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The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

From a psychological perspective

Approaches to Development

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Abbreviations

EU: European Union

DIFD: Department for International Development (UK)

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HDI: Human Development Index

IMF: International Monetary Fond

SL: Sustainable Livelihoods

PPP$: Purchasing power parity

PRA: Participatory Rural Appraisal

RRA: Rapid Rural Appraisal

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

UM: The ministry of foreign affairs in Denmark (in Danish: Udenrigsministeriet)

WB: World Bank

WTO: World Trade Organization

Abstract

This paper discusses what the Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) framework is and how its understanding of poverty and development is necessary in order to sustainably eradicate poverty. It is argued that psychological theories confirm the validity of the basic principle of participation and the understanding of culture in the SL framework. Initially it is stressed that subjective perceptions of own abilities and inclusion of the locals in the entire development process should be emphasised. In this way participation can lead to increased motivation, commitment, and empowerment of the locals. Furthermore it is stressed that taking the differences between North-western and South-eastern cultures into account is important. Moreover that involving the potentials within the local culture, viewing culture as a resource, is possible within the SL framework. It is argued that including all these factors will make successful sustainable development more likely. Finally it is examined whether the SL framework is applied in Danish development strategies today - and why this might be - thus discussing the usefulness of the SL framework.

1. Introduction

The gap between the world's rich and poor countries is widening still, as the 500 richest individuals have a combined income greater than the poorest 416 million (Banik, 2006). Despite several decades of debate on development and inequality in the distribution of global and national resources, it is difficult to spot the radical improvement in poverty reduction. Thus it seems that the attempts to eradicate poverty have been unsuccessful so far. Throughout the last century, reflections on this matter have led to different re-conceptualizations of how to understand poverty and development. Beginning with an understanding of poverty as a lack of economic resources, poverty today is understood as a more multifaceted concept e.g. including social status, health and opportunities to decide over one's life. Also it has been recognized that development has to be done from the perspective of the poor – understanding their subjective perception of what it means to be poor, and what a good life includes (Narayan et al., 2007). If we are to become more successful at reducing poverty, this understanding of poverty and development needs to be incorporated into a theory that can guide the planning of development activities. It will be argued that the Sustainable Livelihoods framework can be seen as such a theory, since it builds on the broader understanding of poverty and development. It is an example of a useful tool for analysing and planning development activities.

Implying a definition of poverty that tries to capture the actual reality of what it is to be poor includes a subjective focus on poverty. This, however, reveals a number of psychological factors that can play a crucial role in enhancing successful development. In this regard psychology as a discipline ought to play an important role in development, because of its specific focus on the human factor. From a psychological perspective it is interesting to find out, whether the principles of the SL framework can be supported by other theories and empirical findings, as well as whether these can help develop and improve the SL framework. These considerations focus on making it more likely that the analysing and planning of activities actually result in development activities that are sustainable, when it comes to reducing poverty.

1.1 Problem statement

These considerations lead to the following focus in our paper:

- What is the SL framework and does it fit the understanding of poverty as a multidimensional concept from the perspective of the local people?
- How can psychological theories confirm the basic principles of the SL framework and help improve it to enhance the possibilities of successful development?
- Is the SL framework applied in the national Danish development strategy - and why?

1.2 Demarcation

When doing development work contemporary experts argue that it is important to remember that even though a good theory is necessary in order to get success, an essential factor is a secure state that is able to support the development activities (Collier, 2007). If the state is not able to or not interested in creating policies and allocating resources to support the different development activities, there is little chance that the activities will continue in the absence of the donors. Therefore efforts to create a secure state will be a prerequisite to start working with other development activities from the SL perspective. However this paper focuses on the actual development activities and how these are analyzed and planned.

The SL framework has a history dating back to the 1980s. During this time it has been discussed and used by different scholars, who have all had an influence on the framework. Furthermore it has been adapted by different organizations to suit a variety of contexts, issues, priorities and applications. Consequently a number of different versions of the framework have emerged over the years, and the definition of SL has been revised accordingly. However we intend to focus on the version of SL that was presented by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in the late 1990s. With their guidance sheets (DFID, 2000) they have developed the most thorough

review of the framework to date. Moreover their material is used to give an introduction to SL at the Eldis website[1], a key international directory of information sources in development and environment.

The focus on participation and culture in our discussion stems from a need to narrow down the extent of our discussion. There are a number of important basic principles in the SL framework, but participation seems to be a central precondition for the entire framework to be successful. Therefore it is important to discuss the actual importance of this factor in sustainable poverty reduction. Culture on the other hand plays a vital role on all levels of the framework, as it influences the individuals as well as the different components in the development process. Therefore a thorough understanding of culture, and how it influences the individuals who are in the center of the SL framework, ought to be essential for the framework to be effective in reducing poverty sustainably.

2. Historical perceptions of poverty

As it was underlined in the introduction, defining poverty is central to the discussion on development. However this is not a straight forward matter, therefore a brief introduction to how poverty has been conceptualized in the past decades of debate on development seems necessary.

The traditional World Bank (WB) definition of poverty focused on income and consumption, as the primary indicators of poverty. In this terminology a 'poverty-line', based on level on income necessary to subsist in a society, would separate rich from poor, and GDP[2] was seen as a way of comparing across countries (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2008). As a reaction to this strict economic way of perceiving poverty the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed the use of additional social indicators to better capture the crucial elements of poverty (Banik, 2006). An example of such an index is the Human Development Index (HDI) based on three indicators: longevity (life expectancy at birth), educational attainment (combination of adult literacy and combined primary, secondary and territory enrolment ratios) and standard of living (measured in PPP\$[3]) (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2008).

