

## Reading

# Policy analysis and formulation for sustainable livelihoods

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### Reference

Roe, E. (1998) *Policy analysis and formulation for sustainable livelihoods* [online], Sustainable Livelihoods Unit of United Nations Development Programme. Available from: [http://www.undp.org/sl/Documents/Strategy\\_papers/Policy\\_Analysis\\_EMR/Policy\\_Analysis\\_and\\_Formulation.htm](http://www.undp.org/sl/Documents/Strategy_papers/Policy_Analysis_EMR/Policy_Analysis_and_Formulation.htm) (Accessed 24 November 2001).

# Policy Analysis and Formulation for Sustainable Livelihoods

*Emery Roe*

**Objective:** Identify and draw upon local complex and cross-sectoral realities for development of SL policies/methodology.

Introduction

- 1 Complex Policy Analysis for SL
- 2 Triangulation of SL
- 3 Participatory Policy-Making for SL
  - 3.1 Key issues of participatory policy making
    - Ownership
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## Introduction

In the past decade the dominant theme of development work has been that of local participation in development strategies. At the micro level this is manifested by participatory rural assessment, rapid rural appraisal etc. exercises. These are done to ensure that projects are appropriate for each community. At the macro policy level it is equally important to ensure that local communities have an input into development policy used by multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies, including UNDP.

The development of sustainable livelihoods is a complex policy issue because unpredictable change is taking place over sites that vary dramatically. A standard, one-size-fits-all approach for sustainable livelihoods is not possible, as conditions differ from site to site and are altering rapidly across the globe. Each case of sustainable livelihoods has to be approached on its own merits. There are, however, commonalities across cases which help the analyst in his or her assessment and which are discussed in the chapter.

The conventional levels of analysis in development are the household, community, district, province/state, country/nation, and the international/global levels. Sustainable livelihoods involve all these levels, plus one more. The most important level of analysis for sustainable livelihoods is the *landscape*, where the priority socio-ecological factors for sustainability converge. A landscape is defined as that mix of land forms, vegetation types, ecosystems, habitats and land uses in a region. The most familiar landscape is the watershed, though watersheds are not the only landscapes (rangeland, for example, is another).

The landscape is a socio-ecological level of analysis because it includes within its perimeter both environmental and social factors. The landscapes which matter for sustainable livelihoods have within them households, communities, and other social groupings. A single landscape can cross the political borders of several different countries. Similarly, the river that runs through the middle of a watershed is often treated by residents as the border separating different communities and territories within that watershed. Thus, the landscape is where development and the environment are so interwoven that they must be analyzed together at all times.

The first thing an analyst must understand in his or her assessment of sustainable livelihoods is how socio-ecological factors converge inside the landscape in which his or her site of interest is located:

- *Looking outside the landscape*, the analyst sees a host of factors affecting the ecological and social conditions within the landscape, including but not limited to global climate change and natural disturbances occurring across regions. Socioeconomic and political changes at the hemispheric and global

levels have increasing landscape impacts as well, such regional trade regimes, worldwide commodity price fluctuations, and global financial speculation. The analyst must be attentive to how these factors uniquely influence the potential for sustainable livelihoods at the site level.

- *Inside the landscape*, the first thing the analyst sees is the mismatch in time and scale between, on one hand, the socioeconomic and political developments that are taking within the landscape and, on the other hand, the ecological, geologic, and natural resource changes taking place within that landscape as well. Social changes typically occur more rapidly than do the environmental changes. This mismatch is the primary reason why it is necessary to treat development and the environment together at the landscape level.
- *But the analyst mustn't assume all mismatches are negative!* While much attention has been given to examples where rapid social developments have had a negative impact on the environment, there are examples where development has over time improved the environment within and even across a landscape. Familiar instances of a negative socio-ecological mismatch include shorter-than-recommended fallow periods, loss of soil fertility due to overutilization of land, and salinization of irrigated farmland. Examples of a positive socio-ecological mismatch include human-populated areas that have more trees than before human settlement (parts of West Africa), better erosion controls than before human settlement (parts of East Africa), and more plant and insect biodiversity than before human settlement (many urban areas). The fact that more people can mean a better environment is the primary reason why sustainable livelihoods are still possible in countries with rising rural and urban populations.
- *Once the analyst starts with the mismatch operating over the landscape*, his or her attention is directed to the interconnected socio-ecological factors that determine whether the mismatch is, on balance, positive or negative for the landscape and the period under analysis. The analyst must assess how within-landscape social factors affect the landscape's ecology, while at the same time looking for how within-landscape ecological factors (including those altered by the preceding social factors) affect other social relations there. Examples of factors that have both social and ecological impacts and origins include but are not limited to property and tenure regimes, demographic change, agricultural intensification, urbanization and regional climate change. None of these factors means the mismatch between social and ecological change is inevitably positive or negative. The analyst has to analyze each case on its own merits when undertaking an assessment of the potential for sustainable livelihoods there.
- *To summarize, the socio-ecological landscape is heterogeneous* not just because it contains a variety of different land uses, habitats, ecosystems and vegetations. It is also heterogeneous because households, communities and other sub-landscape levels of analysis (districts, provinces, countries) are varied in their practices, relations to and impacts on the environment and natural resource base within the landscape.

