

Sustainable Livelihood Approaches – From the Framework to the Field

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Abstract

Sustainable livelihoods approaches (SLAs) build on the best practice of development professionals over many years in addressing poverty and empowerment issues. The 1997 White Paper on International Development committed DFID to ‘policies and actions, which promote sustainable livelihoods’. As a result, DFID has adopted and developed the SLAs as an approach as a means of achieving poverty elimination.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office (SLSO) has helped to share DFID’s experiences and develop practical partnerships using SLAs within DFID and with civil society, governments, development agencies and the private sector in the context of pro-poor programmes.

The CIDT has been directly involved in this process, both within DFID and externally with their partners. Commissions from DFID have included:

- A series of four fora for UK Consultants in 2000
- A series of eight overseas training workshops, ‘Away from the Framework and into the Field’, in 2000-2001 for DFID staff and project partners
- A series of six themed Sustainable Livelihoods Seminars for UK consultants and development professionals in 2001-02

The process of dissemination and method of engagement have evolved to reflect changes taking place in DFID and the needs of the participants themselves. Important lessons are drawn from each of these series of events that highlight the challenges faced in the adoption of approaches such as SLA by project partners and development professionals.

Introduction and Background

Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLAs) build on the best practice of development professionals over many years in addressing poverty and empowerment issues (see box 1). The 1997 White Paper on International Development committed DFID to ‘policies and actions, which promote sustainable livelihoods’. As a result of this, DFID has adopted and developed this approach as a means of achieving poverty elimination.

In the light of demands arising from the 1997 White Paper, which had a clear focus on poverty reduction and the need to change the way in which DFID works to achieve these changes the DFID Sustainable Livelihood’s Support Office (SLSO) was set up. Over the past three years the SLSO’s remit has been to support and co-ordinate resources that help with the implementation of SLAs across DFID and with external partners (Multilateral and bilateral agencies, consultants, and Non Government Organisations and Civil Societies).

Box 1 The DFID Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) approach

The DFID SL approach is one of a number of conceptual frameworks which take an asset/vulnerability approach to analysis of the livelihoods of poor people. It emphasises understanding the vulnerability context and the organisational and institutional environment within which poor people draw upon assets of different types in order to implement a livelihood strategy. It defines five types of asset: human capital, social capital (the ability to draw on support through membership of social groups), natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital.

The strengths of the approach are that it aims to reflect the complex range of assets and activities on which people depend for their livelihoods, and recognises the importance to poor people of assets which they do not own. It provides a framework for addressing the whole range of policy issues relevant to the poor, not just access to health and education, but issues of access to finance, markets, and personal security. It emphasises sustainability, with a people centred and participatory approach, responsive to changing circumstances, and capable of working at multiple levels from national to local, in partnership with public and private sector.

Adapted from Norton and Foster (2000)

One specific role of the SLSO over the past three years has been to help share experiences and develop practical partnerships using SLAs.

The objective of the SLSO training and dissemination strategy¹ programme has been to ensure that key stakeholders within and outside DFID have the knowledge, understanding and skills to apply the SL approach. It did not aim to supplant existing training and staff development programmes – rather the aim was to establish a

¹ There is a thin and rather artificial line between dissemination and training. Working definitions used here regard dissemination as ensuring information reaches those who need it. Training is about imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills, so is somewhat deeper. In many ways, neither word reflects well the approach outlined in DFID’s dissemination strategy document, much of which is based on sharing of information, learning by doing and facilitation of self-learning.

common understanding of the SL approach among key stakeholders as quickly as possible.

The CIDT has been directly involved in this process, both within DFID and externally with their partners. Commissions from DFID have included:

- A series of four fora for UK Consultants in 2000
- A series of eight overseas training workshops, ‘Away from the Framework and into the Field’, in 2000-2001 for DFID staff and project partners
- Two further training courses under separate contracts
- A series of six themed Sustainable Livelihoods Seminars for UK consultants and development professionals in 2001-02

This paper reflects upon recent experiences and the process of dissemination. The methods of engagement have evolved to reflect changes taking place in DFID and the needs of the participants themselves. Important lessons are drawn out from each of these series of events that highlight the challenges faced in the adoption of approaches such as SLA by project partners and development professionals.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES CONSULTANTS FORA

Background

In November 1999 the CIDT was requested by the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office at DFID to organise and facilitate a series of events aimed at sharing ideas on SLAs with consultants. With a view to ensuring the practical application of SLAs in development programmes, the purpose of the events was that DFID consultants should have the knowledge and understanding to apply SLAs in development.

Needs assessment

From a list of consultants frequently used by DFID² a sample of 100 consultants were contacted and asked to complete a brief electronic questionnaire. Forty six fully completed replies were received. Summaries of the responses given to two of the key questions asked are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1 - Summary of responses to the question “What would you hope to get out of a consultants 1 day forum?”

Comment	Number of responses*
Definition of SLA/Key concepts/terminology/what’s different?	26
Skills required	15
DFID’s policy	18
What DFID expects in practice	12
Exchange ideas/experience	11
Experience from the field/practical application	12
Guidance on practical application	8
Application to institutional strengthening	4
How to measure/monitor, especially in long term	4

* *Multiple responses*

² Provided by DFID Contracts Branch

Table 2 - Summary of responses to the question “What is your level of Exposure to Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches”

Level of Exposure	Number of respondents
None	3
Limited	16
Some	5
Good	12
Substantial	4
Ideas but not practice	6

The overall feedback from the questionnaires indicated that the three main areas of interest for potential participants at an event were:

1. definitions of what is meant by SLAs and an analysis of what is different about SLAs,
2. a demand for practical examples from the field.
3. understanding DFID’s approach to SLAs

The questionnaire also indicated that many consultants still considered themselves to have only a limited understanding of, or exposure to, SLAs.

Organisation

In the light of the needs assessment data an SLA organising committee determined the main objectives and focus for the one-day events. Likewise this committee discussed the content for the day, selected speakers and discussed appropriate presentation styles. As a result, a programme was put together that placed considerable emphasis on understanding where SLAs have come from, what the underlying principles are, and understanding the DFID SL framework.

