diversification is thus essential and migration is a necessity for many. A process of differentiation is unfolding, influenced by both local asset ownerships (notably land of higher quality) and off-farm and migration opportunities.

What do they do with it? Following land reform, those able to purchase higher quality land profited from rural, agriculture-based accumulation. Others with more diversified livelihoods have invested proceeds in houses and plots within their home areas.

How do groups interact? Old dependency relationships with the *hacienda* and the church have been shed. A greater sense of local ownership centred on economic activity and investment in the area has emerged. This has brought about changes in political and authority structures, and new institutions, including local committees and protestant evangelical churches, have emerged. Local identities — such as Quichuas — are especially important and influence livelihood choices. This results in hybrid forms of cultural economy that link place-specific livelihoods with wider migration networks.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? A mountainous landscape offers few opportunities for intensive agriculture, and hillsides have been degraded through over-use. Valley bottom lands are important resources, as they have the potential for irrigation. Differential access to these sites is important in defining who is able to pursue an agricultural livelihood without migration.

Case 4: The Western Cape Winelands, South Africa (du Toit and Ewert 2002; Ewert and du Toit 2005)

This case focuses on wine production in South Africa's Western Cape province. Changes in global wine markets, combined with industry deregulation and state intervention around labour rights, have shaped major transformations in livelihood opportunities both

for growers and for labourers. A new pattern of differentiation has emerged that contrasts wine producers able to sell to the higher value international market with those more reliant on local markets, and labourers employed on a permanent basis with those able to gain only casual employment.

Who owns what? Wine estates vary dramatically in size and organization, with different levels of employment, both permanent and casual. There is a growing trend towards the casualization of the workforce, with temporary workers having few resources and living in deep poverty in the towns and peri-urban areas of the wine producing districts. However, economic power today rests less in the hands of the growers and more in those further up the value chain, in processing and marketing. This affects the room for manoeuvre for wine producers.

Who does what? In a competitive global market, the pressures to modernize production are intense. This means employing a permanent skilled workforce with relatively good conditions (often male and drawn from the mixed race "coloured" community), and relying on female, black, Xhosa-speaking migrants for casual work. All wine farms have shed labour and increased casualization.

Who gets what? Major differences exist between farms able to sell into high value export markets and those that cannot, and also between different categories of labour. Livelihood opportunities contrast similarly. These differences are based on longer-term histories, agro-ecological conditions for particular grape varieties, business collaboration and worker skill and background. Race is a major factor in defining different opportunities, with the farms owned by whites, permanent workers largely of mixed race, and casual workers largely black.

What do they do with it? With growing wine consumption in Europe and now Asia, the profits from exports are significant. This translates into opulent lifestyles for successful wine producers. Labour legislation has forced improved conditions for permanent workers, and wages support their livelihoods, with expenditures focused on food provisioning as well as consumer goods. There is a growing group of casual labourers, often female, who live off the farms in poor conditions in urban and peri-urban settlements, and

who depend only in part on wage employment. This group often experiences deep poverty, and relies on diversified livelihood activities and welfare grants to survive.

How do groups interact? The old racially defined, paternalistic interactions between farm owners and workers are changing, but only slowly. Racial difference still defines such interactions, and tensions are evident. Government legislation aimed at improving worker conditions is implemented half-heartedly, and may not have an impact on casual workers. Worker organization is restricted due to the limited reach of unions and the paternalistic hold of farm arrangements.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? Only certain grape varieties are suitable for the high value export market. These are grown in the wetter regions of the Cape. Those farming in drier areas must rely on different markets. Thus, local ecologies influence market opportunity, and so livelihood patterns.

Case 5: The Upper East Region, northern Ghana (Whitehead 2002, 2006)

This case focuses on an extremely poor, dryland area of northern Ghana, the Upper East Region. Here extensive dryland farming combines with off-farm activities and migration. Key asset endowments and the management of labour in large compound households have been critical to livelihood success.

Who owns what? Land is relatively abundant and male household members often farm large areas, although farm sizes vary considerably. Women have smaller plots nearer the home. Farm plots are differentiated between the more intensively cultivated home plots and the large outfields. Key assets are livestock, both cattle and smallstock, and ploughs. Livestock manure is important for agricultural production, particularly as the cost of fertilizers has increased. Asset ownership patterns are highly differentiated, with a few men owning most livestock and ploughs.

Who does what? Men in compound households farm sorghum and millets, as well as cotton, groundnuts, beans and rice. Women focus on groundnuts and vegetable production. Increasing numbers of women also are engaged in off-farm work, such as market trading,

often for very low returns. Men migrate in the dry season, again for limited wages. Poorer households provide piecework labour to richer households during the farming season.

Who gets what? Those households with initial resource endowments (notably cattle and farm equipment) and a ready supply of labour in large household compounds, and as wage labour, are able to accumulate wealth and reduce vulnerabilities to the vagaries of the weather and product markets. Access to labour is the key factor that differentiates households, and this varies over time due to demographic cycles as well as to contingent factors such as death, illness, infirmity and out-migration by males. External economic factors, precipitated by a wider economic crisis at the national level, impinge on livelihoods through depressed prices, withdrawal of state support and a decline in migrant labour opportunities.

What do they do with it? Investments are focused on the key assets of livestock and ploughs. Smallstock are important for off-season sales so food and other commodities can be purchased. Investment in housing (zinc roofs), children's education and health care are important. Off-farm income and wage labour pay are often limited, drawing people away from farming and into a poverty trap that sustains need and vulnerability, pushing some into destitution or forced migration.