With these measures there seems to be a consensus that poverty is a complex concept, and that income is only one of several indicators. But according to recent research there are still obvious limitations to the abovementioned indexes. Most importantly they provide an outsider view on

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[1] http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/dossiers/livelihoods-connect/what-are-livelihoods-approaches
[2] GDP: Gross domestic product is a measure of the overall economic output of a country (Banik, 2006).
[3] PPP\$: Purchasing power parity is a theory of long-term equilibrium exchange rates based on relative price levels of two countries. It is also conceptualized as the real GDP per capita, as it takes into account the cost of living and adjusts for it, as though all income was spent locally (Banik, 2006)

poverty, taking the form of expert explanations, rather than focusing on the people who are actually affected by poverty, trying to get an insider view. The first large scale comparative research effort using participatory methods to gain this kind of subjective knowledge was a WB study conducted in the end of the 1990s, resulting in a three volume publication called 'Voices of the Poor'. This study included 40.000 people in 50 countries, and found that "*the persistence of poverty is linked to its interlocking multidimensionality; it is a gendered, dynamic, complex, institutionally imbedded, and location-specific phenomenon*" (Narayan et al., 2000 p. 7). Based on this definition of poverty, they concluded that "*to develop effective poverty reduction strategies, we must understand poverty from the perspective of the poor and explore the interlocked barriers poor women and men have to overcome.*" (Narayan et al., 2000 p. 7). The participatory paradigm is thus often linked to multidimensional constructs of poverty, where the subjective account of what it means to be poor becomes important. This means that the psychological consequences of poverty get more attention (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2008).

This is where the SL framework becomes useful, because it provides a way to incorporate a systemic and holistic way of describing the factors that affect the livelihoods of the poor - but also highlights the subjective understanding of being poor.

3. The Sustainable Livelihoods framework

SL thinking is inspired by the work of Robert Chambers in the 1980s, and has been further developed by Chambers, Conway and others in the 1990s (DFID, 2000, 1.2). The SL framework is a tool for development work, by highlighting how to understand, analyse and describe the main factors that affect the livelihoods of the poor people. But what is a sustainable livelihood? DFID (2000) states that; "*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required 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.*" (p.1, section 1.1).

The SL framework describes what development dedicated to poverty reduction should focus on to create sustainable livelihoods for the poor (ibid.). The first basic principle is that development work has to focus on *people* – which means that we have to focus on what matters for the poor, how people and their cultures are different, and how this affects the way they understand and appreciate livelihoods. Another principle is that the poor themselves have to be key actors in identifying the important aspects of their own livelihoods. The poor know what matters to them, and outsiders have

to listen to their priorities instead of assuming that their own values and ideas are as good as, or better. It is also a principle that the role of the donors is to be process facilitators that help the poor to be aware of their priorities and analyse their own surroundings for resources. This means that participation and partnership become two very essential factors in development work, and by actively being part of the development work, the poor will be empowered instead of being dependent on outsiders to help them all the time.

The framework also emphasises the principle that there has to be a strong link between macro and micro politics, since these are interdependent. The macro politics are responsible for the main structures and processes in an area and the poor have to adapt to and try to enhance their livelihoods through these. The last basic principle is that development has to have a long-term focus – it is important that the way we develop an area now, will make it sustainable in the future as well (ibid.).

3.1 The Sustainable Livelihoods model in detail

The sustainable framework has been illustrated with a model that makes it easier to understand the different components and their interrelatedness.
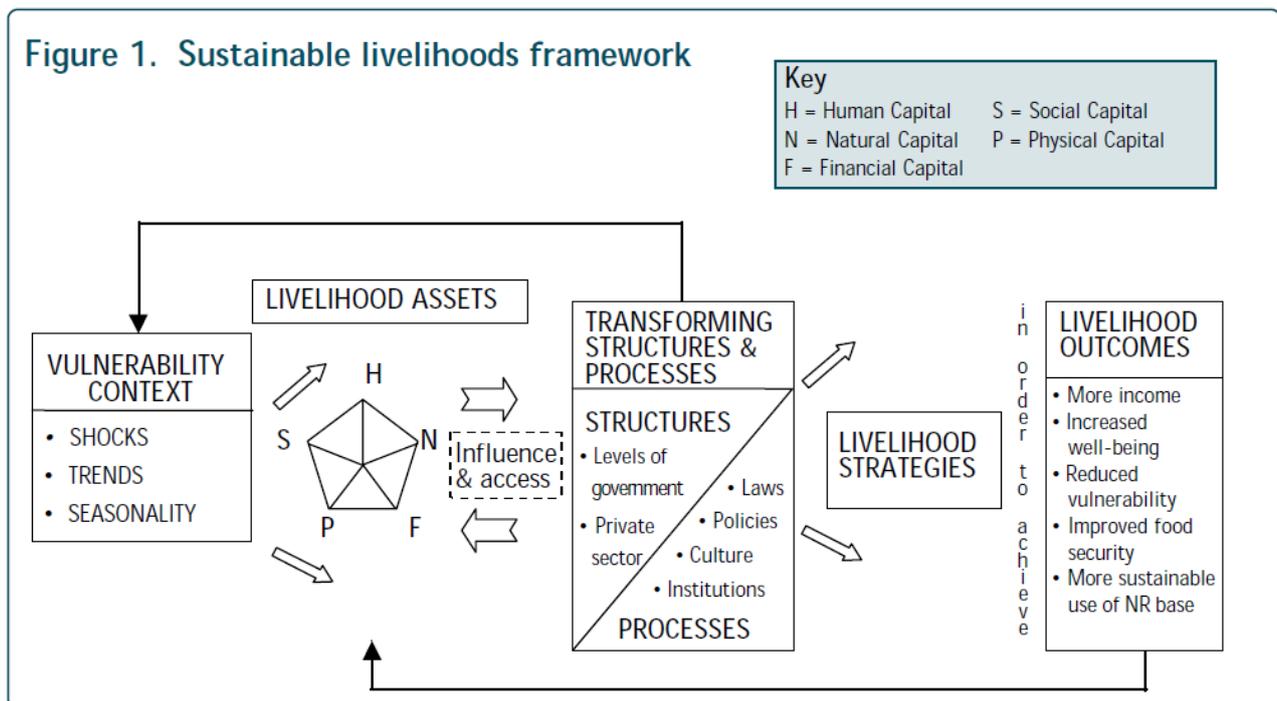