Working through practical examples in any detail at an introductory event such as those proposed was not considered appropriate. Whilst the need to illustrate SLAs in practice was recognised by the committee, it was felt that a one-day forum could not cover all the issues and do justice to a case study approach. Instead, a number of case studies were written up and provided in the participants’ information packs.

The four one-day Sustainable Livelihood’s Fora for Consultants were held between May and October 2000. The details of the fora are presented in Table 3 below

Table 3 The Four Sustainable Livelihoods Consultants Fora

Date	Location	No of participants
9th May 2000	London	39
14th June	Oxford	49
21st September	London	52
5 th October	Edinburgh	47

Methodology

Introduction

Each event opened with a welcome and a brief introduction to the day and its objectives. This was followed by a session presented by a DFID staff member setting SL within the context of overall DFID policy.

Understanding the need for and importance of SLAs.

In order to address the issue of where SL approaches have come from and how they differ from other development approaches, a session was held covering the history of the evolution in thinking that the SLA represent. It was stressed that SLAs build upon the lessons learnt from past experience and draws upon best practice from many different disciplines, approaches and sectors. For participants new to the approach, this session proved particularly useful in understanding the evolution in thinking. This was an important session as it reassured many who had felt that SL were being promoted as a substitute for other approaches, the implication being that all that had gone before were somehow flawed. In the final forum held in Edinburgh, a historical timeline of development approaches dating back to the 1960's was developed in a participatory manner to demonstrate the constantly evolving nature of development thinking, and to show how SLAs have built upon earlier approaches.

What is a Livelihood?

The next session focussed on the meaning of the term “livelihood”. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon their own livelihood strategies, thinking about their access to different capital assets and the dynamic way in which these are managed in order to sustain a livelihood. This was a lively and participatory session.

Core elements of SLAs

This session explored the core elements and principles of SLAs and then went on to examine the context within which we try to manage our livelihoods, looking at the vulnerability context and the policy environment. By the end of the session participants had worked through the DFID SL framework. This session continued to engage participants through the presenter's interactive style.

The Sustainable Livelihoods website explained

The final session of the morning, introduced participants to the Livelihoods Connect website managed by IDS on behalf of DFID. The key message arising from this session was that the website is viewed as a learning platform from which it is hoped experiences will be shared freely. A questionnaire was circulated to all participants to ask how the website might be most useful to them. The presentation raised a number of questions concerning accessibility, particularly for partners overseas. Many suggestions were made as to how the site could meet users' needs.

Group Discussion

In the afternoon participants broke up into discussion groups each group comprising a SL resource person and a facilitator in order to address a number of questions. Some of these were:

- What are the strengths and challenges of the SL approach
- What are the implications of the SLA for consultants?
- What does it mean for me?

- Where next?

These questions were raised to prompt discussion and were not always covered by all groups. A number of questions and challenges for DFID were also raised. Some of the key recurring themes discussed within the groups, and more generally throughout the day, are presented in Allison (2000).

At the end of the discussion group period, summaries of key points were presented to all participants in gallery format for them to browse during coffee break. The summaries were circulated to all participants after the events.

Institutionalising SL approaches

In the penultimate session a presentation on the process of institutionalising SL approaches within DFID and other international organisations was made. This session clarified many practical questions that participants had with regard to the extent to which the approach is becoming mainstreamed within DFID and other organisations. Many comments and questions that arose during the fora concerned the degree to which DFID is changing in order to embrace and operationalise SL approaches.

Wrap Up

The Head of the DFID's SLSO, concluded each forum with a "wrapping-up" session highlighting some of the key issues raised during the day and addressing particular concerns and comments made by participants during the day.

Evaluation

To conclude, participants were asked to evaluate the day answering three questions:

- How valuable has the day been to you?
- What would you change for a similar event?
- What follow up would be helpful to you?

Box 2 presents the summary of the feedback from the final event held in Edinburgh.

Box 2 Feedback comments from the last For a held in Edinburgh:

How valuable has the day been to you?

Most participants found the day useful for a number of different reasons, the principle ones being; hearing about SLA from a DFID perspective, helping to pull together existing ideas, the excellent networking opportunities offered, and having an opportunity to discuss issues with other consultants

What would you change for a Similar Event?

There was a plea for a more practical approach using case studies and inviting more practitioners from the field, from DFID and other organisations. Some participants suggested that more time should be given over to group discussion and that this would have been more successful in smaller groups. Monitoring and Evaluation issues, particularly the setting of indicators, would be one area that participants would like to see tackled in more detail.

What follow up would be helpful to you?

Participants requested that follow up events might include smaller group discussions covering practical examples. Other suggestions included the provision of training materials and manuals and more fora/opportunities for information sharing. There was also a call for those involved in DFID research programmes to address what SL means in practice for research work and how to prepare proposals.

Examination of the feedback from all four for a clearly demonstrated that the majority of participants found the day either “useful” or “very useful”.

Apart from the huge number of comments that participants made with respect to the usefulness of the day, it is worth highlighting here a sample of the positive indicators of success of the fora:

Indicators of success

- forum were so enthusiastic about the event that they recommended colleagues to attend the remaining three events.
-
- first forum in London and others made the journey from London and the South West to participate in the final event held in Edinburgh.
- oversubscribed.
-

Conclusions

A total of 187 consultants/development practitioners from 79 different organisations participated in the four events. Participants came from a range of backgrounds and disciplines. There was a particularly strong showing from consultants working in the natural resources sector. Engineering, urban development and transport were also represented but there were disappointingly few participants from the social development, health and education sectors.

Some of the key conclusions to come out of the events were:

- The fora were successful and there was a need to build on the success. Many consultants stated that they would like to participate in future events covering some of the key SLA elements in more detail and would welcome the opportunity to work through real SLA case study examples. It was recommended that a series of further events should be organised during the next year. It was recommended that these should focus on using SLA tools for analysis, SLA case studies, the setting of indicators and monitoring and evaluation.
- Some consultants were concerned by the apparent “gap” that still existed between the practical management and implementation implications of adopting SLAs, and the way in which they often felt obliged to work, e.g. being bound by contractual agreements that are not conducive to flexible and process approaches. It was recommended that DFID fund a study to examine this issue. It was felt that examples of SLAs and best consultancy practice should be a useful output of this study.

