

# **LIVELIHOODS APPROACHES – WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THEY MAKE?**

## **A Case Study from Usangu, Tanzania**

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*The paper analyses the impact of applying livelihoods approaches to the case of the Usangu river basin, Tanzania. Recent changes in natural resource availability led to a donor-supported project to determine the causes of the changes and to assist local stakeholders in developing a sustainable management plan for the basin. The paper examines the design and implementation of the project from a livelihoods perspective, by analysing its application of livelihoods principles. The conclusion is many of the livelihoods principles were already implicit or explicit in the project. However, the additional understanding provided by the livelihoods framework could have resulted in a more holistic and complete approach to the range of issues confronting the basin.*

### **Introduction**

The concept of livelihoods has been under discussion for a considerable time, but has become a central topic in development only in the last decade. This sharpening of interest was initiated by Chambers and others with a series of seminal papers in the early 90s. For example, Chambers and Conway (1992), building on work done for the World Commission on Environment and Development five years earlier, proposed a working definition of a livelihood:

“a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities or assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term”.

Chambers and Conway were particularly focussing on rural livelihoods in this paper. Although not explicitly incorporated within the definition, the idea of the vulnerability of livelihoods was emphasised through the importance of stresses (“continuous, cumulative and predictable pressures”) and shocks (“sudden, unpredictable and traumatic impacts”). This paper also made an important distinction between the tangible and intangible assets which support a livelihood. Tangible assets comprise stores owned by the household and resources which it is able to utilise. Intangible assets comprise claims which can be made on others for material, moral or other means of support, and access to resources, services, information, employment and other contributions to a means of living.

The early work of Chambers and Conway lead to a more precise definition of the concept of livelihoods in the late 90s through a series of conferences and publications. For example, Carney and others (1998) refined the concept through the “livelihoods framework” which is now commonly presented in a diagram (DFID, 1999). The framework sees livelihoods as supported by five classes of capital assets (natural, human, social, physical and financial) which operate within a context of vulnerability

caused by trends (“stresses”), shocks and culture. People use their assets, mediated and influenced by transforming structures and processes, to develop livelihood strategies. The strategies in turn produce livelihood outcomes which are more or less successful depending on their relationship with the capital asset base, and the actual vulnerability of the livelihoods.

Following on shortly from this work was the definition of a series of livelihood “principles” (Ashley & Carney, 1999), making up a “livelihoods approach”. According to this thinking, the livelihoods approach is:

- people-centred – putting people at the centre of development
- holistic – integrating multiple influences, actors, strategies and outcomes
- dynamic – flexible, and adaptable to change
- building on strengths – rather than focussing on an analysis of needs
- recognising macro-micro links – rather than isolating actions at different levels
- sustainable – environmentally, economically, socially and institutionally

The link between the underlying framework and these principles is not clear in the work done during the late 90s. Nonetheless at the present time the concept of livelihoods is more often taken to apply to the principles, rather than the underlying framework. It is the principles which are now commonly taken to constitute the livelihoods approach, and which are used to inform development interventions from policies to projects.

Debate on livelihoods continues to widen, and many aspects of the concept are being investigated and discussed. A recent development has been an increasing focus on rights, and the incorporation of rights within the overall livelihoods framework (for example, Moser and Norton 2001). The emphasis on rights brings the important dimension of politics and power explicitly into the overall analysis. This dimension was an important element of Chambers and Conway’s original formulation of “claims and access”, both of which imply an unequal relationship between claimant and provider. By contrast, ideas of rights, power and politics were not explicit in the livelihoods framework and principles developed in the late 90s, although they were perhaps implicit in the notion of transforming structures and processes. Nevertheless assets support livelihoods, whether poor or rich, and therefore the control of assets is always fundamentally a political process. The focus on rights thus brings in an important element of the analysis which is lacking in the livelihoods framework and principles.

This paper now goes on to describe a typical natural resources project of the late 90s. The purpose is to examine the impact which the concept of livelihoods could and did have on the way the project was designed and implemented, and whether these concepts actually make a significant difference to to-day’s development interventions.