Figure 1. From DFID, 2000 p. 1 section 2.

The **vulnerability context** describes the external environment that the poor people live in. This includes *critical tends*, such as technological trends or population trends. It also includes *shocks* such as natural disasters or economic inflation, and *seasonality* which refers to the way prices,

employment opportunities and production might shift with the seasons. All of these factors will affect the assets that people have and thereby the sustainability of their livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods framework is build on the belief that people need **assets** to achieve a positive livelihood outcome. People have different kind of assets that they combine, to help them achieve the livelihoods that they seek. *Human capital* is one of these assets, and refers to the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health that enable people to achieve their desired livelihoods. Human capital is essential in order to use the other kinds of capitals that exist. *Social capital* refers to the social resources that people can get help from in order to achieve their livelihoods – this could be through networking, membership of formalised groups or mere trust between people that make them help each another. *Natural capital* is to be understood in a very broad manner, since it both covers tangible factors, like natural resources such as trees, land etc., and more intangible products such as the atmosphere and biodiversity. *Physical capital* describes the basic infrastructure and producer goods that are needed to support the livelihoods that people seek. *Financial capital* is the financial resources that people can use to achieve the livelihoods that they are striving for.

Transforming structure and process includes the institutions, organisations and policies that frame the livelihoods of the poor, and they are found on all levels – from the household to the international level. These processes and structures determine the access that people have to different kinds of assets, and therefore the importance cannot be overemphasised. Examples of processes are international agreements, ownership rights and laws to secure the rights of the individuals, whereas structures might be the existence of ministries, banks that give credit to the farmers or self-help groups in the local community. **Livelihoods strategies** are the way that people act in order to achieve their desired livelihood. The access that people have to different kinds of assets affect the strategies that they employ, and the structures and processes in a given society also creates possibilities and constraints on the strategies that people are able to use. Finally **Livelihood outcomes** are the achievements of people's livelihood strategies. However, outcomes are to be described by the local people themselves, since these include much more than income. For outsiders it can be difficult to understand what people are seeking and why because this is often influenced by culture, local norms and values (ibid.).

3.2 What does the model show?

The description of the model shows that the SL framework is a systemic and holistic way of describing the factors that affect the livelihoods of the poor. The framework is an attempt to understand poverty as a multifaceted concept, covering more than just economic growth (Krantz,

2001). Thus it reflects the understanding of poverty that was evident in the WB report discussed in paragraph 2. The framework emphasises that other aspects are important too, such as health, social status and natural resources. These factors have an impact on how people are able to take advantage of the economic opportunities, how they combine assets and thereby what livelihoods they can create. Moreover the description of the different factors show how important it is to include the poor, since they are the ones with the knowledge of the content associated with each factor, and of how the factors affect each other in positive or negative ways.

4. Discussion on participation and culture in SL

In the discussion on participation and culture, it will be discussed how psychological theories and empirical evidence can support the importance of incorporating these factors into development work. However it will also be discussed how psychological theories can improve the understanding of these factors and their importance in successful development.

4.1 Participation

The SL framework describes that participation is a key tool for securing that development is accomplished from the poor's point of view. When the poor are included in the process, their priorities in life and understanding of valuable livelihoods are made clear. Likewise they can give information on more difficult subjects, such as social norms that affect the access different people have to assets, how they value these assets, or which livelihoods strategies they pursue. However from a psychological point of view the most important point in using participatory methods is that it empowers the locals instead of making them dependent on help from outsiders. When local people are included in the entire process of gathering information, analysing it, making choices on where to take action, and implementing the plans, they gain valuable information on how to handle it in the future themselves. This is an important skill in a society when trying to make sustainable development (Krantz, 2001).

4.1.1 Support from psychological theories

How does the psychological theories and research on participation validate the above mentioned assumption on the positive effects of doing development work in a participatory manner?

Motivation and commitment

According to the psychologist Lines (2004) one of the empirically proven effects of participation is that it increases the motivation and commitment of people. In relation to development work this would mean that the poor would be more motivated to make an effort to implement the activities

that have been decided which would make it more likely that the changes will lead to a successful improvement of their livelihoods. Another benefit might be that the poor, due to the increased commitment, will stay in the local area and help develop it, instead of pursuing their luck other places. Glew et al. (1995) also stresses that participation is more likely to have a positive effect when people understand the purpose and agree with the change that is going to happen. When doing development work, it is very likely that the locals agree that development is needed – especially when they themselves have had a say in what kind of development will be the best.

Utilising human resources

In the examples above there have been an assumption that participation will lead to increased motivation which will then result in an increased performance. Another way of understanding the benefits of participation is that participation will lead to a better utilisation of the human resources, which will result in an increased performance (Heller, 2003). It can be argued that the psychological concepts of *self-efficacy* and *learned helplessness* can lead to a better understanding of how to utilize human resources.