- Many consultants stated that they would like to have seen other areas of DFID taking a similarly proactive stance on communicating new ideas and ways of working to DFID partners and consultants. It was recommended that the fora report be widely circulated within DFID and that attention be drawn to this important issue.
- The demonstration of the Livelihoods Connect Web site was very much appreciated by many of the consultants attending the fora. Experience sharing and lesson learning from practical experience were raised as key areas of interest. In the spirit of lesson learning it was recommended that the report from the fora be made available to the consultants and a wider audience by placing it on the Livelihoods Connect Web site.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES TRAINING WORKSHOPS

In a review of the SLSO in early 2000³ it was recommended that:

- the SLSO should ensure that an SLAs training product is developed and that this should be available for DFID staff to use anywhere at any time – in the field for training to DFID staff, for host agency personnel, consultants, etc.
- support and facilitate experience-sharing workshops for those working in SLAs;
- act as effective presenters on SLAs issues and as general change management support specialists

In the context of these recommendations, in September 2000, a CIDT led consortium of development organisations and trainers was awarded a contract to develop and deliver a series of SL training events under the contract “Sustainable Livelihoods – Away from the Framework and into the Field” Training for DFID Professional Staff Overseas⁴.

Over the next six months a series of short training courses for DFID staff and counterparts were conducted in Bangladesh, Brazil (4), Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Monseratt and South Africa. In addition two courses have been conducted in Egypt and in Bolivia.

The Overall Aim of each of these training courses was that participants develop an understanding and appreciation of the Sustainable Livelihoods approach and how it might be applied to enhance the achievement of DFID Programmes and Projects goals, purpose and outputs.

The Specific Aims were to

- Foster a common understanding of the key principles and concepts that underpin SLAs and recognise the interdisciplinary nature of the approach.
- Encourage participants to examine the linkages that exist between the immediate practical issues concerning rural households and more strategic long term needs.

³ Review of DFID Sustainable Livelihood Office (SLSO) by INDECO.

⁴ Funded by DFID In Service Training Scheme (ISTS).

- Identify how SL concepts can be applied throughout the Project Cycle and how they relate to other approaches and DFID policies.
- Highlight the key skills and attitudes required for putting SL approaches into practice
- Discuss the relationship and complementarity of SLAs to other development approaches and analyses

The Specific Objectives were that by the end of the training on SLA, participants would be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the various components that make up a livelihood framework;
- Articulate the importance of a holistic approach to successful programme and project implementation;
- Show how SLAs build on existing approaches;
- Give examples of the livelihoods concept influencing other policies and approaches;
- Put the principles of the SLAs into practice as part of their own programme or project implementation;
- In addition, they should be enthusiastic to learn more about SLAs and feed their experience into various discussion fora on the approach.

Training Challenges and the Lesson Learning Approach

Many valuable lessons grew out of the earlier training courses/workshops and were taken into consideration during the design and organisation of the later events. Adaptations were made to content and structure after each event. A series of important lessons on SLA training have been learnt:

Advertising and Designing the Training Courses

From the outset the CIDT took a very clear strategy of not “pushing” the training events but allowing overseas DFID offices to “pull” i.e. only request them if required. Considerable effort was required throughout the contract period to inform DFID staff that the training would not be a “SLA road show” sent out by DFID London.

Individual Needs Assessments

For each and every training event a careful needs assessment exercise was undertaken and training material and approaches adapted to the particular needs identified. While this sounds very simple in theory it turned out to be seriously challenging with several DFID staff keen just to “push the SLA message” and an equal number of DFID field staff keen “just to hear the message”. In contrast, some DFID offices were keenly aware of the need to be sensitive. A good example of the need to be sensitive comes from the training courses conducted in Brazil. Brazil has a strong tradition of development thinking of its own and this has to be carefully taken into concern when considering how to introduce participants to SLAs. The approach to the training was to value existing knowledge and to recognise that many of the SL concepts (assets approach, conceptualising poverty, capitals) are familiar to Brazilian development practitioners even though SLAs themselves were often not.

Working with Local Trainers and Capacity Building

The CIDT approach taken to each of the training events was one of trying to build up local training capacity in SLA. Wherever possible local trainers were fully involved in

the design and delivery of the training events. The practical implications of this were that there was a real need to allow considerably more time allowed to train co-facilitators/trainers than had been contractually allowed.

Although the capacity building that has resulted from the series of events held has been an important start, there is a need to identify a range of local consultants able to provide training and consultancy support in SLAs and to support their professional development. In some countries DFID has already considered the idea of establishing a resource group of consultants able to deal with a broad range of DFID approaches in addition to their professional disciplines.

In order to support these ideas, a long term commitment to capacity building for local consultants and trainers is required along with a structured and strategic approach to training that provides support to DFID teams and funded initiatives. Relying on individual project/programme training budgets to provide support that should be more strategic in nature is problematic. A broad ranging, responsive training management programme would be desirable.

Primarily small teams of local consultants whose understanding of SLAs is growing by the day carried out the delivery of some of the training courses. If the capacity of these consultants to provide SL support to DFID is to be enhanced beyond the delivery of training packages, then some effort should be made to provide them with training in facilitation and training skills and to encourage them to develop experiences of their own in the application of SLAs through a series of visits to existing projects that are applying the approach. See for example Experiences of Brazilianising SLAs in Box 3.

Box 3 - Brazilianising SLAs from the CIDT Workshops

Following a series of four CIDT led training workshops, Brazilian staff from government, civil society organisations, donor agencies and universities have adapted the principles and framework of the sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach to better reflect local realities. The original, less ambitious, aim of the workshops was to present the SL approach to project staff and partner organisations as a tool for analysing poverty and discuss its relevance and usefulness to their work.