## **The Case Study**

The Usangu catchment lies in the upper reaches of the Rufiji Basin, in SW Tanzania. It covers an area of 22 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and is home to over 200 000 people who depend for their livelihoods on its natural resources. In particular, water in the catchment is intensively used for domestic purposes, for agriculture (particularly irrigated rice), and for the watering of livestock. The catchment contains a significant wetland, which

supports a small but thriving artisanal fishing industry. Downstream of the wetland, the Ruaha National Park is an important foreign-exchange earner, whilst the Mtera/Kidatu system supplies about 50% of Tanzania's hydroelectric power.

As a result of these multiple and often competing uses, the water resources in the catchment have become increasingly stressed. In particular the Great Ruaha River downstream of the wetland has, since the mid 90s, been drying up during the dry season. This is the most visible sign of changes but there is other evidence of changes in the availability of water throughout the catchment. A variety of reasons were put forward to explain these changes, most of them resulting in one way or another from anthropogenic causes. Perhaps the most important driving force in the catchment is increasing population, arising both naturally and from in-migration.

At about the time that water shortages downstream of Usangu became visible, discussions were taking place between the Ministry of Water of the Government of Tanzania and the World Bank concerning the River Basin Management and Smallholder Irrigation Improvement Project (RBMSIIP). It was known even at this time that Usangu was an area of specific concern within the basin, and the UK's Department of International Development (DFID, formerly ODA) was invited to support a specific project in Usangu, as part of the wider RBMSIIP initiative. In due course, therefore DFID funded the project "Sustainable Management of the Usangu Wetland and its Catchment" (SMUWC, [www.usangu.org](http://www.usangu.org)),

The first phase of SMUWC was a 2.5 year project intended to investigate the reasons for the reduction in water resources in the catchment, and to build capacity amongst stakeholders to develop a plan for the sustainable management of its resources. It began in September 1998, and was completed in April, 2001. It was followed by an extension phase of 1 year. The objectives of the extension phase were to build on the achievements of the first phase, and also to find new sources of funding support.

A logframe for the project was produced at the time of the design, in 1997. The goal and purpose defined at this time remained valid throughout the first phase of the project (partly because changes to either of these requires high-level approval from the funding agency). The goal was:

“Sustainable utilisation of water and other renewable natural resources of the Usangu wetland and its catchment for the maintenance and improvement of rural livelihoods”,

whilst the purpose was:

“Local capacity to manage the Usangu wetland and its catchment sustainably developed for the social, economic and environmental benefit of stakeholders, particularly the poor, and including downstream users”.

The outputs expected from Phase 1 were revised formally, at the time of the Inception Report (this could be done at the project level), and then remained valid for the remainder of the Phase. They were defined as follows:

1. Understanding of the hydrological behaviour and water quality functions of the Usangu wetland and its catchment
2. Assessment of land resource utilisation, biodiversity and environmental impacts of management options in the Usangu wetland and its catchment.

3. Improvement in local peoples' ability to manage their land, water and other resources
4. Increase of capacity to develop an integrated environmental management strategy.

The project was implemented by an association of UK-based and Tanzanian consultants. The consultants' core team were based at Mbarali, the largest district within the catchment. The team worked directly with the district administration, and reported on day-to-day matters to the District Executive Director. The formal beneficiary organisation was the Ministry of Water. Within the Ministry of Water, the person responsible for SMUWC was also the Project Co-ordinator for RBMSIIP.

As indicated in the project's purpose, the beneficiaries of the project were intended to be "stakeholders, particularly the poor, and including downstream users".

### **Incorporating livelihoods concepts into SMUWC Phase 1**

SMUWC was identified as a project in the mid-90s, formally designed in 1997, and implemented from late 1998 to early 2001. This co-incides with the period when sustainable livelihoods concepts were starting to be widely discussed and used. The project itself was not conceived as a livelihoods project but there are many points of relevance to SLAs in its design and implementation.

The following discussion reviews the main issues and concepts, bringing together the experience and reflections of several key actors in the project, including the DFID project officers for the design and implementation stage, the project co-ordinator for the MoW, the consultants' team leader, the DFID project officer at the implementation stage, and the Mbarali District Executive Director (DED).