The analyst must note the three implications for sustainable livelihoods follow from the inside and outside-landscape heterogeneity. First, sustainable livelihoods are necessarily complex because the factors affecting them are numerous, varied and interdependent. This means that the *very best* an analyst can hope is that sustainable livelihoods are realized somewhere and all the time, though not everywhere and always in the same place or way.

Second, sustainable livelihoods take many forms, because there can never be just one kind of sustainable livelihood given all that complexity. The most important part of the expression, “sustainable livelihoods,” is that last “s.”

Third, since sustainable livelihoods are necessarily many and different, the analyst must try to ensure that the systems on which they depend are as self-sustaining and self-correcting as possible. No sustainable livelihood system can be fully self-sustaining just as some systems will always require a very high degree of management. Still, governments and external NGOs cannot hope to do all the management for sustainable livelihoods on their own. This means the analyst should promote and recommend local management systems that can make on-site resource decisions, local markets that value those resources efficiently, and local ecosystems that can adapt as far as possible on their own with little human intervention and management.

For these three reasons, sustainable livelihood systems are socio-ecological just as is the larger landscape in which they are found. We call such systems *complex adaptive systems* because their numerous, varied and interdependent components—social and ecological—interact at best in ways that enable the system to self-organize and improve its chances for survival within its wider landscape. Few systems are ever at their best, and most systems are a mix of processes that are self-organizing and others that require a great deal of management and regulation all the time. It should be clear, nonetheless, that efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods must support rather than undermine self-sustaining complex adaptive systems. Given the importance of such processes, the chapter returns to how to protect and manage complex adaptive systems in the conclusion.

This chapter looks at sustainable livelihoods as a complex policy issue and proposes a triangulation methodology for use in the design of sustainable livelihood policy. The final part of this chapter examines practical issues and methods of participatory policy making for sustainable livelihoods.

## 1 Complex Policy Analysis for Sustainable Livelihoods

Since sustainable livelihoods are complex for a multitude of reasons, it becomes a challenge, then, to answer, What policies should be in place so that sustainable livelihoods can be developed? (Policies, for the purpose of the **Guide**, include projects, programs, strategies, plans and administrative reforms.) To come up with answers means that the analyst must be able to analyze the issue usefully. This cannot be done unless the analyst uses the right kind of policy analysis.

There are two kinds of policy analysis: conventional and complex. In both, the product is the generation of advice through formal means for key stakeholders. Conventional policy analysis typically follows a sequence of steps that leads directly to a policy recommendation. Complex policy analysis relies on multiple approaches (information sources, methods, approaches) to converge on a recommendation from as many different directions as possible. Conventional policy analysis is sequential and cumulative; complex policy analysis is interactive and convergent.

A conventional policy analysis takes place step-by-step. The steps vary, depending upon the textbook, but typically the sequence is as follows: define the problem, identify the alternatives, agree on the methods and criteria to evaluate the alternatives, gather the relevant information, evaluate the alternatives in light of the data, decide on your recommendations, and then communicate them in a way your stakeholders can understand and act upon. In practice, some steps are repeated. Once the analysts have gathered the data, they might discover that they have defined the problem incompletely. Or once they have actually evaluated the alternatives in light of the data, the analysts find there is a previously unidentified alternative that also has to be evaluated. In such cases, the analyst goes back and repeats a step and then proceeds through the others to finalizing the preferred recommendations.

Conventional policy analysis is best undertaken in situations of low environmental uncertainty, relative stability in public (including government) objectives, strong institutional memory in the design and implementing agencies, and sufficient resources to tolerate mistakes in trial and error learning relevant to the issue in question. When these are present, the analyst can be better assured that over the course of his or her analysis there will not be unexpected changes in how problems are defined, alternative

formulated and evaluated, or how information and methods of analysis are identified and taken to be appropriate.

Unfortunately, the chief feature of complexity is surprise and the unexpected, and thus the principal characteristic of sustainable livelihoods, as a complex policy issue, is the unpredictability over how to promote and develop these livelihoods because of the socio-ecological heterogeneity across and between landscapes in which these livelihoods are found. In many of these cases, there is high environmental uncertainty, little or no stability in government objectives, weak to nonexistent institutional memory, and/or very few redundant resources to allow multiple chances at making any project work. Cause and effect are unclear in complex policy issues—just how do we ensure livelihoods are sustainable?—and few, if any, people will ever know enough to get the “big picture” about what makes for sustainable livelihoods, case by case. As for learning about sustainable livelihoods, complexity is defined as those circumstances where step-by-step learning is extremely difficult because little is known and even less is agreed upon, while everything else is changing so rapidly. In short, complex policy issues (and this includes sustainable livelihoods) cannot be analyzed conventionally, because it is next to impossible to come to an agreed upon set of recommendations if the problems that necessitated the analysis are constantly being redefined, the alternatives continually being respecified or reevaluated, the methods repeatedly revised and the data always having to be reanalyzed in light of new information.