Prior to the workshops it had been expected that there would be interest in discussing conceptual methods for analysing poverty in this group but we were not expecting the enthusiasm and demand to learn more, particularly methods to apply SL approaches in practical work. The Brazilianised sustainable livelihoods framework includes issues specific to Brazil that were not in the original framework and clarifies parts that were not clear in the Brazilian context. Nine Brazilians (from the University of Brasilia, FUNDAJ, two technical cooperation officers and an independent consultant) were trained to deliver the workshops and they also helped translate concepts into themes that would be familiar to a Brazilian audience and suggested ways of better presenting issues and case studies.

Many DFID projects in Brazil are now undertaking workshops individually to examine how SLA and rights as concepts can help them identify and resolve the institutional constraints they face on a regular basis which restricts poor people from gaining access to and control over their needs. We have taken the original workshop forward to follow it up with a livelihoods and rights two-day workshop, which examines the institutional constraints to people gaining their rights. The aim has been to make SLA a set of practical tools as much as possible, helpful and meaningful to project partners, which has meant looking at power relationships.

After Marzetti 2001 and 2002

Presenting the framework in an experiential way

The experiential methods used to introduce and explore the SL framework worked well, where participants were asked to consider their own livelihoods and the factors that affect them. Emphasising the dynamic nature of livelihoods and the context within which they operate was also important. Building up the framework diagram in such a way that it did not look like a systems diagram was helpful in helping people to explore the dynamic nature of livelihoods and the interlinking factors involved.

In some courses, the idea of people's aspirations as being of importance in determining strategies was discussed at length. Livelihood outcomes contribute towards meeting a person's aspirations. Aspirations are not covered in the framework but for the purposes of training were sometimes included and the framework diagram modified.

In a few courses there was some difficulty experienced in understanding the Policies, Institutions and Processes (PIPs) aspects of the framework. This arose in particular with distinguishing between institutions as societal norms or "the rules of the game", and organisations. More practical examples of each of the PIP components would be helpful to avoid an overly conceptual presentation of this very important part of the framework. In capacity building terms, this was one of the most challenging parts of the training for the locally appointed facilitators to come to grips with.

Assumptions around the understanding of the participatory nature of SLAs

Our assumptions around participants' understanding of "participation" and participatory approaches were not always correct. It was often concluded that there is a need for a clear understanding (and practice) of PLA and PA before SLAs.

Using case studies

Wherever possible in-country case studies were used. However it was found that it was often beneficial to use case studies from outside the country in question e.g. a case study of SLA in South Wales worked very well in a number of countries.

Language

Language is a key challenge for the dissemination of SLAs. The need for translating training materials into local languages was taken as being essential for successful training. In reality this proved to be a real challenge. In many cases considerable time was required by well qualified translators to translate materials and in many cases it was discovered that several of the SLA concepts simply do not translate very well. e.g. Institutions, Sustainable Livelihoods.

There is a need to localise the SLAs in terms of language and the key messages that DFID wants to put across. In one case a local consultant has been appointed to develop a glossary of suggested translations. It is important that these terms are then discussed by other "SL" consultants to reach a consensus of agreed language for future use.

The need for an SLA "jargon buster".

SLAs have considerably added to the lexicon of development terms now in use. Added to the problems over language there is a real need for development agencies using SLAs to clarify and simplify certain terms.

Questions about things missing in the framework and DFID being “joined-up” around SLAs

During many of the training events participants’ questions around other approaches to development were sometimes a real challenge for both trainers and participants. Common examples of questions included the role and place of gender analysis in SLAs. (Where is it in the framework?), How do SLAs fit together with the Rights Based Approaches being advocated by DFID? Where do justice and power fit into the framework?

In some courses the participants had difficulty in thinking about gender, power and equity issues as cross cutting throughout SLA principles. After considerable debate it is now felt that these issues should be explicit when talking about the underpinning principles rather than implicit. Ideally these should be added to the list of accepted principles so as to better reflect the priorities of the DFID’s Programme in some countries. In Brazil, workshop participants decided to develop their own principles to add to those already under discussion (see Box 4).

Box 4 - New SLA Principles added in from Brazil

The principles of SLA were an important part of the training course. These were presented and then examined through detailed case studies where participants working in small groups focused on how the principles can be built into development planning and processes. These summarized aspects of best practice and were not new to many Brazilians and were readily accepted. However participants wanted to add more principles in order to make issues that are implicit within the framework more explicit. Three new principles were added. These were:

- a. One on gender and power relations as this was identified in the workshops to be an area that needs to be strengthened and one that could easily be omitted during exercises despite its central link to inequality.
- b. One to emphasize the long term impact and outcomes that SLA emphasis
- c. One to center the approach around poverty and inequality analysis, which was seen to be most important given that inequality is a major social, economic and political issue in Brazil.

After Marzetti 2001

Questions about SLA as a policy instrument

One recurring theme in many of the training events discussions was that of the use and value of SLAs at household level. Most participants quickly saw the value of SLA at this level. More challenging however is the real use of SLA at the policy level. In some cases however the opposite was true. e.g. In Brazil most of the participants who attended the training courses were well able to “think at policy level” although often less able to think at “grassroots” level.

Action Plans and the need for follow-up

It is often said that training with no follow-up is a complete waste of time. In order to assist the follow-up process each training event finished with an Action Planning session. In many cases these action plans have been followed up. However, many course participants have had very high expectations for follow-up activities. The need

to carefully manage expectations has been paramount. The need to plan out the next stages and offer longer more in-depth courses and other types of SLA support is now critical.

Considerable good will and enthusiasm was generated as a result of many of the courses and it is important that DFID capitalises upon this if SLAs are considered to be an important part of the overall strategy for DFID. The extent to which DFID should actively encourage the application of SLAs by project teams and partners is of course a matter for internal discussion but there is considerable demand for follow up courses and tailored workshops to be held for specific project teams and/or organisations. Serious thought needs to be given as to how best to provide this follow up. Piecemeal training will not be adequate if the approach is to be treated seriously and it is also important that training and institutional support is provided in other key areas such as participatory tools and approaches, and other methods required in order to put SLAs into practice.