In development work a better use of human resources can be seen as the way local knowledge is brought into awareness, when making the locals describe which kind of strategies they employ, what kind of assets they value, and how they combine different kinds of assets. When this kind of knowledge is brought into the decisions on how best to develop sustainable livelihoods for the poor, this might result in more qualified decisions and hence greater success in reducing poverty. However there are some important factors to consider for this to actually happen. Heller (2003) points out that for human resources to be useful, it is necessary that people have the abilities to engage in participation. One mediator in this respect can be the individuals´ perception of their own abilities, which is called *self-efficacy* in psychological terms (Bandura, in Bertelsen, 2005). Self-efficacy in this regard means whether the individual perceives her/him-self as able to contribute with useful information – otherwise he might not speak up during a discussion and valuable information might never be revealed. Self-efficacy can be affected by social norms of who are important and valued in a society, since the way that people in your surroundings engage with you affects your own self-image (ibid). Therefore there is a risk that the people with minimal social capital feel that they are not able to contribute to a discussion, and thus their point of view is not represented. The critical factor is that they might be the voices that are most important to include in the development work, since they are often the ones who are most poor (Narayan et al., 2000).

Another concept that might be interesting to include is *learned helplessness* (Petersen et al., 1993 in Franzoi 2003). This refers to the fact that people, who have experienced not being able to influence their own life, might develop an attitude of hopelessness and passivity, and they will stop engaging in activities that might make their life better. Many people in developing countries, especially the ones who are really poor, might have had a lot of bad experiences, which have promoted an attitude of learned helplessness. If this is the case, they might not bother to participate in discussions and knowledge sharing, since they do not think that it will lead to changes anyway – and again we will not hear the voices of the ones who need change the most.

4.1.2 Recommendations for improvement of the participation concept in SL

So how can the SL framework take self-efficacy and learned helplessness into account? What matters here is that both self-efficacy and learned helplessness can be changed for the better by showing the people that they *do* have useful abilities. Self-efficacy is formed by the role-models that people observe, and by the consequences their behaviour has, and whether they believe that they are able to behave in the same way. The role-models that one pays special attention to are the models that one is similar to (Bandura, in Bertelsen, 2005). For poor and socially disadvantaged people it might be necessary to spend some time showing them examples of other people, like themselves, that have been able to contribute with valuable information, highlighting how they did it. To overcome learned helplessness it would be useful to start out by engaging people in easy activities to show them that they *can* affect their own surroundings. This might be done by showing them exact examples of how they do it, so that they might be able to engage in more in-depth discussions and actually participate later on.

Self-efficacy and learned helplessness point out that participation doesn't necessarily result in an increased utilisation of the human resources (understood as knowledge-sharing that can lead to qualitatively better decisions). For this to happen, the SL framework has to consider not only the local people's objective abilities to engage in participation, but also their subjective perceptions of their own abilities. These subjective perceptions strongly influence whether people engage in an activity or not. This means that the human capital concept has to include subjective perceptions as well as objective descriptions of abilities. It is also important to remember that this part of the human capital will affect what livelihood strategies these people apply, and how they are able to combine assets, making the subjective part of the human capital a very important factor.

4.1.3 Does participation result in increased empowerment of the local people?

Another way of understanding the link between participation and utilizing human resources to increase performance is to empower the human resources to do work more effectively themselves – not just extracting more qualified knowledge from them (Chambers, 1994b). This is exactly what one of the core principles in the SL framework emphasises – stating that participation is important because it will lead to the empowerment of the poor people. But is this really true?

This might depend on how participation is defined and understood. The first point to take notice of is that the concept of participation is not clearly defined. According to Heller (2003) participation can mean two things, one being that people take part in an activity and another being that people have power to affect decision-making. These are two quite different definitions, since the first one does not necessarily contribute to empowerment. When people e.g. are engaged in discussions without getting to affect the themes that will be discussed or which methods for doing it might be best, they do not learn the skills for analysing a situation and deciding how to take action in order to get the wanted information. This means that they will still be dependent on outsiders to do this for them. It seems that the way participation is defined and understood will affect whether it will lead to empowerment or not. However, to understand the definition of participation in the SL framework, it can be useful to look at the history of their participation concept.

4.1.4 History of the participation concept in SL

In the 1980s, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was invented in order to get quick access to information, instead of using the time and cost consuming sample surveys that was normally used for data collection (Chambers, 1994a). When collecting data through RRA methods, locals are included through e.g. semi-structured interviews, mapping and modelling the assets, and transect walks in the area where locals discuss and analyse land zones, soil types etc. Likewise RRA emphasised that biases in the election of participants should be avoided – making sure to include women and the poorest people (ibid). So far this participation fits the idea to include local knowledge, and bring in different perspectives to increase the quality of this knowledge. The problem is that after the data has been collected in this participatory manner, it is taken away for further analysis and action planning by donor agencies or stake holders from the macro level. Therefore this kind of information is called extractive, and corresponds with Heller's definition of participation as taking part in an activity.

In the 1990s Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) gained popularity. PRA is very similar to RRA, but in PRA though, the entire process is kept in the hands of the local – often referred to as

"handing over the stick" (Ellis, 2000). The outsiders will only be process facilitators and the locals will do all the work – collecting data, analysing it and deciding on which actions to take and how. In this way the locals are truly empowered, since they get maximum influence and learn how to do all the processes themselves – making outsiders unnecessary in the long run. This kind of information is called elicitive – since it stays in the hands of the locals and helps enlighten the outsiders on what really matters for the local people. The PRA therefore corresponds to Heller`s definition of participation as influence power.