How then to analyze a site’s potential for sustainable livelihoods? The answer: complex policy analysis.

### ***Complex Policy Analysis***

Complex policy analysis is *triangulation*, which is the use of multiple methods, databases, theories, disciplines and/or investigators to converge on what to do about the issue in question. The goal here is for the analyst to increase his or her confidence that no matter what direction he or she analyzes the issue from, he or she is led to the same problem definition, alternative, and/or recommendation. In this way, the analyst takes into account unexpected changes by first looking at the issue from all possible or available positions. If your analysis leads you to the same conclusion regardless of what position you take on an issue, then the fact that you have to suddenly change positions matters less than before because you have tried to take into account all different positions right from the outset in your analysis.

Everyone triangulates in their daily lives, and examples range from the everyday ones of cross-checking statements from one source with other sources to more formal ones, such as the use of different quantitative and/or qualitative methods to analyze the same issue or use of different theories to converge on a set of testable hypotheses. The most popular form of triangulation has been the use of multiple—the “tri” doesn’t mean only three—methods. Methodological triangulation figures prominently in many applied fields, including professional policy analysis, anthropology, marketing, investigative journalism, and participatory rural appraisal.

Triangulation is used for several reasons. It is most appropriate when issue complexity is high as in sustainable livelihoods. When it is not clear which of several approaches (methods, theories, databases, key informants) for analysis is correct because causality is not fully known or agreed upon, the analyst must use as many different approaches as possible so as to ‘triangulate’ on what is most useful to do.

Triangulation is especially helpful in identifying and compensating for biases and limitations in any one approach. Obtaining a second opinion or soliciting the input of all interested stakeholders or ensuring you interview key informants with widely differing positions are three common examples. Detecting bias is fundamental to complex policy analysis, because reducing or correcting for bias is one of the few things that analysts can actually do successfully when undertaking complex policy analysis.

The primary virtue of triangulation is that it builds confidence in the face of high issue complexity that the analyst is on the track of something relevant or useful in his or her analysis. When the findings of different approaches agree (that is, they converge on a shared finding), the analyst is more confident about the results of his or her analysis.

When the results of a complex policy analysis hold across different populations, settings, times, and perspectives, the validity of the analysis (their merits and relevance) increases.

Convergence in triangulation increases confidence. It does not increase certainty nor get the analyst closer to the “truth.” Triangulation does not miraculously make sustainable livelihoods any less complex than they are. Nor does it miraculously mean you have found “common ground” between approaches that differ so radically from each other. Things do not cease to be complex when we converge from different directions on what we should be doing or pursuing further. Instead of truth or certainty, convergence across multiple approaches enables the analyst to be more confident that he or she has in that convergence a suitable point of departure for pursuing sustainable livelihoods further. What triangulation allows the analyst to conclude is that, “No matter from what direction you look at this issue—in our case sustainable livelihoods—you’re led to the same [conclusion, starting point, problem definition, alternative, and/or recommendation].”

Even the failure to triangulate provides useful information. When patterns do not converge across multiple measures, methods, populations, landscapes, times and scales, the analyst has then to search for the more specific or localized factors that govern the issue in question. What you, the analyst, are studying may in reality be non-generalizable—that is, it may be a case in its own right—and triangulation is one of the few ways we are able to confirm that. *In fact, much of sustainable livelihoods is non-generalizable in just this way. That is, they have to be developed on a case-by-case basis, though some points are common to many, if not all cases, as we shall see.*

Triangulation has its problems. First, it can be time-consuming and expensive. Limitations on time, money and other resources may make it infeasible to employ multiple interviewers, multiple methods, and/or multiple databases. In order to reduce this cost, the chapter lays out the results of a triangulation on sustainable livelihoods, which can be used as a template for analysts when undertaking their complex policy analyses of sustainable livelihoods in the field.

Another problem with triangulation is bias. While triangulation can help correct for the bias in any one approach, care has to be taken to ensure that the biases are not in the same direction. No matter how many cross-checking questions in a survey, for instance, they cannot correct for the fact that the interviewer is white, male, middle-class and asks questions only in English. Such is the reason why the approaches used in triangulation should be as different as possible. Convergent findings are compelling, i.e., confidence building, only if it can be demonstrated that when the approaches make mistakes, they typically make mistakes in the opposite ways. Thus, the frequent debates over “quantitative versus qualitative” or “reductionistic versus holistic” methods of analysis are very misleading, when it comes to complex policy issues like those of sustainable livelihoods. In these cases, the analyst needs as many different methods—qualitative *and* quantitative, reductionistic *and* holistic—as he or she can, if the triangulation is to work.