Many of the training courses ended with a brainstorm on the participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the SLAs. This often generated a lot of interesting discussion and particularly highlighted the need for buy-in at higher decision making levels if the approach is to have an impact.

The need for networks

Participants at many of the training events expressed an interest in setting up a local or regional network to keep participants up to date on SLA events and developments and to also cover other areas of DFID activity/approaches. Setting up networks is a common result of popular training and conferences but maintenance and relevance of content often calls for a level of management requiring a full time member of staff. In one case - DFID Brasilia - DFID (through an existing CIDT contract) have just appointed a training/information officer who will take on this role so long as intellectual inputs are provided on a regular basis from one of the locally appointed SLA facilitators/consultants.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES THEMED SEMINARS

In response to feedback from the series of SLA Fora held in 2000, and consultant demand, DFID commissioned CIDT to develop and deliver a further seminar series which aimed to look in more depth at SLAs in practice and provide an opportunity for sharing experiences. A number of case studies were used to support these seminars..

The six seminars, which were held in 2001-2, were intended to have a strong emphasis on the practical aspects of implementing livelihood strategies/projects, and focus debate away from the DFID Framework.

Aims of the seminars:

The seminar aims were to:

- Provide an opportunity for people to exchange views and experiences on the utility of these approaches.
- Create and strengthen networks
- Improving communication between the sectors, and actors



- Encourage new strategic partnerships

The development of the series was guided by a number of key issues that have emerged in the five years since DFID adopted its Livelihoods Approach. For example; how do Livelihoods Approaches relate to current issues in poverty reduction? What implication do SLAs have for sectorally anchored projects/programmes? What is the complementarity between SLAs and other development approaches? And most importantly, how might DFID take SLAs forward? Each of the six seminars took as its theme a broad area within development:

- Governance, Institutions and Public Sector Reform
- Water and Livelihoods
- Rural Poverty and Natural Resources
- The Private Sector and Enterprise Development
- Urban Poverty and Infrastructure
- Governance and SLA

The target participants were set as being:

- Independent consultants
- Representatives of commercial consultant organisations
- DFID Advisors
- Programme and project staff
- Staff from research centres and institutions
- Representatives of INGOs and NGOs
- Staff from Government partner groups

Development of the Seminars

The themes were chosen based on the results of a questionnaire sent out to potential participants⁵ amongst the target groups (above). Respondents were given a choice of 14 options based on current and emerging programme initiatives within DFID. A total of over 150 responses were received and based on these, it was decided to condense the themes as follows:

- Governance and Institutions (to include Public Sector Reform, some aspects of Private Sector Participation in Poverty Reduction)
- Water and Livelihoods (to include Watershed Management, Sanitation and some aspects of Infrastructure)
- Rural Poverty and Natural Resources (to include NR, Rural-Urban Links, Rural Access and Service Provision)
- Private Sector and Enterprise Development
- Urban Poverty and Livelihoods (to include Urban Infrastructure and Development, some aspects of Rural-Urban Links)

Once themes were agreed, the content and focus of each seminar were identified with key representatives from the relevant DFID Departments or groups. The level of interaction varied, with some Departments being more pro-active than others. This

⁵ The questionnaire was sent out to previous participants from Consultants Fora 2000, DFID Resource Centres, key contacts within DFID departments for distribution to consultants and advertised on-line through Yellow Monday, One World, ELDIS and other sites

collaborative effort with other DFID departments had been a recommendation of the Consultants Fora 2000, and was considered important because it:

- ensured that each seminar reflected current thinking within DFID,
- helped to identify relevant case study material and suitable presenters,
- gave ownership of the process to a wider range of stakeholders, and,
- helped to develop strategic links for SLSO.

Recognising the importance of cross-sectoral dialogue, and the likelihood of common issues arising between themes, it was originally intended that the sixth and final seminar in the series should draw together the previous discussions. This idea was however dropped as it was felt that it would be difficult to manage. In addition it was felt that the final seminar could be best used to take forward discussions on ‘Governance and Livelihoods’.

Location

Although the London catchment encompasses a large number of development professionals, there is considerable expertise outside of this area. In recognition of this, and to ensure as broad a range of practitioners would be encouraged to participate, it was decided that four of the six seminars should be held out of London⁶.

The events were held at:

Date	Theme	Venue	Number of participants
2001			
19 th October	Governance, Institutions and Public Sector Reform	Birmingham	42
31 st October	Water and Livelihoods	London	48
8 th November	Rural Poverty and Natural Resources	Edinburgh	49
19 th November	The Private Sector and Enterprise Development	Manchester	38
2002			
28 th January	Urban Poverty and Livelihoods	Birmingham	47
26 th February	Governance and Livelihoods	London	53

Programme

The programme was designed to maximise the number of case studies, give ample opportunity for group discussion and time to network. Balancing these requirements was difficult and a number of options had been explored before settling on the format used.

- 09:00 – 09:15 Introduction
- 09:15 – 09:45 Keynote Speaker and Questions
- 09:45 – 10:15 Case Study Presentation 1
- 10:15 – 10:30 Questions

⁶ Three further Consultants Fora were organized by ERM on the topic of SLA and the Environment.

10:30 – 11:00 *Coffee*
11:00 – 11:30 Case Study Presentation 2
11:30 – 11:45 Questions
11:45 – 12:45 Breakout Groups
12:45 – 13:00 Plenary
13:00 – 14:00 *Lunch*
14:00 – 14:30 Case Study Presentation 3
14:30 – 14:45 Questions
14:45 – 15:45 Group Work
15:45 – 16:15 *Tea*
16:15 – 17:00 Plenary and Close

Introductions

Each event opened with an introduction to the seminar series, giving the background from recommendations that came out of Consultants Fora 2000, to the aims and key questions that informed their design. This was followed by an introduction to Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office and brief summary of the DIFD Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.

Keynote

The keynote presentation at each event was made by a representative of the relevant department, who presented the current thinking within that sector of DFID in terms of strategy, key issues and the common ground with SLAs.