4.1.5 The participation concept in SL today
So how does the SL framework define and use their concept of participation today? In the description of the SL framework development is supposed to be built on PRA (DFID, 2000). According to Chambers (1994b) though, development work is often described as being done in a PRA-manner, but when looking at actual descriptions and practice this seems like nothing more than neat words because the local people are not empowered at all.

When taking a closer look at the projects, described in DFID (2000) as being conducted from a SL perspective, one sees that extractive information gathering is a lot more common than elicitive. A project on drought and water security is described, and even though the project takes a holistic perspective, focuses on people, not resources, and takes many assets into account, the idea of letting the locals analyse and design is not taken into account. Instead different outsider specialists are engaged, whereby the poor are *not* empowered.

In DFID's (ibid) own description of the SL framework, they argue that both extractive and elicitive methods are useful. They describe; "*This section of the Guidance Sheets is mainly concerned with finding out about livelihoods in order to inform project design, monitor the effects of development activity and evaluate outcomes. It therefore tends to emphasise more extractive methods. It is not about project implementation, nor about ways to ensure that projects involve and empower intended target groups.*" (DFID, section 4.7). DFID is off course right that sometimes it makes sense to extract information in order to use it for e.g. knowledge-sharing other places or proving the results of activities to donors. However their division of when to use which method is problematic. The quote shows that locals will only be empowered in the implementation phase – meaning that they will not be empowered to design or evaluate their own projects, whereby they will still be partly dependent on outsiders. Likewise they will not learn to interact with the macro level, since they are only empowered to make decisions on the micro level. When thinking of the importance that structures and processes created at the macro level have, it is problematic that the locals are not

engaged in these activities, since they might be the key to influencing their own livelihoods in a way that really matters.

Therefore it is questionable whether the SL framework is as empowering in practice and in its own description, as it intends to be in its basic principles. This will have consequences for the actual impact on poverty reduction, since sustainable development depends on the locals being empowered to participate in the process (DFID, 2000).

4.1.5 Recommendations for participation to be empowering

For development work to result in empowerment of the poor, development workers and process facilitators have to cooperate with locals in *all* phases of the development process. This means that the entire process should be in the hands of the locals, giving them maximum influence in order for them to learn how to do all the phases themselves. Even though it can be time consuming in the beginning, the focus should be on creating independence in the long run – making them able to do sustainable development themselves. Chambers (1994b) emphasises that development workers have to abandon their superior attitude, thinking that outsider specialists are always needed to do thoroughly analyses – since studies have shown that local people are good at these activities, when guided by educated process facilitators in the beginning (ibid).

4.2 Culture

As it was evident in the presentation of the SL framework, culture plays a role on many levels in the framework, influencing both the different components in the process and the interaction between them. Therefore a thorough understanding of culture is essential for the framework to be effective in reducing poverty sustainably. However culture is a complex phenomenon and has been defined in numerous ways, depending on the context in which it has been discussed. Likewise it has been seen as both a facilitator and an inhibitor of development, as well as it has frequently been ignored in 'Eurocentric' development strategies (Daskon & Binns 2009). Consequently we find it necessary to stress the importance of an in-depth understanding of the actual interactions between culture, livelihood sustainability and community development.

4.2.1 Support from psychological theories

From a psychological point of view the central aspect of studying culture, revolves around understanding the dialectic relationship between culture and the individual (Heine 2001). One of the leading researchers in this area Harry Triandis defines culture as: "*shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, expectations, norms, roles, self-definitions, values, and other such elements of subjective culture found among individuals whose interaction were facilitated by* shared *language,*

historical period, and geographic region" (Triandis 1993 p. 156). This definition gives an insight into some of the processes though which culture influences the individual. Through socialization culture specifies a way of living that has been proven effective in the past. Thereby providing a set of patterns for living (including attitudes, beliefs, norms etc.) that form a basis for the individual, from which (s)he can construct a perception of him-/herself and of life in general (Rothbaum et al. 2000). This is reflected in the way the SL framework focuses on *people* and on what matters for them. According to this definition of culture what matter to the people would be influenced by the culture in which they live. Thus culture should be seen as fundamental to understanding any of the components in the SL framework, from the vulnerability context over the different capitals to the livelihood outcome. For the individuals that we intend to help through our development initiatives, all of these components are viewed from a specific cultural stand. It influences the individual's perception of right and wrong, of his/her possibilities, personal resources and environmental resources.

Moreover this view on culture supports the way the framework focuses on the multidimensional constructs of poverty, because it revolves around the subjective account of what it means to be poor that we encountered in paragraph 2. Not only relying on the poor for the definition of poverty, but also inviting them into defining, what development is and how it can be achieved.

4.2.2 Recommendations for improvement: Culture as a resource

Being aware of the local culture, and of what it means for the individuals that are to be empowered through the SL framework, can have a major impact on the way one views the components in the framework and thus on the livelihood outcome.

The most obvious impact is related to the livelihood assets or capitals. As it was underlined in the presentation of the SL framework the human capital is essential in order to benefit from any of the other capitals. Furthermore as we have seen in the previous paragraph, culture has a major influence on the skills and knowledge that the individual has been socialized to have. Drawing on this knowledge one would be able to recognize that the human capital that is valuable to a person in a rural village, would vary tremendously from that of a person in a city. Recognizing the skills and knowledge of the people, the framework is supposed to help, thus provides an opportunity for them to be the experts and to use what they value as a starting point for securing sustainable livelihoods. Therefore the SL framework might benefit from not only recognizing culture as part of the 'transforming processes' that determine the access that people have to assets, but also to view culture as a resource for the individuals within the framework.