The requirement that the analyst use different approaches when triangulating is one major reason for choosing the four approaches used in the following analysis of the sustainable livelihoods. To jump ahead, since “management” is so crucial to the definition and discussion of sustainable livelihoods, the approaches have been selected precisely because they differ dramatically on the issue of management. *Critical theory* contends there is a ruling techno-managerial elite of resource managers opposed to local-level control needed for sustainable livelihoods, while the *local justice framework* insists there are cases where this elite can be found locally as well. In contrast, *cultural theory* argues that the techno-managerial elite, whether local or not, is just one of several basic cultures of resource management important for sustainable livelihoods, while *Girardian economics* insists that none of these cultures are in any sense permanent, doomed as they are to disappear in crises that wipe away any chance of living sustainably. Although there are never any guarantees that a complex policy analysis will actually lead to triangulation, the chapter shows that we do converge on some important results for our understanding of what to look for when the objective is to support sustainable livelihoods.

One final point about triangulation in general. In triangulation it is not appropriate to select the “best” from each approach and then combine these elements into a composite approach. Remember, the approaches have been chosen precisely because they are as *different* as possible. Triangulation is not about coming up with a new composite method or theory, but rather arriving at a convergence, if any, of existing theories and methods.

### ***Starting the Complex Policy Analysis***

Below are eleven things to remember or do before you, the analyst, begin your triangulation:

- 1 *Undertake, where time and resources permit, the UNDP/SL interactive process of relevant data collection, namely,*
  - (i) A participatory assessment of risks, assets, entitlements, and indigenous knowledge base in the specific area for which you are trying to develop/assess sustainable livelihoods, e.g., the site, community, landscape, region;
  - (ii) An analysis of the macro, micro and sectoral policies and governance arrangements which influence livelihood strategies there;
  - (iii) An assessment and determination of the potential contributions of contemporary science and technology that complement indigenous knowledge systems relevant to improving livelihoods in the area of interest; and
  - (iv) The identification of social and economic investment mechanisms (including but not limited to microfinance and expenditures on health and education) that influence existing livelihood strategies.
- 2 *As you collect the above information, always ask yourself: What's the story here? The people you interview will be telling you stories—more formally, scenarios and argumentation having beginnings, middles and ends or premises and conclusions. Story-telling is the pre-eminent way people stabilize decisionmaking in the face of complexity. These scenarios and arguments allow them to make decisions, when things seem too complex to take decisions. When you, the analyst, cannot determine causality, you have to analyze people's argumentation and scenarios over that causality. Your policy recommendations will also be cast in a narrative format to make them comprehensible to policymakers and other stakeholders. This is why simplicity, clarity and transparency are so valued in policy analysis—they are precisely the values prized in good storytelling.*
- 3 *But “What's the story here?” only begins and ends the analysis. You still have to do the triangulation in between.*
- 4 *One way to get a storyline straight is to reduce the gap between information users and gatherers, that is, between decisionmakers and those who provide them their information. “Researchers”—whether bureaucrats, villagers or others—make their information more policy relevant when they cease to be just the gatherers of information and become the actual users of that information. This is why participatory assessment is so important. The ideal PA has residents gathering information that they themselves use, even if no formal project ever follows from that data collection. When the gap between the gatherers and users of information is reduced, then analysis has a much better chance of becoming timely feedback, prompt learning and rapid adaptive response. Analysis, in this case, is the intervention that gets information gatherers-as-users to think more productively about sustainable livelihoods.*