#### People's livelihoods

Did the objectives of the intervention include a mention of people and their livelihoods? How central is this to the intervention's objectives?

In spite of the fact that SMUWC was not conceived as a livelihoods project, the project's goal specifically mentioned (rural) livelihoods, and the concept of livelihoods is also implicit in the project purpose. None of the project documentation took the analysis of livelihoods further, for example with reference to capital or vulnerability, but the overall aim of improving livelihoods was central to the project's aim.

*"The whole project was about improving people's livelihoods especially the local resource users. All interventions focused on ultimately improving rural livelihood. To understand physical, environmental and social processes has provided knowledge about resource availability, and their relationship with resource users. From that understanding we are in the position to develop a vision and strategies to manage the resources and thus improve the rural livelihood leading to food security, increased rural income and sustainable use of the resources." (Project Co-ordinator)*

*"The project suffered unfairly in DFID and within the Tanzanian context by the fact that it had to determine the nature of the problem with water flows first. This*

*attracted misunderstanding about the nature, complexity and necessary duration of the process warranted in order to stimulate the scale and kind of change of behaviour really required to achieve the stated goal.” (DFID Project Officer, Implementation)*

The DED was also appreciative of the efforts of the project to improve livelihoods, though in this case her interpretation of the concept of livelihoods was somewhat restrictive. She assessed the success of the project particularly in relation to its efforts to assist local people to plan, reflecting the somewhat formal relationship between local people and local government, rather than taking a broad view of the way the project assisted local people across the whole range of their livelihood activities.

### Participation

How was the intervention developed and which stakeholders participated in this process? How and when did this participation occur?

The process of project identification took place mainly between the funding agency and the Government of Tanzania, and did not involve the participation of a significant range of stakeholders. DFID fielded a three-man design team, which was in the field for about a month, and which reported in March 1997. This team included a UK consultant who had good local knowledge and contacts, and who knew the local language. It was therefore assumed that he, in particular, would be able to look after much of the stakeholder participation needed for the project design.

*“The main contact throughout this period was with the Project Co-ordinator of the RBMSIIP project, from the MoW. It was always acknowledged that the overall project was a WB project, and SMUWC was a “bolt-on”, designed mainly with Government officials. DFID provided a UK member of the WB Scoping Mission for RBMSIIP The WB project handled most of the agency contacts and stakeholder participation in the early days of the project.” (DFID Project Officer, Design)*

During implementation, participation became a major activity of the project. This was particularly through the community engagement programme which sought to support people from pilot villages throughout the catchment in the establishment of institutions which would allow them to plan and manage their own development at the local level.

*“The project falls under RBMSIIP which was developed in a very consultative manner involving various stakeholders. SMUWC helped the broader RBMSIIP to make intervention in the Usangu catchment more focused. There were a series of meetings /workshops at various levels during project development. During implementation there was an elaborate community engagement programme as well as a sub-catchment resource management programme involving primary stakeholders. The Steering Committee of the Project represented a wide range of stakeholders.” (Project Co-ordinator)*

### Partnerships

Which organisations are, or were, involved in its design, implementation and evaluation? What was the level of partnership and collaboration between these organisations?

The key partnership in Phase 1 of the project was between the Ministry of Water, Local Government and the Consultant's team. The Ministry of Water were active at two levels:

- at the centre, through the Project Co-ordinator
- at the catchment level, through the Basin Water Officer, who has responsibility for stewardship of the basin's water resources under the Water Act.

In principle, local government represents the interests of local people at the district and village level.

The project had relatively close working relationships with both these partners, though there were inevitable tensions relating to resources, priorities, and work programmes.

In addition a project steering committee was established, representing local or regional offices of government agencies and other institutional stakeholders. The committee took some time to become active but it gradually developed in its role and was, by the end of Phase 1, in a position to provide some degree of ownership and co-ordination across the range of these institutions.