The usefulness of this attitude has been confirmed by a recent field work in Sri Lanka, exploring the importance of cultural values in attaining rural livelihood sustainability (Daskon & Binns 2009). This research demonstrates how the SL framework can be applied as a pragmatic approach under which cultural knowledge and traditions can be explicitly treated as resources in the context of achieving sustainable community development (ibid. P. 2).

This is an argument that has been recognized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in a large report on the relationship between culture and development. They concluded that "*unless economic development has a cultural basis it can never lead to truly lasting development. Culture is 'not' something 'to be taken into consideration'. It is fundamental*" (UNESCO, 1995, p. 1). As this conclusion points out, in practice culture may often have led to a lack of understanding, and has therefore been pointed out as something that has to be taken into consideration, if it is not to become an obstruction to development. Within the SL framework this however does not necessarily have to be the case. The people centred focus of this framework, and the principle of the poor people themselves having to be key actors in identifying the important aspects of their own livelihoods, allow culture to be perceived as a positive thing that can lead to creativity in the process of securing sustainable livelihoods. Therefore we recommend that this is made more explicit in the framework.

4.2.3 Culture resulting in differences

Beyond these positive aspects, where culture is understood as a resource, there are also other aspects that can contribute to and possibly improve the existing use of culture in SL. For example the abovementioned definition underlines the fact that cultures vary from one geographical region to another. Even though this is not a new insight, it seems to be frequently ignored in the planning and practical application of development work (Daskon & Binns 2009). Even the SL framework doesn't explicitly attend to this factor.

Early scholars, such as Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), presented an overall framework for understanding how cultures differ across geographical regions. One of these differences is the distinction between individualism and collectivism. These orientations were perceived as opposite poles on one dimension, fostering independent and interdependent selves respectively (Markus & Kitiyama 1991). In this frame of reference the North American and Northern European cultures would be defined as individualistic while the Asian, African and South American cultures would be defined as collectivistic. Thus this would indicate a cultural clash in the prototypical development work, where independent North-western donors operate in South-eastern countries. In regions

where the majority of the people could be defined as being interdependent, living by values, norms and attitudes in line with a collectivistic way of thinking.

The fundamental difference between individualism and collectivism according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) is that collectivism is related to being born into extended families, which continue to protect the individual in exchange for loyalty during an entire life. And that on the other hand individualism is related to everyone growing up to look after him-/herself and to some extent the immediate nuclear family. This leads to a range of differences, a few of which are listed in table 1, focusing on the most relevant in relation to the SL framework.

Individualism	Collectivism
Children learn to think in terms of "I"	Children learn to think in terms of "we"
Speaking one's mind is considered important	Harmony should be maintained and direct confrontations avoided
Hiring is supposed to be based on skills and rules only	Hiring decisions take ingroup (e.g. family) into account
Task prevails over relationship	Relationship prevails over task
Everyone is supposed to have a private opinion	Opinions are determined by group membership
Self-actualization by every individual as ultimate goal	Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goals
Relationship employer-employee is a contract based on mutual benefit (metaphor: market)	Relationship employer-employee is perceived in moral terms (metaphor: family)

Table 1. Based on Hofstede & Hofstede 2005.

Despite these differences between prototypical individualist and collectivist cultures later research has shown that the constructs can coexist within every culture and are merely emphasised differently (Triandis 1993, Kağitçibaşi 2007). This means that within each culture you will find both collectivistic and individualistic tendencies, which will typically be expressed on the individual level. That means that there will be individuals within each culture that stand out. For example research shows that resource availability seems to be curvelinearly related to individualism, as both upper class and extreme poverty is associated with individuality in all societies (Triandis 1993). Furthermore the general tendency following globalization is that individualistic values and tendencies seems to be exported to varies corners of the earth, partly because of the larger exposure to mass media (ibid. 171). In this way culture can be perceived as an ever changing phenomenon, with a range of features influencing the individual in different ways.

Even though the SL framework allows perceiving culture as a positive value in attaining livelihood sustainability, this aspects of culture reveals that the actual partnership between people from

different cultures still present a range of challenges. According to the aforementioned definition of culture, it shapes not only attitudes, beliefs, and norms, but also expectations and values. This means that it could also be seen to have a huge effect on the concept of participation that was discussed in paragraph 4.1. Therefore we recommend that the SL framework make use of the understanding of these differences.

4.2.4 Culture and participation

As it was argued in the discussion on participation, including the locals in the entire process of gathering information, analysing it, making choices on where to take action, and implementing the projects, is key to the SL framework. It is meant to increase motivation and commitment of the people and lead to a better utilisation of the human resources. However cultural factors might influence, whether this way of being included in the process is valued and how participation is understood. Turning to the aforementioned differences between individualistic and collectivistic tendencies (table 1) this becomes evident. For example from an individualistic point of view you might argue that participation in the entire process requires that everyone dares to speak up, and be honest about what is on one's private opinion – even though it might lead to confrontations. Furthermore focusing on the task would be considered important, and the relationship between the different agents in the process would be seen as contract based, only prevailing as long as it is mutually beneficial. However from a collectivistic point of view, participation would be viewed very differently. When harmony and consensus are ultimate goals, confrontations are avoided and it might seem to someone form an individualistic culture that people are not being honest about their private opinion. But what might be going on is that relationship is considered more important than the task and that participation therefore get's a more relational character.