How do groups interact? Large household compounds are the key asset holding and cooperative labour unit. Managing household and hired-in labour is a critical process that depends on good social relations. Successful compounds attract more members, and so more labour, and a virtuous cycle results. Investing in such social relations and managing conflicts both within and outside the household is essential to livelihood success. External support through government and NGO projects has been important in providing key assets that have transformed opportunities for a few. However, most rely on highly disadvantageous labour conditions and market relations in a context of increasing land competition and conflict, especially between ethnic groups.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? Extensive, dryland cropping is the core agricultural strategy in the savannah regions. Access to small wetter patches, such as streambeds for growing

onions, has nonetheless been important for some. In the absence of sustained inputs, declining fertility in the outfields has affected production. Although bush land remains available for clearance or for grazing, this is now further away from villages, and land conflicts have accelerated.

Case 6: Hebei Province, northeast China (Jingzhong, Wang and Long, 2009; van der Ploeg and Jingzhong 2010; Jingzhong and Lu 2011)

This case focuses on Yixian County in Hebei province, about 300 kilometres from Beijing. The research is based on a series of in-depth village studies around Pocang Township. This area has seen rapid change, first as the production system moved from collectivization to a household responsibility system, and later as demand for largely male labour grew with the rapid industrialization of China. The household registration system prevents the movement of families to urban areas and ensures a continued link to rural homes. However, these changes have resulted in major changes in livelihoods, with at least four trajectories of change observed. Some have strengthened peasant livelihoods and production, but have expanded to off-farm activities and specialized in new agricultural commodities. Others have diversified out of agriculture and are gaining livelihoods in off-farm activities in town and village enterprises, in mines or through trading and migration. Others are downscaling agriculture to a simplified form on very small plots as men migrate away and the elderly, women and children stay behind. Some others are being driven into poverty as livelihood opportunities collapse. Despite starting out with similar assets when land was allocated to individuals, patterns of differentiation are occurring. These are affected by state policy, social relations in and beyond the village and changing patterns of migration.

Who owns what? Land was distributed under the household responsibility system in the early 1980s. Each household got the same amount. Today land areas are small, usually less than a hectare, sometimes as little as a tenth of a hectare, and some rent land to others. Villagers have access to mountain land through a contract system whereby one or two hectares are contracted for fifty to seventy years

for grazing and tree growing. Key local assets are livestock (especially goats for wool production) and trees (notably fruit and nut trees, including apple and walnut). These commodities have been a focus for specialization in production in recent years.

Who does what? The mix of livelihood strategies reflects the trajectories noted above. Traditional agricultural production is dominated by wheat, maize, sweet potato and groundnut production, with seasonal irrigation. Migration is a critical factor, and most households have one or more migrants, mostly male, who move for variable periods to industrial centres, including Beijing. Some migrants leave for as long as ten years, with limited visits home, while others are employed more locally, for example in industries in nearby townships or at iron ore and vermiculite mines in the area, and can return regularly. Resident populations are comprised largely of elderly people, women and children. Children are heavily involved in labouring, both on- and off-farm. With less adult labour, some have downscaled and simplified their farming operations. There exists a huge diversity of off-farm income earning activities, including trading, grinding mill operation, glass noodle processing, brick manufacture, fodder selling and even scorpion breeding.

Who gets what? Despite the allocation of similar amounts of land, there are growing patterns of differentiation, driven by differential access to remittance income. Some have managed to accumulate wealth by drawing on knowledge, expertise and connections developed through travel and social relations. Specialization in particular high value activities, such as wool production, vegetable irrigation or medicinal plant growing, has allowed others to become richer, and to consolidate rural livelihoods.

What do they do with it? Remittances drive many investments in housing and consumer goods but also in agricultural production. This includes agricultural equipment (such as three-wheeler tractors and irrigation equipment), inputs (including fertilizer) and infrastructure (such as greenhouses). Much remittance income is spent on basic social reproduction and survival, however, as part of a social security system for the families left behind.

How do groups interact? Migration creates a distorted demographic that results in new caring relationships, often with grandparents

raising children. The absence of parents and the heavy involvement of children in work can result in negative social and psychological impacts on children. Some people in the village have gained wealth by acquiring knowledge and expertise through social connections based on trust and cooperation. The state has had a major influence on the way livelihoods are structured, from allocation of land to support for decentralized industrialization in the countryside, to the household registration system that restricts migration.

How are political changes shaped by ecologies? This is a mountainous area, with poor, sandy soils. Access to irrigation in the river valleys is crucial to crop production, while access to mountain grazing through the contract system is vital for livestock rearing. The presence of mining in the area has influenced off-farm livelihood opportunities. The shortage of high-quality irrigated land has limited agricultural growth potentials and encouraged off-farm diversification and migration.

Emerging Themes

Each of these cases, from extremely diverse settings, shows that rural livelihoods are dynamic, diverse and shaped by longer-term processes and wider structural drivers. Farm and off-farm activities are combined; links between rural and urban settings are vital. No simple attribution of livelihood type or identity, as Bernstein (2010a) notes, can be made: people are farmers, workers, traders, migrants, sometimes all at once. As the next chapter shows, a combination of methods and a longitudinal perspective are required to understand rural livelihoods. Six themes emerge from the cases that reinforce some of the key points made in the book so far:

- Diverse rural livelihoods emerge from long-term processes of agrarian differentiation. It is crucial to understand how patterns of accumulation occur and for whom, and how different classes are formed. Emergent classes are often hybrid, combining paid work or entrepreneurial activity with farming, for example. A dynamic bricolage of different livelihoods is the norm. Farmers are rarely just farmers, just as waged workers often have other

activities that sustain their livelihoods. Thus, a rounded, inclusive perspective on livelihoods is essential.