*“As development projects go partnership and collaboration was pretty strong and very encouraging. A project like this is never going to be neutral and the issue being worked on was actually very sensitive and highly charged. This undoubtedly impacted on collaboration and partnership. The project timeframe was far too limited to give the room for developing high-quality relationships. So much of the project was concerned with relationship building, compromise and attitude changing, which takes time.” (DFID Project Officer, Implementation)*

The DED, though appreciative of the project's efforts overall, commented that it was project staff who took the lead, and it was they who prepared plans, which were then presented for discussion with the other partners.

### Integration

Did the project attempt to develop an holistic approach to the issues of the basin, integrating multiple influences, actors and strategies?

Right from the earliest stages of project design, SMUWC was conceived as an integrated project, both in terms of integrating across natural resource sectors and also in attempting to integrate social and institutional dimensions into the overall approach.

Although it was originally identified as a result of perceived water problems, it was quickly understood that it was impossible to treat these issues in isolation, and that they had to be seen in a wider context of land and water resources, and the

relationships between them. The project team therefore comprised specialists and inputs across the whole range of natural resources from hydrologists and water resource specialists to land capability and range experts, as well as staff covering such issues as biodiversity, fisheries, and livestock.

Integration with human, institutional and social factors was also an important element of the project, from design through to implementation. A large part of the project team worked on these aspects, and there were continuing attempts to develop transdisciplinary approaches to the issues, through joint field trips, regular meetings and brainstorming, workshops, and other mechanisms.

### Change and Feedback

Did the objectives and activities of the intervention change to respond to a changing environment and/or demands? What further interventions have arisen from the intervention? How did this take place?

The project objectives were modified at the time of the Inception Phase. It had previously been assumed that the project would be responsible for developing a strategic plan for the catchment. This objective was dropped in favour of twin objectives of acquiring knowledge and building capacity in stakeholders so that they could themselves develop and own the strategic plan.

*“There were some changes..... The original plan was for the project to prepare the strategy for the management of the natural resources. It was later realised stakeholders needed to have their capacities strengthened to enable them (to) prepare the strategy.” (Project co-ordinator)*

At the time of the mid-term review there were some other, relatively minor, changes to the activities and direction of the community engagement programme, which took account of the experience that had been gained in the first part of the project.

As Phase 1 came to its conclusion, there was considerable discussion on what further support should be given to the process. It was always acknowledged that a significant period would be required for the development of a strategic plan by stakeholders. However, the priorities of the funding agency had changed during Phase 1, and it wished to transfer its focus to poverty reduction activities and direct budgetary support. Eventually, it was agreed that one further year’s funding should be provided by DFID, with the explicit aim that other funding would be found for support beyond that. The extension phase continued to focus on knowledge dissemination and capacity-building, at central, basin and local level.

The DED, from the perspective of her local responsibility and constraints, felt that there was only limited ability for the project to change. This reflects the fact that the project was conceived in response to a particular set of circumstances, as perceived by one set of stakeholders, whereas the DED and her local government colleagues were faced by a different set of circumstances and priorities, and were looking for assistance to be provided in different ways than that determined for the project.

### Capacity Building and Strengths

Does the intervention use existing capacities, and build on these in its implementation?

Capacity-building was a major component of the project, and one of its defined outputs. The capacity-building activities did not start until the project was well established, and a good understanding of the catchment had been gained. It then focussed primarily on developing capacity at the village level, through a training programme for village governments. Other formal programmes were carried out for district officials across the catchment. There were also capacity-building initiatives with Ministry of Water officials.

Work carried out under the project which focussed on livelihoods and village institutions has raised interesting questions about the operation of such institutions, and the range of institutional capacity that exists at the local level (Cleaver, 2001). In particular it has contrasted “bureaucratic” institutions (such as village governments) with “socially embedded” institutions, such as cultural groups, local associations, village choirs etc, many of which have functions far beyond their original purpose. This raises further issues about what is meant by existing capacity, and how interventions such as SMUWC can best recognise existing capacity, and support its development.