Case studies

Case studies were taken from current work, and presented by those directly involved in it. Presenters were asked to make a 30 minute presentation supported by a handout of additional information. For each seminar, every effort was made to include a case study from the work of an NGO and/or the private sector. Presenters were asked to go beyond the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and were encouraged to bring out lessons learned from their experiences of implementing livelihood strategies and projects such as best practice, problems/challenges, M&E and project/programme cycle management issues.

Group Work

Each case study/situation gave an example that was intended to stimulate/compliment the ensuing group discussions. Participants were divided into groups of between 4-9 people. Questions for group discussions, included:

1. What does it mean to take a Livelihoods Approach in the context of [*the theme*]?
2. What common ground exists between [*the theme*] and Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches?
3. What are the implications for my work and that of my partners in taking a Livelihoods Approach?
4. How could DFID support me in this?

During the final seminar on 26th February 2002, it was decided to try a new approach in which groups were given questions similar to those, above, in the morning. During

the afternoon session, each of the five groups was asked to discuss the role of SLAs in a particular area. The five topics allocated were:

- Policy making
- Local-level planning and resource allocation
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Change management
- Working with other donors.

Summing Up

Each event was concluded by an invited Chair. This person was recognised as a practitioner within the theme. They were asked to sum up the outcome of group discussions and the day, calling on their wealth of experience.

During the last seminar in the series, the day was concluded by a panel session on which sat all presenters and a representative from SLSO.

Evaluation

During the first 4 events, participants were asked to evaluate the day by answering the following questions:

- What have you learnt?
- What went well?
- What could be improved?

This produced excellent written feedback from all participants. In the last two seminars the evaluation process was changed to a tick box questionnaire format. This produced results that could be analysed statistically, but significantly reduced the amount of useful commentary received.

Analysis indicated that overall, participants felt the seminars to have been very successful in meeting the objectives.

Each of the seminars has been written up and details of the events can be found at: http://www.livelihoods.org/info/training/2001_training.html

Some of the key recurring themes discussed within the groups, and more generally throughout the day, are presented in Allen and Sattaur (2002).

Conclusions

1 The Training Approach and Facilitation Methodology used in SLA is critically important.

For successful SLA training a needs based approach is essential. During the SLA fora, training courses and seminars we have been fortunate to be involved in facilitating and training a variety of donor agency, government, Non-Government Organisation (NGO) and civil society staff as well as private sector staff. One of the most rewarding elements of this work has been the high level of participant satisfaction expressed in post event evaluations. We believe this is primarily because a combination of a needs based approach and an experiential methodology has been taken.

Whilst designing and developing each SLA event we have been faced with a series of choices about the type of learning experiences to incorporate. In a few cases the learning requirement has been simply to extend the knowledge and skills of those participating. In most cases, however, the task required has been to challenge and attempt to change the attitudes of those participating. Given the heterogeneous nature of the development professionals involved, a series of different learning experiences have been incorporated into the fora, workshops, courses and seminars. These often included:

- case studies, usually based on a presentation, with considerable participatory group work,
- some brainstorming sessions (surprisingly a skill which very few development professionals seem to have),
- a heavy emphasis on visualization,
- a series of practical development sessions in groups, and
- a series of presentation and feedback sessions where flip charts were often presented for critical appraisal by other groups.

The recognition that the participants all have their own preferred learning styles and consequently prefer to learn in different ways (as classified by Honey and Mumford 1992), was coupled with the use of Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb 1984) which was used as the basis for sequencing the various experiential learning activities in the SLA fora, workshops, courses and seminars (see figure 1 below).

The importance of the training and/or facilitation approach is critical as the trainers and/or facilitators are usually acting as role models for other development professionals. Personal attitudes and skills are also critical because at the very core of development programmes and projects are a constellation of attitudes and skills that include:

- the ability to listen openly and actively;
- a respect for people and communities and their points of view;
- strong interpersonal and collaborative problem solving skills;
- a deep belief in the wisdom and creativity of people;
- a search for synergy and overlapping goals;
- a working knowledge of group dynamics;
- a deep belief in the inherent power of groups and teams;
- patience and a high tolerance for ambiguity to let a decision evolve and gel;
- an understanding of adult learning processes, and
- a flexible approach to resolving issues and making decisions.

In reality, the field management of SLA programmes and projects requires us to use an array of management knowledge, attitudes, and skills - a comprehensive and effective toolkit for development managers. There is a need for SLA programme and project managers to have an array of skills, a depth of knowledge and the appropriate attitudes. At the personal level there has often been a need for fora, workshop, course and seminar participants to challenge themselves and to transform or deepen their attitudes for collaboration and to build their personal programme and project toolkits overtime. This is often overlooked when considering whether to initiate training - if the adviser does not think beyond the tool to the deeper skills that underpin its use.

- In our experience it has been a real challenge for SLA trainers and facilitators to model and balance the application of these principles and skills given the real resource and time constraints that have often constrained the fora, workshops and seminars.