- Many livelihood activities occur beyond the farm, within wider rural spaces or in urban areas. Links between these sites — over time, across generations, within and between households — is essential to understanding rural livelihoods. Very often the poorest groups must put together an array of activities to make up very fragile and insecure livelihoods. Labour migration is a recurrent feature that influences local livelihoods in profound ways, not only through the flow of remittances but also through changes in aspirations, cultural values and norms.
- All livelihoods are influenced by wider market changes and globalized connections. Shifts in global markets have ripple effects that make a wider perspective on livelihoods crucial. The state is important too, even if it is not visible. Processes of regulation/deregulation, standard setting and so on affect who can do what, and what pays. State facilitation of external investment or infrastructure development also reshapes livelihood opportunities in fundamental ways.
- Global and national level changes are always locally mediated, however. This means that livelihood impacts are not uniform, and investigating livelihoods requires a detailed understanding of local social, institutional and political processes. Contingency, agency and particular contextual experience are all important factors in explaining how larger-scale capitalist processes operate, with historical, cultural and social relations critical to any explanation of longer-term livelihood change.
- Political economy analysis therefore needs to articulate an understanding of social relations and how they influence institutions and organizations. This needs to occur at a variety of levels, from very micro settings — such as managing labour within a household — to wider processes — such as collective organization among farmers and workers. Political economy is therefore not just about the macro features of structural change but also the micro-level dynamics of power relations associated with production, reproduction, accumulation and investment.

- In the contexts of rapid differentiation, stark power divisions and competing claims on resources for livelihoods, conflict between groups is a recurrent feature. This is often accentuated when unclear hybrid institutional and legal arrangements pertain, making clear negotiation and arbitration difficult. Conflicts between migrants and locals, across generations, between genders and among landowners and workers are all highlighted by the cases. To understand the roots and dynamics of such conflicts, livelihoods analyses thus must focus on the intersections of power and agency.

Conclusion

Linking detailed, longitudinal analysis of livelihoods in particular settings with wider processes of agrarian change, patterns of accumulation and investment and class formation helps us make the connection between local realities and wider processes. This requires us to ask the right questions about the social relations of production and labour, and the ecological basis for this. The six key questions proposed in this chapter offer an initial checklist. The cases discussed previously show how answering these questions can be immensely revealing. But each case will require its own tailored investigation; so while they may be helpful prompts alongside the sustainable livelihoods framework (Figure 7.1), they should not be used slavishly or exclusively.

Our challenge is to find out what is going on and why, and to situate these findings in a wider understanding of the political and economic dynamics of change. For it is only with these insights that interventions to support livelihoods can succeed. So, whether researchers, practitioners or combinations of both, we need to know the diversity of livelihood pathways, and the relations between them in order to assess what works for whom. We need to know the patterns underlying social relations and institutions, including the role of the state, and the implications for livelihood outcomes, to understand who are the winners and losers and which institutional and policy levers might have traction. And we need to know how livelihoods and ecologies are mutually constituted, and so how livelihoods might become more sustainable.

Livelihood interventions always enter dynamic systems with complex histories and multiple interconnections. Understanding how an intervention might play out requires an appreciation of such complexity. A livelihood intervention will have impacts throughout the livelihood system, regardless of whether it involves a change in land tenure legislation; a shift in regulations around migration; support for asset building among one or other social group; a focus on a particular crop through agricultural research and extension; an investment in small-scale enterprises in the area; or some combination of these or others. This is not an argument to refrain from intervening, as poverty reduction, livelihood improvement and economic and social empowerment are crucial. Rather, a livelihoods analysis of the sort discussed here should make those engaged in such interventions more informed, better grounded and better prepared to assess risks and consequences in the context of a livelihoods approach.

Chapter 8

Methods for Livelihoods Analysis

The sorts of questions outlined in the previous chapter call out for a mix of methods to answer them. The aim must be, above all, to "open up" and "broaden out" debate (cf. Stirling 2007) about livelihood change. A diversity of methods — quantitative, qualitative, deliberative, participatory and more — are relevant (Murray 2002; Angelsen 2011). But how do we choose? Is this not an impossible task?

For researchers, in the days before excessive disciplinary specialization, each urging a particular set of accredited methods to get published, it was perhaps easier. More flexibility, opportunism, learning and teamwork were possible, and conversations between disciplines were more frequent (cf. Bardhan 1989). Similarly, for practitioners, there was greater openness and learning when the pressures of the "audit culture" and the drive for success and impact were not so overpowering. It is not surprising, then, that the early incarnations of livelihoods approaches flourished in an era when the challenges were practical and problem-oriented. Indeed, they were less burdened by narrow specializations and associated methods, measures and metrics, and not so restricted by bureaucratic procedures (Chapter 1).

In this chapter I will look at the variety of methods used in livelihoods analysis. The chapter starts by asking how methods might be combined to break down disciplinary silos and capture the complexity and variation of real livelihood settings. It goes on to look at methods for operationalizing livelihoods approaches in development action and policy, and consider how they match up to these demands. Finally, I turn to the challenge of embedding a political economic analysis at the heart of livelihoods approaches.

Mixed Methods: Beyond Disciplinary Silos

What characterized the early livelihoods approaches methodologically? First, there was a concern with the interactions of ecology and

society, politics and economy. Unlike the disciplinary divides of today, there were no neat natural-social, economic-political separations. Second, there was a concern with history and long-term dynamics. This allowed current observations to be set in historical context; sometimes with a very particular theory of historical change, as was the case with Marx. Village studies approaches were explicitly longitudinal, some extending thirty or more years. Third, the well-known principle of triangulation was evident: cross-checking, looking from different perspectives and using different methods.

As the disciplinary grip took hold of the development enterprise — and indeed the whole of academia — from the 1970s and 1980s, the problems of a narrow, singular focus became apparent. In some fields — medicine and quantum physics, for example — the disciplinary specializations had clear benefits. But in others the benefits were less apparent. As development became essentially about a particular branch of neo-classical economics, at least in the places that mattered, such as the World Bank and the key development agencies, its viewpoint became more and more blinkered. Increasingly narrow recommendations followed. Structural adjustment programmes were seen as the solution. And the rest, as they say, is history. This period illustrates how the dominance of a singular disciplinary perspective can narrow methods, close down debates, shut out broader perspectives and allow an approach not open to critique to prevail. As in this case, such an approach, reinforced by political and institutional processes that shut out any alternative, can cause massive damage and widespread suffering (Wade 1996; Broad 2006).