*“In planning for the capacity building programme, three key elements of capacity building were used: an enabling policy environment, the institutional framework and human resources development and management systems. A wider meaning of the term “institution” was applied whereby existing local institutions were analysed and mobilised for engagement in the programme.” (Project Co-ordinator)*

The DED, however, was unsure whether capacity had been increased by the project. She noted that project staff were quite separate from local government staff, and that by implication much of the capacity-building was directed at the project staff. She also noted that some of the tangible benefits of the traditional approaches to capacity-building (such as overseas study trips) had been proposed but had never taken place, and that this had resulted in demotivation. Certainly buying-in to and benefiting from project involvement was a constant issue for local staff, never fully resolved.

### Policy Linkages

What evidence is there that the intervention addressed linkages between policy at the micro, meso and macro levels, and across sectors?

At the time the project started, RBMSIIP was undertaking a revision of the water policy for the Government, and the SMUWC team was explicitly invited to make a contribution to this process. However this invitation came early in the project, before detailed lessons could be drawn from the situation in Usangu.

*“SMUWC was designed according to the wisdom of the time. It was therefore desired that the project should achieve, in order of priority:*

- 1. A defined level of benefits to an identifiable group of people (micro-level)*
- 2. Tools and lessons for river basin management, at the operational level (meso-level)*

### 3. *Contribution to policy making (macro-level)*” (DFID Project Officer, Design

By the time the first phase of the project was completed, the order of priorities of these objectives had been completely reversed by the funding agency. The potential contribution of the project to national policy making was the main criteria for DFID’s qualified support for an extension phase.

At the meso and micro level, there was some evidence of successful cross-sectoral integration. This was particularly noted by the DED, who was administering a system which was traditionally sectoral and bureaucratic in its approach to local issues. She found the support provided by the project of some value in breaking down traditional sectoral barriers between departments at the district level.

#### Governance

##### How were those implementing the intervention accountable to the public and intervention’s beneficiaries?

Although reporting to the Project Co-ordinator in the Ministry of Water, and working closely with the local District Executive Director, the consultant team intentionally kept some distance from existing Government structures. This was to allow freedom of manoeuvre in a complex institutional situation in which vested interests played an important role. It was not, for example, clear at the start of the project as to which institution should properly take the lead in developing the strategic plan for the catchment, and the consultant team therefore thought it better not to be tied too closely with a particular institution. This had inevitable impacts on accountability, since no formal stakeholder felt exclusive ownership of the work coming out of the project.

An aspect of specific interest in this regard was the role of the media, particular the press. Usangu was an area of national interest over a long period, and the project received a significant amount of unfavourable press coverage early on. Following this, efforts were made to engage journalists in the process, and a seminar/training week was held for a group of journalists from a number of newspapers. This was successful, in that it resulted in an increase in the coverage of the issues in Usangu. It might therefore be said that the project became accountable to a wider audience through this mechanism, though of course it also raises a number of issues about the role of the press in such situations.

*“This was a technical project with a Steering Committee drawing members from key stakeholders. The Community Engagement and Sub Catchment Resource Management Programme had direct relation/contact with stakeholders whereby stakeholders were facilitated to fully participate in the intervention” (Project Co-ordinator)*

*“In Tanzania the project worked within the Government system, at local and national levels, and was therefore accountable in the way any public service operation is in a democratic system. The same is true in respect of the UK public and indeed there was correspondence between the public and the Secretary of State concerning the project.” (DFID project officer, Implementation)*

## Sustainability

### Did the intervention address the different dimensions of sustainability (social, environmental, institutional and economic)?

The project's purpose explicitly stated "catchment sustainably developed for the social, economic and environmental benefit of stakeholders...."

An economic analysis had been carried out at the time of the project design (though this was later shown to have a fundamental flaw). In the implementation of the project the emphasis was on social and environmental issues, and the institutional framework for addressing those issues. Very little attention was paid by the project to economic issues, although these were an important factor in, for example, the irrigated rice sector in the catchment.

The DED noted that, at the local level, some of the institutional developments facilitated by the project would continue, for example the setting up of irrigators' groups. She was also appreciative of the relatively limited assets provided by the project (such as office space and equipment), which would remain after its completion. She did, however, also comment that the project had come "to provide answers", and that many of the questions were still unresolved.