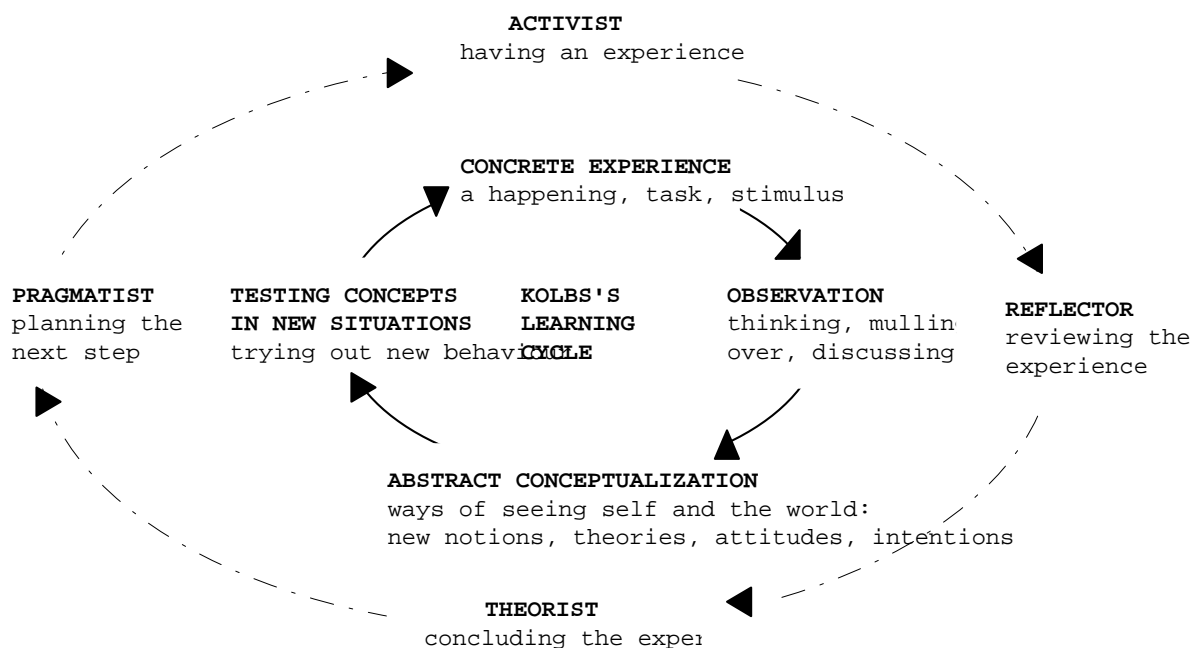


Figure 1: Kolb's Learning Cycle with adaptation to add Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles (after Dearden et al 1999)

The subject of SLA has required that a practical and thoroughly pragmatic approach be taken in the training process. For instance there has been an emphasis on discussing how SLAs are synergistic with the poverty elimination focus as well as other current DFID policies and approaches. In addition, it has been important to recognise that SL Approaches have contributed to deeper thinking and analysis rather than becoming no more than a co-opted phrase.

One key issue implied by the principles of SL (Ashley and Carney, 1999) is that of promoting inter-disciplinarity in actors, to reflect and better understand the multidisciplinary nature of the livelihoods of the poor. The fora and training events have all emphasised the need for interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral communications. The first SLA fora and training courses all took an interdisciplinary approach highlighting the linkages that exist between rural and other sectors, in keeping with the spirit of SLAs. Participants were encouraged to think about the connections that exist within their own contexts and how these might be better understood, made more explicit and successfully enhanced. In several of the seminars participants were encouraged to consider links between SLA and other development approaches.

2 Recognising the importance of helping create reflective practitioners as part of the DFID SLSO “learning organisation”

DFID follows a generalised activity cycle shown in Figure 2 below.

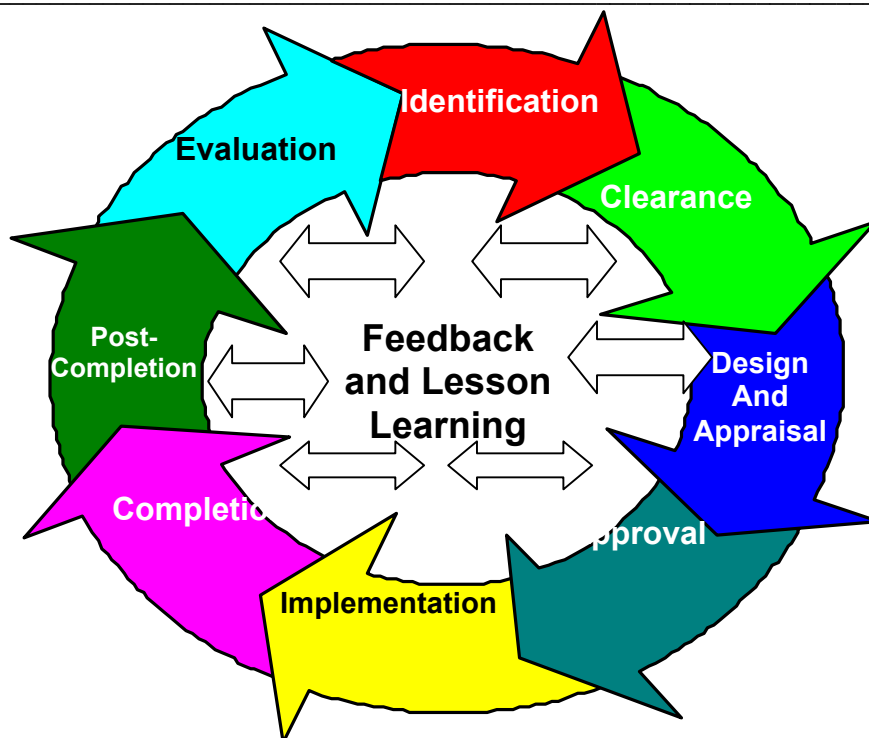


Figure 2 - Generalised DFID Activity Cycle⁷

Through our facilitation and training the staff of CIDT and our partners have attempted to create consultants and DFID staff who are reflective practitioners. It is important to understand that these consultants and staff are however working in a larger reflective learning environment.

Over the past four years the SLSO have bravely attempted to take a “learning approach” to their work and really implement this idealised DFID model of learning and become a learning organisation. As a contractor to DFID the CIDT have become an important partner in this process. Before we examine how we have all done a few words about learning organisations.

Learning organisations are a bit like the Loch Ness Monster. Everyone wants to be a believer in them but very, very few people have ever seen one. A couple of definitions of learning organisations emphasis the diversity of views over exactly what a learning organisation is.

“Learning organisations are organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together” Senge 1990

“A learning organisation is a lot of people learning” Gaines 1990

⁷ Tools for Development – A handbook for those engaged in Development Activity, Development Policy Department, DFID, January 2002.

There are however a number of key features of a learning organisation See Box 5.

- Box 5- Prerequisites for the development of a learning organisation (After Cook 1997):
- Vision – The need for a common vision and the active communication of the vision to align individuals and organisation.
 - Commitment – Active support and commitment from the top with bottom up strategy implementation.
 - Working on change quickly – introducing change rapidly at all organisational levels to avoid dissonance in approach between the various parts of the organisation.
 - Organisational congruence /alignment – ensuring that the organisational culture, structure and systems support the desired changes.