Of course there was resistance to this hegemony. It emerged on multiple fronts, from social movements and academics to practitioners and others who saw the damage unfolding. For example, in the late 1970s, frustrated by the limits of what Robert Chambers later dubbed "survey slavery," rapid rural appraisal emerged. It gained a large following in the 1980s, drawing on methods from anthropology, psychology, agro-ecosystems analysis and so on (Howes and Chambers 1979; Chambers 1983; Conway 1985). Developed by academics and practitioners, this approach allowed field teams to go into rural areas, find out what was going on and gain a real understanding of livelihoods. This became known as "participatory appraisal"

(Chambers 1994) and "participatory learning and action"[1] as local people's direct involvement was encouraged in the field enquiries.

Again from the 1970s, a parallel and perhaps more radical movement emerged among social activists and academics, particularly in Latin American. Labelled "participatory action research" (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Reason and Bradbury 2001), this movement drew inspiration from Paulo Freire (1970) and his critique of conventional schooling and ways of learning. Taken up by social movements, as part of liberation theology, it was hugely important in galvanizing action based on deeper understandings of people's own living conditions, tackling in this case the oppression of the Latin American dictatorships in particular.

While a particular disciplinary hegemony reigned at the policy level, plenty was happening on the ground. The village studies tradition persisted, with many fine studies on the long-term dynamics of change in rural areas carried out. Steve Wiggins compiled a list of twenty-six studies in Africa, each showing how changes had been complex and diverse (Wiggins 2000). The long-term, historically informed studies by Sara Berry in Ghana (1993) and Mary Tiffen and colleagues in Kenya (to take two of many examples) served as powerful inspirations for more contemporary livelihoods studies. In South India, the ICRISAT studies took direct inspiration from the earlier village studies (Walker and Ryan 1990). Integrated assessments were central to farming systems research (Gilbert et al. 1980), an approach to linking socio-economic studies with field agronomy. Later, farmer participatory research (Farrington 1988) and participatory technology development (Haverkort et al. 1991) all drew on the principles of cross-disciplinary integration in field-based teams using multiple methods in a participatory way. Similarly, long-term studies of environmental and livelihood change have combined technical, biophysical analyses with livelihoods assessments (cf. Warren et al. 2001; Scoones 2001, 2015).

As poverty researchers rediscovered long-term dynamics, transitions and threshold features (see Chapter 2), attention returned to longitudinal studies, making use of repeat panel surveys and long-term ethnographic research. Peter Davis and Bob Baulch (2011) provide a useful survey of such methods applied to poverty studies in

Bangladesh. They again argue for the importance of mixed methods, combining the quantitative with the qualitative, and panel surveys with life history methods (Baulch and Scott 2006).

In recent years, an oft-mentioned feature of rural systems — complexity — has gained more methodological attention in development studies (Eyben 2006; Guijt 2008; Ramalingam 2013). Drawing on long and diverse traditions of complexity science and complexity methods — from the quantitative modelling traditions of the Santa Fe Institute[2] to the more qualitative enquiries based on grounded theory and emergent analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2011) — complexity approaches have become an important addition to the conceptual and methodological toolbox of livelihood studies.

No matter what methodological stance is used, all insights are necessarily positioned, plural and partial. This has been highlighted in feminist critiques that argue all knowledge is inevitably "situated" and that a stance of "passionate detachment" that also recognizes subjectivities, identities and location is necessary for any research (Haraway 1988). In other words, this requires us to interrogate biases and assumptions in knowledge-making and commit to reflexivity in the research process (Prowse 2010).

Operational Approaches to Livelihoods Assessment

How have field practitioners and policymakers responded to the rise of livelihoods approaches, and to these trends in wider debate? How has this translated into particular operational methods and approaches?

One frequent response to combining insights from the debates highlighted above is to produce integrated livelihood surveys or assessments as part of development projects, relief operation or disaster responses. They take a variety of forms, with varying degrees of complexity and sophistication.

In Africa, the "household economy approach" is widely used. This was developed in the early 1990s by Save the Children U.K. Following Sen, the focus was on access to food rather than on production. It was originally developed for emergency relief situations but has since been extended to wider development efforts.

For different broad livelihood zones, an assessment is carried out based on a disaggregation by wealth. The outcomes analysis is drawn from an assessment of the baseline, and of the effect of the hazard as influenced by coping strategies. The emphasis is on livelihood protection and survival thresholds. The approach has been elaborated over time and has engaged with wider research on livelihoods and poverty dynamics. The most recent guide for practitioners runs to 401 pages[3] and extends the approach to issues such as institutions and political economy.

A similar approach is used in vulnerability assessments.[4] Again, these usually start from a food balance approach but look at the range of livelihood activities that contribute to gaining food, including both on- and off-farm livelihoods. Disaster assessments,[5] more often associated with emergency responses than annual monitoring, focus on changing asset bases, and coping strategies in particular, but again attempt a holistic view of livelihoods to assist relief but also rehabilitation work.

Poverty assessments have become an obligatory step in poverty reduction strategy papers and require assessments of diverse livelihoods, both rural and urban (Norton and Foster 2001). Sometimes they are done as broad surveys, drawing on a mix of techniques and measures highlighted above; at other times they employ a more participatory approach whereby local people are asked to define their own understandings of poverty (Booth and Lucas 2002; Lazarus 2008).