It can be argued that the SL framework would benefit from understanding culture in this way. But how is that possible? One way could be to recognise that The North-western and South-eastern representatives meeting in development work would be influenced by individualism and collectivism respectively, thus implying qualitatively different values. Consequently the North-western representative might have one set of expectations and values connected to the partnership, and how to interact, while the South-eastern representative has a total different premise to enter the partnership.

However as underlined in paragraph 4.2.3 a dichotomised understanding of the differences between North-western and South-eastern cultures, as being purely individualistic and collectivistic respectively, might be too simplifying. There is a risk that this line of thinking can end up causing

more harm than good. In case the different agents within the SL framework enter the partnership with a prototypical idea about how people from "the other culture" typically act and think, it can result in not meeting the actual human beings that participate in the process. Therefore being aware that culture is a complex matter, and that it influences the individuals and the different components in the SL framework in diverse ways, is key to achieve the much needed positive outcomes.

4.2.5 Recommendations in relation to culture in the SL framework

Based on this discussion on culture and the influence on the SL framework it can be concluded that culture is indeed a complex matter. Therefore the first recommendation is to gain a thorough understanding of culture and the way it influences both the individuals and the different components in the SL framework. Thus neither ignoring cultural resources nor the cultural differences between the different agents represented in development work.

It is recommended to draw upon the resources of the culture in which development projects are implemented - something that the SL framework allows, but that can be further elaborated.

Furthermore this discussion has shown that the cultural differences can become an obstruction to development in at least two ways. One is if they are ignored, and therefore lead to a lack of understanding, different expectations, and so on. But on the other side emphasizing the differences too much, relying on prototypical ideas about the other culture, instead of trying to understand the individuals participating in the process, can be just as harmful. Therefore it is vital to find a way to perceive and think about partnership in a cultural sensitive way. This might be done by explicitly matching the different expectations within the group and to pay attention to these different expectations within the entire process of securing sustainable livelihoods. Holding in mind both the resources and challenges of culture.

5. Discussion of the usability of the SL framework

So far the paper has shown that the understanding of poverty and development within the SL framework is supported by psychological theories, even though there are also elements in the framework that leaves room for improvements. But how widely applied is the SL framework when looking at major development strategies like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Paris Declaration that have impacted the Danish Development strategy? And why might this be?

5.1 Has SL been used in shaping Danish development strategies?

Since the SL framework has been developed, there have been a number of attempts to formulate strategies and goals for development that are supposed to affect the way we analyse, conceptualize

and plan development, within the development community in Denmark. The most recent development strategy was published in 2010, and in many ways rely on previous strategies such as the Millennium Development Goals (OECD, 2000) are the Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005). These attempts to formulate strategies and goals for development in the past ten years are all concerned with eradicating poverty in one way or the other, but their conceptualizations of poverty are not entirely in line with the overall progress in understanding poverty, that is evident in the SL framework.

The MDGs were agreed upon subsequently to the United Nations Millennium Declaration in New York, September 2000, and has been one of the major macro-political forces that have influenced the way poverty has been conceptualized in the 2000s (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2008). They consist of eight goals and have been adopted as a framework for the development activities of over 190 countries (UN, 2008). The overall purpose of these goals is to eradicate poverty, and the first target under the first goal is to halve the number of people whose income is less than one dollar a day ($1 PPP) (OECD, 2000). This numerically specified indicator can lead to questioning the intrinsic worth when it comes to capturing the multidimensionality of poverty (Saith, 2006).

The Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005) on aid effectiveness is another international agreement to which over one hundred Ministers, Heads of Agencies and other Senior Officials have agreed, and it was meant to aid in accelerating the achievement of the MDGs (ibid.). An overall strength of this declaration is that it builds on partnership commitments, focusing on ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability (ibid.). This means than instead of the donor/recipient terminology, where development is mostly about providing what is missing, the partnership terminology gives an opportunity to fundamentally address the underlying causes (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2008). This however necessitates that the terminology is put into actual practice, with the partners meeting at the same level, having the same say in decision-making and genuinely working together.

The most recent strategy for development, the Danish Development Strategy (UM, 2010), in many ways builds on the two above mentioned approaches to development, and in this way incorporates both limitations and advantages from these. The MDGs are given a central role in the way this strategy conceptualizes poverty reduction, which means that there is a focus on economic development. Furthermore the terminology from the Paris Declaration becomes apparent when partnership is given a central role as well. But this terminology seems mostly to be used when it comes to international partnerships with other and larger players in the aid-business; UN, EU, WB,

IMF, WTO etc. (ibid.). Something that separates this strategy from the other two is a thorough emphasis on *freedom* throughout the entire document: "*Freedom from poverty – freedom to change*" (ibid.). In this way it seems to be capturing the fact that poverty is more than just a matter of income.

However this analysis reveals that even though these strategies are all concerned with eradicating poverty, and that they to some extent capture the social aspects of poverty, they all seem to lack vital aspects, when it comes to placing people at the centre of development and understanding poverty from a subjective point of view. This is where the SL framework could have been useful.

5.2 Why has SL not been used?

Considering that the SL framework does not seem to be applied in the national Danish Development Strategy, it becomes interesting to consider why. Since the SL framework has been subject to a lot of debate concerning the usability of it, these critiques might be a way to shed light on this matter. Thus this section will discuss some of these critiques and their validity.

5.2.1 Too many components?

One of the critiques is that there are too many components to address, which make it impossible to go into depth with any of these, hence making the framework too broad and superficial to actually help design and analyse anything (Clark and Carney, 2008). However, the proponents advocate that the framework is meant as a holistic overview of which factors might be beneficial to include in any given development activity, and how these factors cannot be analysed without considering some of the other components, e.g. how a process like the law of ownership rights affects the assets that can be made available to the local people (Krantz, 2001).