- 5 Remember: *Always be prepared for surprises*. You, the analyst, should think in terms of, be prepared for, and know ways to accommodate **surprise** in your analysis and recommendations. The most important feature of complexity is that complexity produces surprise.
- 6 *If the objective is to be ready for surprise, you must always be thinking in terms of counter-expected events*. If you are told “a leads to b and b leads to c”, can you think of a plausible scenario, where “not-a leads to not-b, but not-b still leads to c” or where “a leads to b, but b leads to not-c”? If, for example, in your interviews, you are told that “integrated pest management leads to increased agricultural yields, which in turn lead to more sustainable livelihoods,” can you imagine a situation (1) where IPM and increased field yields do not lead to sustainable livelihoods or (2) where chemical-based agriculture and lower field yields could nonetheless lead to sustainable incomes? In actuality, one can imagine situations where the latter would be found, e.g., in regions where field fertility is extremely low and overall degradation is extremely high, requiring home plots or gardens for intensive agriculture. Once you have such a rival hypothesis, ask of it: Is it *surprising*? Is it *desirable*? Can it be treated *seriously*? In addition to better preparing you for surprise, the virtue of counter-expected thinking is that, even if the rival scenario cannot now be supported, it can still serve as a possible policy option for the future to the extent that it is plausible, desirable and serious. For example, even if IPM is the preferred policy option, a case can be made for a modestly chemical-based household garden initiative.
- 7 *Indeed, one good way to show you are taking complexity seriously in your complex policy analysis is to replace terms, such as rational, efficient, optimal and second-best, with those of “plausible,” “desirable,” “serious,” “surprising,” and like terms*.
- 8 When starting your complex policy analysis, *Beware analogies from the past or examples from other sites*. Just because a scheme worked before or somewhere else does not mean it will work again, even there or where you are now. Such analogies are too tightly coupled and linear (i.e., “it worked in x, so it should work in y”), when the world you work in is complex, i.e., cause-and-effect are unclear in the most important regards. Knowing the past or comparable cases helps you less and less in moving up the learning curve in complex policy analysis.
- 9 It follows that *the usefulness of the complex policy analysis cannot be based solely on its success in explaining the past or predicting the future*. The reasons why we cannot predict or plan better for the future are the same reasons why we do not learn more from the past, i.e., in both cases, as noted earlier, we require stability in objectives, institutional memory, multiple reserves and low environmental uncertainty—all of which are typically missing or rare in complex policy issues. If explaining and predicting are difficult, what then should the analyst want from the complex policy analysis? Answer: *You want to identify what people are able to do, not just what needs to be done*. As the UNDP/SL program stresses, initiatives to promote sustainable livelihoods have to build on strengths and existing capacities.

In particular, an abilities-based assessment rather than a needs-based assessment forces the analyst to rethink his or her approach to sustainable livelihoods. For example, the analyst commonly comes across figures, such as “Nearly two-third [three-quarters, four-fifths] of the planet’s population is [without adequate shelter, outside the reach of adequate water, without adequate health care.]” From a needs-assessment perspective and assuming



for the moment that these figures of billions of people are true, then meeting these needs seems an insurmountable challenge. However, from an abilities-based assessment perspective, it *must* follow that there are hundreds of thousands of such people, probably millions of them, who are able to do something to improve their [shelter, health care, water supply], but currently are not doing so. This follows because of the law of large numbers. The billions of people in need form a distribution around the average person worldwide who is without services. Some people are better off and some are worse off than the average. Since billions of people are involved, the tail end of the distribution for people who are better off than the average, or could easily make themselves better off, probably number in the millions. The same holds for sustainable livelihoods. Even if billions of people are living unsustainably, this must also mean that millions are able to live sustainably but aren't. These are the people whose abilities your complex policy analysis should address. In brief, abilities count, and count big, even when (precisely because!) needs are also so great.

- 10 The next-to-the-last thing to remember before starting your complex policy analysis: Policies that you end up recommending must have built into their formulation and implementation the capacity to be redesigned through, e.g., effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Policy isn't policy, unless it can be revised in light of surprise. If what you recommended is treated as if it is to be formulated and implemented without modification and once and for all, then you are not doing development. Development means increasing human adaptability to change, and you cannot do that unless policy can adapt to change as well.
- 11 Finally, since policy is policy only to the extent that it can be redesigned in light of change, then there is never just one criterion to evaluate whether any given complex policy is successful. In conventional policy analysis, the principal, and often only, evaluative criterion is the extent to which policy implementation matches the original goals of the policy as written. In complex policy analysis, we must expect that the goals will change, even during implementation. Thus, in complex policy analysis, there are *always* different criteria to evaluate any given policy, the five most important being:
  - in terms of whether its implementation achieved its stated objectives;
  - against some ideal, which the policy's objectives may or may not match;
  - against the implementation record of like policies;
  - in terms of what would have happened had not the policy been in effect (the "counterfactual"); and
  - in terms of whether savings could have realized if the policy had been more cost-effectively undertaken.

In the process of defining the problem and assessing the evidence, the analyst will eventually decide which evaluative criteria are more important than others and just how more important. In fact, this is what is meant by "deciding the weight of the evidence" and "deciding each case on its own merits." This is also why complex policy analysis, unlike conventional policy analysis, is a form of case-by-case analysis, i.e., deciding the mix of criteria and the weights to be assigned to each for the issue in question.

## 2 The Results of an Actual Triangulation for Sustainable Livelihoods

For any analyst reading this chapter, the four most important policy questions are: What are sustainable livelihoods? Why are they an issue? Ideally, what should be done to develop them? Practically, what can actually be done? This section provides answers which analysts can use in their own site work. Because sustainable livelihoods are a complex policy issue, the answers to the questions are not easy and must be arrived at through triangulating on them from different directions.

The results of the triangulation are summarized below (and are based on edited and paraphrased material from the triangulation on sustainable development found in Roe, 1998):

What are sustainable livelihoods?

Although much more complicated, they are about using resources today in ways that keep open options for their use in future livelihoods.

Why are they an issue?

Sustainable livelihoods are an issue not just because we know few, if any, ways to keep options open for the future, but also because of many other factors too numerous to name.