As noted in Chapter 2, the number of improved data sources to feed into such surveys and assessments is increasing. Living Standards Measurement Surveys, for example, are routine in many countries, repeated at regular intervals. In many sites there are longitudinal panel surveys to draw on, along with well-documented longitudinal studies. Statistical services can provide more general data on a range of facets of livelihoods, although certainly in Africa the quality of such data is questionable (Jerven 2013).

Yet none of these approaches really take politics and particularly political economy seriously. With important exceptions, many of the mainstream methodological aspects associated with livelihood studies in recent years — RRA, PRA, poverty assessments and surveys,

vulnerability assessments and so on — do not address the underlying political questions. They may be quite good at answering the question "what is going on?" but the question "why?" is very often left untouched. This is partly because they tend to leave politics aside, or cast it in a rather sanitized way, as in many of the applications of livelihoods frameworks discussed in Chapter 3. As I discuss in the final chapter, what we urgently need in livelihood studies is to bring politics back in. For it is politics, or perhaps more precisely political economy — and the institutional, knowledge and social relational dimensions of this — that determines who owns what, who gets what and so on: the key questions of the extended livelihoods approach advocated in Chapter 7.

Towards a Political Economy Analysis of Livelihoods

How then can the suite of techniques, tools, methods and models that we have at our disposal — the choice is enormous — be deployed to answer the questions central to any analysis of livelihoods and agrarian change? Table 8.1 summarizes the six key questions identified in Chapter 7 as part of an extended livelihoods framework, and lays out the possible methods that might help answer them. Of course this will always depend on context, skills and interests and so on, so this should be seen as simply illustrative and not in any way prescriptive.

As is clear, a large toolbox is available. And many, many more methods could be added. But it is the deployment of the particular tools around a particular framework for enquiry rather than the tools themselves that is important. This means asking the right questions, and seeking methods appropriate to them and to the context in response. The extended livelihoods framework (Chapter 7) is a first step, and combined with Table 2, offers the beginnings of an approach to livelihoods analysis that takes seriously the material political economy of agrarian change and livelihoods. The key point, though, is not to follow this prescriptively but to adapt, invent and change, always with an eye on an integrated analysis that links the particulars of livelihood activities with the wider structural political processes that impinge on them.

It all depends on what we want to achieve. Such an extended

Table 8.1 Methods for an extended livelihoods analysis

Key Question	A Selection of Potential Methods
Who owns what?	Social surveys and maps; wealth/asset ranking
Who does what?	Activity mapping; agricultural and migration seasonal calendars; intra-household cases and gender analysis; biographies and personal narratives; "affective histories" documenting emotions
Who gets what?	Ethnographic and sociological observations; asset ownership surveys; historical/longitudinal analyses of production and accumulation; conflict analysis
What do they do with it?	Income and expenditure surveys; longitudinal asset acquisition and investment analysis; life stories and histories
How do groups interact?	Actor-oriented sociology (interface analysis); institutional analysis; organizational mapping; case studies of conflict and cooperation; village and life histories; gender analysis
How are political changes shaped by ecologies?	Ecological mapping; transect walks; participatory satellite/GIS applications; socio-environmental history; participatory soil surveys; biodiversity mapping; field and landscape histories

livelihoods approach may be useful for researchers interested in linking detailed, context-specific information about livelihoods to wider processes of change. As a policymaker, such information may be helpful for exploring different scenarios of change in macro-policy conditions or institutional arrangements, and for examining their likely impacts on people's livelihoods. As a field practitioner, thinking about the consequences of any intervention in such complex systems can help identify risks, tradeoffs and challenges, and ensure that more inclusive and sustainable outcomes can be realized.

Challenging Biases

Good questions and mixed methods are not the magic wand for improving livelihoods. But asking the right questions, broadening

out analysis and opening up policy debate, certainly help. Despite the rhetorical emphasis on "livelihood approaches" in recent years, development efforts do not have a good track record in improving livelihoods. As Robert Chambers pointed out over thirty years ago in the classic book *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (1983), rural development is steeped in professional biases, leading to top-down impositions and inappropriate projects. Tania Li (2007: 7) points out in her book *The Will to Improve*:

> Questions that are rendered technical are simultaneously rendered non-political. For the most part, experts tasked with improvement exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions. They focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another.

The "anti-politics machine" (Ferguson 1990) of development thus creates multiple biases through the practices and routines of engagement. In areas as seemingly technical as agronomy, political contests over framing can influence methods and outcomes (Sumberg and Thompson 2012).

Can livelihoods approaches, applied in the ways discussed in this book, make a difference? I think the answer is yes. In *Seeing like a State*, James Scott (1998) demonstrates how top-down development can go wrong if it doesn't take into account lived realities in particular contexts. Again and again, we see the same mistakes repeated, sometimes dressed up in a thin veneer of participation and livelihoods rhetoric. But following Chambers' urge to "reverse" thinking in development, what if we turned things on their heads? What if the challenges, provocations and confrontations of the real world impinge? What would it be like to see like a peasant, or pastoralist, or fisher, or trader, or market broker, or labourer, or indeed any one or combination of the huge array of professions and practices pursued by rural people? Things surely would look very different.

In a book on pastoral development in Africa that I co-edited with Andy Catley and Jeremy Lind (2013), we laid out some of the contrasts between "seeing like a development agency" and "seeing

Table 8.2 Seeing like a development agency or a pastoralist?