## **Discussion**

SMUWC was not conceived or implemented as a "livelihoods" project. Nevertheless the preceding analysis shows that it incorporated many features of the "livelihoods approach", as currently understood. For example, explicit and extensive attempts were made to involve local people in the project, through participatory mechanisms, and by means of partnerships with local institutions. Likewise the importance of linkages between micro, meso and macro levels was continuously stressed, and indeed this linkage became the justification for the further tranche of funding which the project received from the original donor. From its earliest conception, capacity building was intended to be one of the major outputs, and considerable efforts were put into this aspect once the project was established, the local institutional structures were understood, and the most effective form of capacity-building had been identified. In a sense this could be described as "building on strengths", although it was not directly identified as such. Change and feedback was an important part of project implementation, and mechanisms were built in to allow for some change of direction as the project proceeded, including modifying planned outputs at the mid-term review. Attempts were made to make the project accountable to its clients and beneficiaries, through a variety of reporting mechanisms. Finally the project's emphasis on sustainability was explicit in its title, goal and purpose, though the focus for this project was primarily on environmental sustainability through its assessment of the natural resource base of the catchment.

Use of livelihoods approaches is not the same as success in applying them, and on many counts the project failed in its application. For example, participation was an important tenet of the project, and considerable resources were invested in it. However, major decisions about the project's direction and activities were always

taken ultimately by the project staff, and not by the local people or institutions. Likewise capacity-building efforts were directly or indirectly focussed on the project's stated purpose, even when other needs were also evident and identified. Indeed the overall flexibility of the project was also severely limited, even if it was possible to make some modifications at the time of the mid-term review, because the project's purpose was established at high levels within the donor organisation, and could not be changed without reference to that level. Attempts at governance and accountability were constrained by language and process. Reporting was the main mechanism by which the project aimed to be accountable to its clients, but this was undertaken through written reports in English, thus making them inaccessible to a great majority of those clients. Finally, the sustainability of the project's outcomes is very much debatable. (It is not, of course, the project itself which is intended to be sustainable, since the project was intended to assist local stakeholders to develop a plan, after which there would, in theory, be no further need for it.)

The project's failures, on these and many other counts, can be ascribed partly to shortcomings in internal mechanisms and processes within the project, and partly to external constraints. It is not of particular interest in this paper to explore the internal shortcomings further, except to acknowledge that development interventions are complex undertakings, and that such shortcomings are bound to occur. A multi-year project which has impact on thousands of people in different ways will inevitably result in tensions, mistakes and misunderstandings, and the SMUWC project was no exception in this respect.

External constraints are of more interest here, because they touch on some of the fundamental problems of the livelihood approach, and indeed of all types of development interventions. Two aspects of the project's external environment are of interest and relevance in this discussion. First, SMUWC was a donor-funded project. Whilst its design and implementation tried to incorporate modern approaches, it had all the procedural requirements of such interventions. For example, it was conceived round the concept of a time-bound plan and outputs, and it was richly resourced, so that internal accounting mechanisms were significant constraints. It was also much more richly resourced than the local institutions with which it was ostensibly working in partnership, so that the working relationship with these institutions was inevitably severely skewed.

The second external constraint of interest in this discussion is the overall situation within which the project was designed and implemented, and the issues which gave rise to it. As described in earlier sections the initially perceived problem was the drying up of the river downstream of the catchment, and the effect this was having on downstream users, including several of national significance. This problem was hundreds of kilometres from many of the upstream stakeholders, making it quite inaccessible to them, and making it therefore very difficult to involve them in overall discussions of its significance. The state, meanwhile, judged the problem to be of national importance, and sought assistance through a project intervention to address it. There was, thus, an overall context for the project which provided its goal and direction, and which meant that, for example, project priorities would always be set in the final analysis by the project staff in line with this goal and direction. Interesting issues arise from this process which affect not just projects similar to SMUWC but go to the very heart of the relationship between the state and its citizens, and indeed are

as relevant in industrialised countries as they are in developing countries. This issue is how to balance the needs and priorities of the state (the large scale), with the needs and priorities of local people (the small scale). It is not clear that livelihoods approaches are any more successful than any other type of development “approach2 in addressing this very political question.