Ideally, what needs to be done?

Ultimately, what needs to be done is to reduce the uncertainty that gives rise to the demands for sustainable livelihoods in the first place.

But practically, what can actually be done?

Differentiate! Beware the persecutory language of talking certainly about uncertainty. Acknowledge the unmanageable. Search for feedback cycles that make hard policy problems hard. Problematize need.

How the analyst can use these findings in his or her assessments for sustainable livelihoods will become clear as you read.

The four approaches used to arrive at the triangulated answers and introduced in the preceding section—Girardian economics, cultural theory, critical theory, and the local justice framework—were chosen for specific reasons. In addition to the fact that the four approaches focus on the issue of resource management central to sustainable livelihoods, they were selected because (1) each takes complexity seriously, (2) each differs diametrically from the others in terms of their approach to resource management (see the preceding section), and (3) each casts the problem of sustainable livelihoods in a fresh and useful light.

Before explaining how the above triangulated answers were generated and what their implications for sustainable livelihoods are, the core of each approach is summarized.

### ***Girardian Economics***

From this perspective, when economic agents—you, me, everyone—feel compelled to make decisions under high uncertainty, they act in an imitative fashion. That is, when they don't know what to do (things are that uncertain), they imitate those whom they think do know. You see such imitation at work in the sustainable livelihoods arena, where, because no one really has the blueprint for sustainable livelihoods (in fact it is not possible in a complex world), people tend to copy and mimic those who they think are living sustainably.

Unfortunately, the people being imitated are operating under same pervasive uncertainty and thus are also reduced to imitating those whom they think know best. Everyone ends up imitating everyone else, where no one really knows what to do. In this way, people become more alike as they become more and more desperate in finding someone to imitate. They eventually rush headlong into that ultimate state of imitation where everyone is acting exactly in the same way, namely, in a panic. People become mob-like, undergoing what the Girardians call a “crisis of undifferentiation,” when the distinctions that originally set people apart fade as the panic spreads in their midst.

Such mimetic (i.e., imitative) behavior is found throughout an economy, both in developed and developing countries. Panic selling, spiraling inflation, land speculation, commodity bubbles, and pyramid schemes (I buy when you buy, sell when you sell) are just some of the many instances of imitative economic behavior. In such situations, everyone wants wealth in order to protect themselves from this uncertainty, and for a while they even may find that wealth. Becoming wealthier and wealthier also allows people to take on new desires that they never had before. But the more people want wealth, the more they end up not knowing what real wealth is. One year people are investing in land, next month they are investing in commodities, next week in currencies, then gold yesterday, diamonds today, and whatever tomorrow as they feverishly try to find something that is certain and sustainable in the midst of the uncertainty that is tossing them hither and thither.

These panics, contagions and frenzies only break when the mob-like behavior fixes on (“polarizes around,” in Girardian terms) a scapegoat who is blamed for all the trouble. Someone or something is identified and condemned for causing the crisis, and this choice and condemnation is unanimous. Everyone ends up agreeing over who or what is to blame, and belief in these “facts” becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy independent of the original imitative behavior. The problem, however, is the utter arbitrariness of this “agreement”. These remain situations of pervasive uncertainty. The reality is no one person or thing can be blamed, things being as complex and uncertain as they really are. The scapegoat is just that, a scapegoat. It could have been anything or anyone. It could have been you.

Accordingly, people try to hide the fact that their choice of scapegoat was ultimately arbitrary. Once the scapegoat has been identified and a crisis of undifferentiation breaks, people construct elaborate reasons and conventions to make it look as if the scapegoat was really to blame. Whole societies and social norms get built around obscuring the fact that their real foundations—e.g., killing the leader, expelling minorities, ethnic cleansing, fighting a war—were based in mass behavior that had gotten out of control and was without any real foundations, save for the originating uncertainty.

But the unanimity and social conventions last only for a time, as these elaborate facades do not reduce the uncertainty that gave rise to imitation and polarization in the first place. Uncertainty persists. Yes, difference emerges from a crisis of undifferentiation in the form of new social conventions, but eventually that difference is seen for what it truly is—an arbitrary choice that temporarily works for people who can deal with uncertainty in no other way. And so the crisis of undifferentiation begins once again. In the view of Girardian economics, nothing is sustainable in the long-run.

From the Girardian perspective then,

*What are sustainable livelihoods?*

They are at best a social convention which for a time enables decisionmaking to take place under high uncertainty in a way that the decisionmakers believe keeps options open for the future.

*Why are they an issue?*

Ultimately they are an issue not because people are overexploiting resources, but because some of them have reached a level of (temporary) wealth where they now have the desire to stop such exploitation and achieve what they believe to be sustainable livelihoods.

*Ideally, what needs to be done?*

Ideally, the uncertainty that drives the crises of undifferentiation people are undergoing should be reduced.

*But practically what can actually be done?*

- Protect or decouple sustainable livelihood systems and their management from the more uncertain environments in which they are embedded (reduce the uncertainty).