Livelihood Issue	Views from the Centre (Seeing like a Development Agency)	Views from the Margins (Seeing like a Pastoralist)
Mobility	Pre-sedentarization, nomadism as a stage in the process of civilization	Mobility as essential for modern livelihoods — of livestock, people, labour, finance
Environment	Pastoralist as villain and victim	Responding to non-equilibrium environments
Markets	Uneconomic, weak, thin, informal, backward, in need of modernization and formalization	Vibrant cross-border commercial trade. Informality a strength
Agriculture	The future, a route to settlement and civilization	A temporary stop-gap, but linked to pastoralism
Technology	Backward, primitive, requiring modernization	Appropriate technology, mixing old (mobile pastoralism) with new (mobile phones, etc.)
Services	Simple to supply, but difficult, resistant customers unwilling to take up services	Huge demand for health care and schooling, but requires new forms of mobile livelihood-compatible delivery
Diversification	A way out of pastoralism; a coping strategy	A complement to pastoralism, adding value, gaining business opportunities, a route back to livestock-keeping
Borders and conflict	The edge of the nation, to be controlled and protected. Disarmament, peace building and development required	The centre of extended livelihood and market networks across borders. Long-running clan and inter-clan rivalries

Summarized from Catley et al. 2013: 22–23

like a pastoralist" (Table 8.2). Development actors — state agents, donor officials and NGO project workers alike — repeatedly misunderstand pastoral livelihood contexts across a wide range of factors. Such misperceptions are rife with political, cultural and historical biases, and with geographical dislocations given the long distances from capital cities and centres of power in pastoral areas. The book argues for shifting the gaze from the capital cities to the rural areas, from the centre to the margins and from the perspectives of elite experts to pastoralists themselves.

But taking notice of what local people say should not be simply a populist move. Advocates of participatory development have long promoted the capturing of "indigenous knowledge" (Brokensha et al. 1980) and listening to the "voices of the poor" (Narayan et al. 2000). Starting in the 1980s, participatory appraisal methodologies took off in a big way, supporting a more bottom-up approach to development. Yet too often such efforts have not tackled the underlying poverty dynamics, the patterns of differentiation and the longer-term livelihood trajectories in different settings. A superficial nod to local people's knowledge and capacity is insufficient (Scoones and Thompson 1994). Predictably, without the deeper analysis and challenge to power structures, similar patterns of development emerged, under new labels: a new tyranny in some people's eyes (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

However, livelihoods perspectives of the sort outlined in this book can shift our understanding and lead to different types of action. A shift of focus can change the discursive parameters of the debate: from "seeing like a development agency" to "seeing like a pastoralist," for example. As discussed in Chapter 4, a shift in the narrative around a policy problem can have a huge impact, filtering down to how development is practised on the ground. A more fundamental deliberation on alternative livelihood options — or pathways — can also reveal important tradeoffs. It is immensely revealing to ask who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what do they do with it?

Again in the case of pastoralism, we identified four emerging livelihood pathways in the Horn of Africa, each linked to different dynamics of accumulation and social reproduction (Catley at al.

2013). All were related to different pastoralist classes: from those who were firmly engaged in capitalist market circuits, to those who focused more on traditional mobile pastoralism, to a growing group who had set up businesses or provided labour on the back of the growing livestock economy. Further, there were those who were being forced to seek alternative options outside the livestock economy, and some driven to destitution. A diverse, differentiated picture emerged, with major implications for how development efforts should be prioritized and perceived. Getting beyond the standard categories and the biases — either romanticizing traditional pastoralism or criticizing it — helped present a debate about diverse futures, each with different livelihood configurations, and in turn implications for service support, business opportunity, infrastructure development and policy.

Conclusion

A livelihoods approach galvanized by the right questions and appropriately mixed methods — and sufficiently reflexive around potential biases — can therefore offer a new focus for debate and deliberation. Indeed, it can shift our perspectives and challenge our assumptions, both in relation to epistemological understandings (what we know) and ontological understandings (what is). Deeper understandings rooted in a livelihoods analysis can in turn help inform wider policy questions, including, for example, who are the poor, where do they live, how is poverty experienced and what can be done to reduce it?

Notes

1 First *RRA Notes* then *PLA Notes* have been published by the International Institute for Environment and Development from 1988 onwards.
2 www.santafe.edu/
3 www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/practitioners%E2%80%99-guide-household-economy-approach
4 ftp://ftp.fao.org/.../Vulnerability%20Assessment%20Methodologies.doc
5 www.disasterassessment.org/section.asp?id=22

Chapter 9

Bringing Politics Back In: New Challenges for Livelihoods Perspectives

The importance of bringing politics back into livelihoods analysis has been a recurrent theme in this book. As discussed in Chapter 3, the instrumentalization of livelihoods analysis, through the appropriation of the livelihoods framework in aid agency debates and programme delivery, meant politics were often downplayed or even lost. Given the centrality of institutions, organizations and policies in livelihoods analysis — and the key role of politics in shaping these processes — now is the time to recapture and reinvigorate the political dimensions of livelihoods analysis.

This short book has attempted to do this through various conceptual tools and approaches, and a revamping of the original framework to give this aspect due emphasis. "Bringing politics back in" is certainly a good slogan, one advocated by Chantal Mouffe in her superb, short book *On the Political* (2005). She argues strongly against a simplistic approach to participatory and deliberative democracy, making the point that what she calls "agonistic politics" — conflict, argument, debate, dissent, contest — must always be central to any democratic transformation. Challenging a "post-political" position, she states:

> Such an approach is profoundly mistaken and that, instead of contributing to the 'democratization of democracy,' it is at the origin of many of the problems that democratic institutions are currently facing. Notions such as 'partisan-free democracy,' 'good governance,' 'global civil society,' 'cosmopolitan sovereignty,' 'absolute democracy' — to quote only a few of the currently fashionable notions — all partake of a common anti-political vision which refuses to acknowledge the antago-

> nistic dimension constitutive of 'the political.' Their aim is the establishment of a world 'beyond left and right,' 'beyond hegemony,' 'beyond sovereignty' and 'beyond antagonism.' Such a longing reveals a complete lack of understanding of what is at stake in democratic politics and of the dynamics of constitution of political identities and … it contributes to exacerbating the antagonistic potential existing in society. (Mouffe 2005: 1–2)

But where do such politics lie in a revitalized livelihoods analysis? I want to emphasize four core areas, each of which have been highlighted at various points in previous chapters. These are the politics of interests, individuals, knowledge and ecology. I will elaborate briefly on each below, but together they add up to what I mean by "bringing politics back in" as central to livelihoods analysis. In the final section of this chapter, and indeed the book, I discuss the implications of this more political approach to livelihoods and rural development for organizing and action.