In the past three years there has been a clear attempt by the SLSO to create a learning organisation associated with the roll out of SLAs.

How have we all done?

- **Vision** – SLSO have articulated a clear vision and attempted to actively communicate this with a wide variety of key stakeholders – the fora, training workshops and seminars are clear evidence this.
- **Commitment** – A clear commitment to SLA has been articulated from the tops of DFID and a strategy of implementation put into place.
- **Working quickly** – good progress has been made over a short period of time – however as has been noted there is a lot more to do.
- **Organisational alignment** - this has been slowly emerging but there is still a long way to go. The difficulty in collecting experience of application of SLAs and feeding this back into organisational learning should not be underestimated. This aspect has been one of the most noted aspects during the fora, training workshops and seminars. Many outsiders to DFID have quickly noted how un-joined up DFID has sometimes been. At many of the training courses/workshops events participants have often noted that DFID has a traditional “silo” culture and often lacks an ethos of real teamwork. The seminar series, which have taken a thematic approach to explore links between sectors, has been a brave attempt to appear joined-up.

3 Good progress has been made in disseminating ideas on SLA but there is still a long way to go.

By using third party resources the DFID SLSO has made extensive and explicit efforts to roll out SLAs in a variety of ways. It is concluded that in relation to the fora, training courses and seminars good progress has been made. The evolutionary approach taken to the all the events has proved very helpful with materials being changed and adapted as different needs and problems were raised or important issues needed to be incorporated.

Evaluation feedback from each and every consultants' fora, training course and seminar event has been very positive and it can be concluded that the specific aims and objectives of each event have been achieved.

Over 500 plus key UK Consultants and development practitioners have been exposed to new SLA ideas, experiences and practices through the series of fora and seminars. In the early fora many participants simply came to learn about the new SL framework that was so important in the early days and the policy switches that had occurred in DFID. At the fora some participants became enthused with SLA and saw the potential they offer. Conversely a small number of participants, as one would expect, left the events feeling that SLAs were simply a passing fad that DFID was preaching. In the seminars a slightly more sophisticated approach has been taken with more case studies presented and linkages with other sectors made. Most importantly at both the fora and seminars participants have had a chance to actively debate and evaluate progress made in relation to SLA's in practice.

Through the training workshops over 350 DFID project staff and partners have been exposed to SLA ideas, experiences and practices. Most staff have had time at the workshops have not only had time to actively learn about SLA but reflect upon their learning and then apply their new knowledge and skills to their own specific project environments.

While the above may sound impressive it is of course a mere drop in the ocean. The education and training task ahead is simply huge.

4 Adapting the training approach to the local context is critical.

From the start of the training work the CIDT staff refused to take a "SLA roadshow" approach. It has been critically important to ensure that the training has been carefully integrated with DFID policy priorities and strategic planning. In some cases participants came from a wide range of backgrounds from across the country e.g. South Africa, in other cases all workshop participants came from the same institution. e.g. Bolivia where staff from CIAT held a three-day retreat to grapple with the terms, concepts and decide what it would mean in the context of their work before implementing institutional programmes and projects using the approach. In summary, the need to carefully adapt the approach to each and every situation has been essential for success.

5 Recognising both the importance and limits of any SLA training in institutional development and change is essential.

The final lesson that we would like to make very much brings us back to the topic of this conference and directly relates to the development of institutions and organisations. In our recent SLA training experience we have come across considerable confusion around these terms. A few helpful definitions are presented in box 6 (below).

Box 6 - Institutions and Organisations some working definitions

Institutions – “rules of the game”

Organisations – entities that act collectively in pursuit of shared objectives

Institutional development – process and content of change in institutions. Usually focus is individual organisations and the framework of policy, law and custom within which they operate

Organisational development – the process through which change is designed and accepted in organisations

Organisations are made up of people and it is a truism of Organisational Development to state that you need to change the people in an organisation to change the organisation.

Donor agencies who are often looking for short term fixes however often poorly understand the place and real importance of training in bringing about lasting change. Well-designed and effective “deep” experiential training activities can bring about important long-term learning. On the other hand poorly designed and superficial training with no follow-up will bring about no meaningful or lasting effects.

In logical framework terms, if conducted well, training (the activity) can lead to learning (an output), this in turn can bring about an immediate impact of organisational development (the immediate impact or purpose) and this in turn can contribute to longer term institutional development or a change in “the rules of the game”. This is illustrated in Figure 2. The importance of SLA training in bringing about change is critical. If DFID and other donors are serious about really adopting SLA then there is a huge training task ahead.

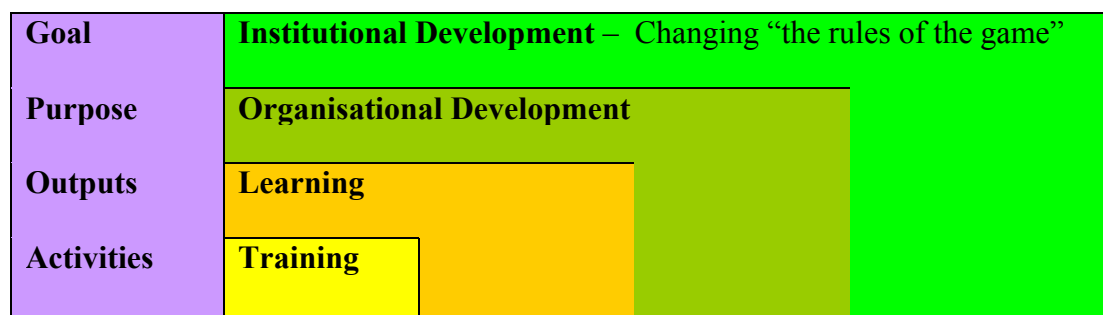


Figure 2 – The place of training and learning in organisational and institutional development linked to hierarchy of objectives column of the Logical framework..

In principle SLAs are about bringing about fundamental attitudinal changes to some forms of development practice. Fundamental attitudinal changes can rarely be brought about in a few days. For SLAs to be effective in the longer term there is huge training and education job to be undertaken.

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