- Encourage the evolution and diffusion of more than one kind of sustainable livelihoods (increase differentiation).
- Differentiate sustainable livelihoods by treating them on a case-by-case basis (maintain differentiation).
- Last, but never least, when it comes to sustainable livelihoods, nurture both inter-local differentiation and the role of economic growth and sovereignty rights in that differentiation. One of the few ways we know to increase wealth and diversity is through economic growth, while the sovereign nation state may well be one of the most efficient ways to create both differentiation and loyalties to that differentiation.

### ***Cultural Theory***

Peoples' views of nature and their strategies for managing needs and resources are a function of their culture, in the view of cultural theory. This means that what is taken to a sustainable livelihood in one culture is not taken to be so in another, such that each culture has its own definition of sustainability. But cultural theorists mean something very different by the term, "culture," than do most. From their perspective, Ghanaian market women and 19th century American robber barons are not from different cultures, but represent the same culture, that of entrepreneurial individualists. In the same way, notwithstanding their obvious differences, an Indian village and Exxon Corporation share the same culture, that of the highly stratified hierarchist.

Cultural theory identifies basic cultures that differ along two dimensions: grid and group. Group refers to the extent to which a person identifies with and is incorporated into a coherent unit, i.e., his or her group cohesion. The greater the identification and incorporation, the more that person's choice is subject to group oversight and determination. Grid denotes the degree to which a person's life is circumscribed by externally imposed constraints. The more binding and extensive the scope of these external constraints, the less open to individual negotiation is that person's life. Four basic cultures emerge from the intersection of the two basic (grid and group) dimensions of social being.

Strong group boundaries allied with few external prescriptions produce social relations that are *egalitarian*. Here there are few internal differences among group member (because of their low grid position), while there is high group cohesion. When a person's wider operating environment is characterized by strong group boundaries and binding constraints, the social relations are *hierarchist*. Here people are subject not only to the control of other members in their group but also the demands of externally imposed constraints, making their operating environment highly stratified. Persons who are circumscribed by neither their group nor by socially prescribed constraints are in the *individualist* culture. In this culture all boundaries are open-ended and ripe for negotiation. Finally, persons who feel themselves constrained from outside, yet alone by virtue of being part of no group, exemplify the *fatalist* way of life. Fatalists feel they have no control over their lives, because external forces are controlling them.

These four cultures represent competing ways of life, where one way of life defines itself by being opposite of the other ways of life. Where you find one culture, you will find the others, though the dominance of each varies over time and space. The reason why it is possible to find four diametrically different cultures operating at the same time and in the same area is simple: uncertainty. If the world were just one way, then the surprises that befell all those who insisted that it was some other way would eventually tip them out of their delusions and into that one true way of life. That this does not happen—that people go on and on being surprised—tells us that the world is never just one way; it is constantly changing.

Each way of life entails its own view of nature, and these differing views of nature imply competing definitions of sustainable livelihoods. The views of nature are the individualist's Nature Benign, the egalitarian's Nature Ephemeral, the hierarchist's Nature Perverse/Tolerant, and the fatalist's Nature Capricious:

- Nature Benign assumes the world is wonderfully forgiving and inherently sustainable. In the view of the individualist, no matter what knocks we deliver, the ball will always return to the bottom of the basin. Nature Benign

encourages and justifies trial and error. As long as we go about our individualistic ways, order will come out of chaos and a hidden hand will lead us toward the best possible outcome, both being the essence of the individualist's notion of sustainability.

- Nature Ephemeral assumes the opposite. The world, egalitarians tell us, is a terrifyingly unforgiving place and the least jolt may trigger its complete collapse. Trial-and-error learning or experimentation is much too dangerous to undertake. Individualistic behavior is irresponsibly destructive if nature is ephemeral. Sustainability is all about leaving nature alone, untouched by human hands or direct human intervention.
- Nature Perverse/Tolerant is forgiving of most events but is vulnerable to an occasional knocking of the ball over the rim. Whereas Nature Benign encourages bold experimentation in the face of uncertainty and Nature Ephemeral encourages extreme caution, Nature Perverse/ Tolerant requires us to ensure that exuberant behavior never goes too far, but rather is kept within firm limits, controls and carrying capacities. For the hierarchist, the essence of sustainability is keeping within these limits, thresholds and capacities.
- Nature Capricious is a random world. Institutions with this view of nature do not really manage or learn. They just cope with erratic events. Life is, and remains, a lottery. It is luck, not learning, that from time to time brings resources one's way. For the fatalist, nothing is guaranteed and accordingly nothing is sustainable.