Politics of Interests

We cannot shy away from the fact that livelihood opportunities are shaped by interests and a wider, structural, historically defined politics that influence who we are and what we can do. If you are reading this book, you probably are relatively well off, you are certainly educated, and you likely have livelihood opportunities that many others, of equal intelligence and similar capacities, could only dream of. This privilege emerges from our location, our ethnicity, gender, class and inherited wealth, our access to resources, our history and many other factors besides. The politics of interests are central to the structural features that define our lives. As Karl Marx argued: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

Thus, an analysis of livelihood contexts should not, as discussed earlier, be consigned to a passive listing of the things deemed external that influence local livelihoods. Rather, it requires a much more ac-

tive look at history and the configuration of interests that influence what happens (and what doesn't). This emerges from the six core questions outlined in Chapters 7 and 8 that help us understand local livelihood strategies through a political economy lens. But it also demands our attention to the wider pattern of interest politics that construct policies and institutions, and which in turn affect access to livelihood assets and the pursuit of different livelihood strategies. Thus, policy process analysis focuses on the narratives and associated actor-networks linked to particular interest groups. Equally, socially and politically grounded perspectives on institutions are essential for an understanding of access and opportunity (Chapter 4).

Our understanding of these processes must be located in a wider appreciation of the historical political economy of any particular place. In the context of a period of intense globalization under neoliberalism, the appropriation of resources for livelihoods through commodification and financialization is well documented — whether this is farm land, and the consequent rush for investment (see Chapter 5), or even nature itself, through the acquisition of carbon, biodiversity or ecosystem services rights. The penetration of capital and the wider politics of interests associated with this process are having profound impacts on livelihoods the world over. The basic questions of who owns what and who gains what are as pertinent as ever. Any livelihoods analysis must therefore be rooted in the wider political economy, situating the more micro understanding of place-based livelihood strategies in this wider perspective.

Politics of Individuals

Such a structural, historical, political economy analysis is essential at one level of resolution, but attention to the individuals who make up livelihood systems is equally as vital at another. At various points in this book, I have emphasized actor-oriented approaches and the importance of understanding human agency, identity and choice when thinking about livelihoods. Drilling down to what individual people think, feel and do is a core part of any livelihoods analysis. Focusing on individual behaviour, emotions and responses — rather than on aggregating and homogenizing — could help us come to grips with

the lived realities of diverse livelihoods. Wellbeing emerges, as we saw in Chapter 2, from a diversity of sources. Certainly material factors are important but so are social, psychological and emotional aspects.

Our life-worlds, identities, subjectivities and experiences are central to who we are and what we do. This is associated with an intense personal politics that articulate with the wider structural political economy discussed above. For example, the politics of the body, gender and sexuality are conditioned and shaped by these wider forces, yet they are intensely personal, wrapped up in particular identities. Earlier I highlighted the importance of what Nancy Fraser (2003) terms "the politics of recognition" alongside the more traditional concerns of livelihoods studies focusing on the politics of access, control and redistribution.

An emphasis on the politics of the individual, while not forgetting wider political processes, is another key move for bringing politics back into livelihoods analysis. Thus, weaving such concerns into our understanding of institutions (see Chapter 4) or our definition of livelihood outcomes (see Chapter 2) can substantially enrich and deepen our analysis. Such perspectives highlight the very individual, personal politics of lives, lifestyles and livelihoods in ways that the more technical and instrumental frameworks may ignore. Indeed, personal stories, rich testimonies, affective histories and deep ethnographies (Chapter 8), all informed by the politics of the individual, can extend, challenge and diversify our insights.

Politics of Knowledge

The politics of knowledge is woven through all the discussions of livelihoods across the previous chapters. "Whose knowledge counts?" is a central question for any analysis. Robert Chambers (1997a), for example, asks, "whose reality counts?" Which version of whose livelihood is seen as valid and which is seen as deviant and in need of change have a major impact on policy. Much livelihoods thinking is imbued with assumptions about what makes a good livelihood. A toiling yeoman farmer is seen in many circles as more worthy than someone who gains a living from garbage collection, hunting or sex work, for example. Farmers working on their own land are

seen perhaps as more valued than the workers they employ, who are sometimes invisible and underappreciated. A specialized, professionally focused enterprise creating a singular livelihood is again seen by some as superior to a livelihood constructed across a diversity of sources, and put together through a range of skills and connections in multiple places. The framing of livelihoods is thus important for any analysis but also for unpacking and questioning the institutional and policy imperatives that construct them (Jasanoff 2004).

There is also an intense politics of knowledge at play in the way we measure, count, assess, evaluate and validate livelihoods at the heart of livelihoods methodology. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are a variety of equally valid ways of assessing livelihood outcomes. No single alternative is superior, nor is one more "right" than others. It all depends on normative positions, disciplinary assumptions and contexts for their analysis. Yet in the disciplinary and professional hierarchies that influence development research and practice, a politics of knowledge often operates that deems the narrow, quantitative and measurable as the most valid indicators. These versions of knowledge gain sway in policy circles and are funded, accredited and accepted as valid.

Livelihoods analysis, with its cross-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, integrated approach at its core, must always challenge such assumptions and seek ways of integrating approaches. And it must capture diverse forms of knowledge involving different epistemological frames. For livelihoods analysis, a narrow, disciplinary approach is infinitely poorer and less effective than the opening up of diverse forms of knowledge emerging from different perspectives. Indeed, there is a myth of rigour and validity that shrouds the narrower versions supported and maintained by a particular form of knowledge politics. In fact, by triangulating across diverse forms of knowledge emerging from multiple perspectives, we can enhance rigour and expand insight (Chapter 8).