On balance, it can be said that SMUWC attempted, with varying degrees of success, to apply livelihoods principles. Its much more important shortcoming, however, was that in effect it hardly used a livelihoods framework in its overall analysis. Within the project a highly-focussed study on rural livelihoods and conflict over resources was carried out (Cleaver, op.cit), and this provided some very valuable and unexpected insights into the situation in villages where the project was carrying out pilot institutional development and capacity building activities. Nevertheless the integrating concept of livelihoods composed of complex, diverse and interlocking activities based on a range of assets and vulnerable to stresses and shocks did not feature in the project’s design or implementation, and did not provide the basis on which the various members of the project fulfilled their tasks. Strenuous efforts were made to adopt an integrated approach to the project but too often this was at the superficial level, with sectoral specialists contributing ideas from their sector in a melange of complementary or conflicting activities. For example, two of the key livelihood system in the catchment are irrigated agriculture and pastoralism. Development interventions in the past have often focussed on irrigation farmers or pastoralists (often further subdivided on the basis of size of holding), The livelihoods framework encourages stakeholders to think in terms of livelihoods which depend to a greater or lesser extent on either or both of these activities, with perhaps several other activities (petty trading, remittances, hired labour) contributing as well. Different insights and more relevant interventions and outcomes may well arise from this fresh perspective.

Current focus on rights could also have added insights to the work of the project team. The project was fundamentally about access to, and control of, resources. These are political processes, and the project was therefore undertaken within a subtle and highly-charged political environment. Whilst this was acknowledged and understood by the project team, there was no obvious framework within which they could analyse it. Such a framework could have been provided by the idea of livelihoods as depending to an extent on claims, access and rights, mediated through political processes.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion reached as a result of the analysis of the SMUWC project is that the concept of livelihoods is more useful as a framework of understanding than as a set of development principles. The principles incorporated within the livelihoods approach are not new, nor do they follow logically from the livelihoods framework of assets, vulnerability and transforming structures. Sustainability, for example, clearly predates livelihoods thinking by many years, and reached its apotheosis in the WCED report. The focus on people as the centre of development has been growing since the early 80s, when development interventions moved on from infrastructure projects (partly because many of the “good” infrastructure projects had then already been completed) to human resource development and institution building projects. For example, the

UNDP Human Development Report had its first year of publication in 1990, and of course participation as a concept has been part of development thinking for a considerable time (Oakley's seminal work, for example was published in 1984, and he and others continued to write extensively on participation throughout the early 90s). It is accepted that "participative" is not the same as "people-centred" but this change in emphasis is part of the normal progress of development thinking, and not particularly due to the insights provided by livelihoods thinking. Dynamism and flexibility likewise have been accepted as an essential for good development interventions for a considerable time. Again this is partly in parallel with and resulting from a move from the infrastructural projects of the 60s and 70s to the HRD and institutional projects of the 80s and 90s. This move was exemplified by the shift from "blue print" to "process" projects. The whole concept of "process", with its attendant ideas of feedback and flexibility was thoroughly discussed by Rondinelli starting in 1983, and continuing throughout the late 80s and early 90s, again predating this aspect of the livelihoods debate by several years.

The normative principles of the livelihoods approach (people-centred, holistic, dynamic, building on strengths, recognising micro-macro links, sustainable) are thus the principles of good development. These emerge and change through the natural process of debate and discussion, as new insights are gained and new perspectives adopted. At the present time, these principles would be accepted by most people working in development, and the discussion focuses on how well they can be implemented in practice. Like SMUWC, all development interventions are complex affairs and they depend for their success on the subtle linkages of human behaviour in such complex situations. The livelihoods concept can not make a particularly important contribution in this respect, and indeed it is either rejected or ignored by many development agencies. On the other hand, the livelihoods framework can make a significant contribution in analysis, in helping stakeholders to understand the situation they are working in, and suggesting appropriate responses to that situation. It is this aspect in which the livelihoods concept can make its most important contribution.

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