Therefore it seems that the first critique might be less relevant than another critique, pointing out that the SL framework is mainly suited as an analytical tool, since its force lies in creating a holistic analysis of the entire situation. Therefore using it in the implementation phase has proven less successful, since it has no guidelines of how to do this, and because implementation requires the effort to be focused on a few areas (Clark and Carney, 2008). The concept of making everything as simple as possible is important in the implementation phase, making the many components in the SL framework difficult to handle. So even though the proponents are right in pointing out the importance of considering all the components in the analysis, this might not be the case in the implementation phase. This emphasises the fact that SL is a useful tool, but that it cannot stand on its own when designing and implementing development activities.

5.2.2 Advocating for cross-sectoral work

Another critique concerning the usability of the SL framework is that the organization of practical development work does not match the cross sectoral approach that the SL framework advocates for (Clark and Carney, 2008). SL stresses that development has to have a holistic focus, understanding the interrelatedness of the different components, and therefore collaboration between sectors is important to make sustainable solutions. In practical development work though, activities are often coordinated within a single sector, making it difficult to cooperate between sectors. This has been used as an argument for not applying the SL framework (ibid.). On the other hand if the different components really are interdependent then it is essential to cooperate between sectors in order to understand how different activities affect each other.

Thus there seems to be a dilemma. On one hand the SL framework is built upon insights about poverty and development that seem to analyse the understandings and causes of poverty in a beneficial way, and on the other hand these insights are not reflected in development practice, due to the practical arrangements of development work. Insights from psychological systemic theories might be useful to shed light on this dilemma. Systemic theories describe two kinds of changes: a change of 1. order is a change that happens within the structures and processes in a given system. A change of 2. order though, is a change that changes the way the entire system is build (Hansen, 2002). Since the arrangements of the practical development work does not leave room for cross-sectoral work, then maybe the sector system itself has to be changed, which would imply a change of 2. order. Creating structures and processes that are better at implementing the newest insights on poverty and development might be done by making it easier to collaborate between sectors. And if that could improve and make development activities better and more sustainable, it might be a better idea, than dismissing the idea of holistic cross-sectoral work.

5.2.3 Too much focus on the micro level?

Opponents have also stressed that the framework puts too much emphasis on the micro level, e.g. the local community, instead of focusing on the macro level, e.g. the state or the international society (Krantz, 2001). When thinking of the components 'structure and processes', it is understandable that the macro level is very important to include, since many structures and processes on the micro level are shaped by the laws, regulations and institutions that are decided and founded on the macro level. Therefore it might not have any real impact working on the micro level, since many changes have to come from above. Thus, in a country with corruption, a weak state capacity, and a poor functioning infrastructure, interventions on the micro level have little

hope of being sustainable once the project period is over, because of the interrelatedness of the macro and the micro level (Collier, 2007). One of the basic principles in the SL framework, that the development and poverty reduction should be sustainable, is therefore undermined before even starting. Nevertheless, proponents of the SL framework describe that what makes SL useful is that it shows, how the micro and macro levels are interrelated, and that one has to consider both when trying to develop more sustainable livelihoods (Krantz, 2001). However, one might say that even though the SL framework is a useful tool for pointing out the interrelatedness between micro and macro levels, it does not give any guidelines for actually changing the politics on macro level, in order to ensure the sustainability of the interventions on micro level. Thus the SL framework can be seen as a useful tool to analyse and plan development activities, but not as the solution to all problems, especially not in countries with a weak state capacity that undermines the sustainability of the development activities.

6. Conclusion and beyond

The presentation of the SL framework has shown that in many ways it is a useful tool for conducting development work with an understanding of poverty as a multidimensional concept and from the perspective of the locals – insights that seem essential in order to be successful at eradicating poverty. Even though psychological theories support some of the basic principles of the SL framework, the discussions have proven that SL still leaves room for improvements. From a psychological point of view, the importance of including an understanding of people's subjective abilities in the human capital factor has been stressed, as well as including local people in all phases of the development work, if empowerment is really going to happen. Furthermore the importance of gaining a thorough understanding of culture and the way it influences both the individuals and the different components in the SL framework has been stressed. On this note it has been argued that both cultural resources and the cultural differences can have an impact on the sustainability of development.

When looking at development strategies like the MDGs and the Paris Declaration and their influence on the Danish Development Strategy, the basic principles from the SL framework does not seem to be reflected. The discussion on the usability of the SL framework has shown that this might stem from critiques concerning the usefulness of the framework in practical development work. The critiques point out that practical experiences have shown that the SL framework is best suited as an analytical tool and as a tool to put focus on the interrelatedness between components

and between the micro and macro levels. However, it lacks guidelines on how to implement activities and intervene on the macro level, therefore incorporating other tools when working with the SL framework is necessary. On the other hand it seems that the practical approach to development work might benefit from a reorganisation in some respects. The basic principles from the SL framework offer important insights on this matter, some of these being implementing a more cross-sectoral approach, being people centred, and applying a multidimensional conceptualisation of poverty.

In conclusion it is motivating to discover that psychology can be used to analyse and even improve development theories, and in that way be a valid voice in the debate on development and inequality. However, as it has become evident through the discussions on the SL framework, like any other theory, psychological theories cannot stand alone. A holistic approach to development, considering economic, social, subjective factors and the practical realities, is needed if we are ever to see the improvement in poverty reduction.

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