Gaining insights into livelihood dilemmas from multiple perspectives is certainly a core aspect of any livelihoods analysis. Seeking out the poor, vulnerable, hidden and invisible; challenging the classic rural development biases and being aware of normative assumptions about good and bad that blinker our perspectives are all important

challenges. But what about those whose voices cannot be heard? When considering issues of livelihood sustainability, future generations are vital and must be brought into the conversation in some way, as part of negotiating pathways to sustainability (Chapter 5).

Politics of Ecology

In a period of rapid environmental change and major local and global sustainability challenges that directly impinge on livelihoods, whether climate change, urban expansion, water use or toxic pollution, attention to the politics of ecology is essential. As discussed in Chapter 5, a political ecology approach to livelihoods analysis has long been part of the broader intellectual canvas. The essential point is that ecology and politics have a recursive relationship: ecology shapes politics and politics shape ecology. We ignore these relationships at our peril.

Livelihoods are constructed across dynamic ecological contexts. There is no stable, equilibrial blank slate. Livelihoods must respond to highly variable non-equilibrium environments, to sudden changes and shifts, and to patterns of thresholds and tipping points. We must be aware of limits and boundaries, and how to negotiate and transform them, both politically and socially. Livelihood sustainability is thus concerned with this process of nimble, responsive and informed negotiation. This involves seeking out social and technical innovations and transitions that allow multiple goals to be realized — not exceeding an ecological boundary and maintaining livelihoods within a safe operating space, but also maintaining livelihood opportunities in an equitable and socially just way. This is clearly a political task whereby tradeoffs between livelihood opportunities and ecological boundaries must be negotiated across scales and between generations. It requires a balancing of the directions of livelihood change and the diversity of activities, and how these are distributed.

In the context of globalization, giving rise to the sort of transnational networks that constitute livelihoods discussed in Chapter 4, analyses must cross scales, places and networks. This requires a global political ecology that pays attention to local struggles and

forms of resistance, and to their intersections with wider movements and alliances that link livelihood concerns with environmental and social justice imperatives (Martinez-Alier et al. 2014; Martinez-Alier 2014).

A New Politics of Livelihoods

Across these four dimensions (and no doubt others), a new politics of livelihoods can be created. This new perspective challenges and extends the livelihoods approaches that have become popular in rural development, especially since the 1990s. It injects some new aspects into the analysis, seeking a greater rigour and depth. It also attempts to avoid both the simplifying instrumentalism of some earlier versions, without ending up with an approach that is incomprehensible and impossible to implement. Going beyond simply responding to the bureaucratic requirements of the aid business, such a reinvigorated political conceptualization allows for the generation of a practical political economy, one that is focused on real change at the local level but does not ignore wider structural and institutional politics that shape conditions and possibilities.

The extended livelihoods approach advocated in this book argues for close attention to the local and the particular, appreciating the complexity of people in places. But this has to be complemented with an understanding of the wider, structural and relational dynamics that shape localities and livelihoods. This is a challenge of moving across scales, from the micro to the macro, but perhaps more especially, between analytical frames: between the detailed and empirical (the many determinations) and the more conceptual and theorized (the concrete). In this classical approach to method in political economy, it is these multiple iterations between scales and frames that become important, and that reveal the way political processes structure and shape what is possible and what is not, and for whom. Thus, changes in commodity prices, shifts in terms of trade, the financing of agricultural investments, and political deals far away will impinge on the patterns of livelihoods in diverse localities. These, in turn, will affect processes of social differentiation, patterns of class formation and gender relations — and so livelihoods.

A normative position that takes the side of the marginalized, the dispossessed and the less well-off, and that asserts a vision for improving wellbeing for all, also allows us to locate livelihoods approaches in a wider political project. This is linked to other struggles over rights to food, land, shelter and natural resources, where respect, dignity and the recognition of diverse livelihood identities and possibilities are central. A right to a sustainable livelihood is something worth fighting for, and one that I hope this book has helped to frame intellectually.

Rights struggles, led appropriately by people and their movements , need analytical perspectives that inform, deepen and sometimes challenge. Outlining concepts and methods and linking them to diverse literatures and examples is part of this, and something this book aimed to do, albeit in a relatively few pages. This is not just an academic exercise, in the pejorative sense. While the book has been pitched at the critically engaged student or practitioner, there is clearly an additional translation and dissemination job to be done to extend the thinking herein to more accessible, popular forms, rooting these in examples relevant to different places and different struggles. I hope the readers of this book, wherever you are, will take this next step.

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Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies Series

The message of *Sustainable Livelihoods and Rural Development* is clear: livelihood approaches are an essential lens to view questions of rural development, but these questions need to be situated in a better understanding of political economy. Ian Scoones delves into the history of livelihoods thinking, reflects on the links to studies of poverty and wellbeing and discusses the array of livelihood frameworks and their potentials and limitations.

This is an extraordinarily important book. Concise yet comprehensive, combining and drawing on the perspectives of many disciplines, accessible to all readers, professionally impeccable, and on top of all this, original in its analysis and extension into new fields, this book is a wonderful contribution to development thinking and action.
—Robert Chambers, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

In this uniquely comprehensive, lucid and valuable review of notions of sustainable livelihoods and their applications, Ian Scoones makes a potent argument for reinstating an expansive perspective on livelihoods, informed by the political economy of agrarian change. —Henry Bernstein, University of London

This is a book in perfect balance: immensely useful; it is also challenging; theoretically perceptive, it is wonderfully readable; historically informed, it also looks forward, proposing agendas for scholars and professionals alike.
—Anthony Bebbington, Clark University and University of Manchester

Ian Scoones is a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and director of the ESRC STEPS Centre.

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