Each way of life and view of nature has a distinct strategy for managing needs and resources. Fatalists believe you can manage neither your needs nor your resources. Yes, there are plenty of resources out there, but the horn of plenty disgorges in your direction only on your lucky day. In short, it really is not possible to sustain livelihoods. Egalitarians believe you can manage your needs, but not your resources. Because they perceive resources to be fixed and fragile, the only real strategy open is to decrease peoples' needs directly. In this view, sustainable livelihoods means protecting the resources and reducing what humans want from them. Hierarchists believe you can manage your resources, but not your needs. For hierarchists, increases in resources are necessary because it is really not possible to change people's requirements for these resources and because there are always more and more people. Hierarchists, in short, see no contradiction in sustained economic growth. Finally, individualists believe you can manage both your needs and resources. Skillful individualists, unlike egalitarians and hierarchists, believe experimentation and trial-and-error learning can harm only the individual, never the totality. For individualists, free-market capitalism and entrepreneurialism are the essence of their sustainable livelihoods.

These four different views of nature and their associated needs and management strategies are summarized in Figure 1:

	Grid		
High	<b>FATALIST</b> <i>Nature Capricious</i> Can manage neither needs nor resources	<b>HIERACHIST</b> <i>Nature Perverse/Tolerant</i> Can manage resources, but not needs	
Low	<b>INDIVIDUALIST</b> <i>Nature Benign</i> Can manage both needs and resources	<b>EGALITARIAN</b> <i>Nature Ephemeral</i> Can manage needs, but not resources	Group
	Low	High	

**Figure 1: Cultures, Views of Nature, and Management Strategies**

Two things become clear when the analyst examines Figure 1 closely. First, you see a fifth culture at work, one at the exact midpoint of the figure where all cultures are tangent. For these few, it is possible to escape the social control of any one of the other

four cultures by refusing to control the others or to be controlled by them. Like hermits, these persons do not take sides; they know enough about each culture to contemplate it without at the same time really being consumed by any of them. For these persons, an important part of their “sustainable livelihoods” is their ability to meditate on and distance themselves from the hurley-burley of cultures-as-usual.

Second, look closely at Figure 1 and you will find that cells along one diagonal share something in common that those along the other do not—principally, a very different attitude toward trial and error. We have already seen how individualists value trial and error, while fatalists do not. Egalitarians, in contrast, prefer that there be no trials unless one could guarantee against errors, particularly ones perceived to be dangerous, whereas hierarchists are more comfortable undertaking trial and error, albeit in relatively small, incremental steps. In other words, fatalists and egalitarians, who fall on the downward sloping diagonal, believe that trial and error is impossible or at minimum potentially very harmful, while individualists and hierarchists, who fall on the upward sloping diagonal, believe trial and error is possible, though at times in small steps. This suggests two very different kinds of orientation toward sustainable livelihoods can be at work depending on what position one takes on the role of trial and error in developing those livelihoods.

From a cultural theory perspective then,

*What are sustainable livelihoods?*

It depends on the culture. Because their views of nature and their strategies to manage their needs and resources differ so profoundly, sustainable livelihoods are necessarily defined differently by each culture.

*Why are they an issue?*

Ultimately sustainable livelihoods are an issue not because people are overexploiting resources, but because people belong to cultures that are not only different, but conflicting and competing as well. What one culture takes as the answer to uncertainty—its view of nature and its corresponding management strategy—another culture takes as the source of its problems. Given multiple cultures, sustainable livelihoods will always be an issue.

*Ideally, what needs to be done?*

Ideally, the uncertainty to which culture is a response should be reduced.

*But practically what can actually be done?*

- If you cannot think like a hermit, be biased in favor of your culture (and thus your own conception of sustainable livelihoods), recognizing that others are doing the same for theirs.
- Center your definition of sustainable livelihoods in terms of where you stand on the usefulness of trial and error learning in development.
- Insist on the necessity of incorporating multiple cultural viewpoints into a sustainable livelihoods perspective; these livelihoods won't be real otherwise.
- Finally, be open to surprise and change: No sustainable livelihood can be or, for that matter, should be once and for all or in one way only.

### ***Critical Theory***

The keystone of critical theory is the observation that a government promotes itself and its dominant ideology by means of fostering opposition to itself. Whether intentionally or not, government bureaucracies engender counter-bureaucracies, each having a vested interest in keeping their “opponents” around as a way of perpetuating themselves. So-called opponents—be they IMF “versus” World Bank, the IMF/World Bank “versus” host country governments, these governments “versus” international NGOs, and the NGOs “versus” multinational corporations—are all part of the same techno-managerial elite that believes it has the solutions to managing our way out of the increasing complexity in which we find ourselves. They all believe, for example, in the need and

ability to manage natural resources on a global and transnational scale. They differ only in the management solutions they wish implemented. Unfortunately but unsurprisingly, complexity increases as these “solutions” give rise to “counter-solutions,” with bureaucracies giving rise to counter-bureaucracies and thereby intensifying the belief that a global resource managerialism is all the more “needed” in order to resolve the increasing complexity. This is why the more regulations there are, the more things seem in need of (further) regulation

In this way, the techno-managerial elite (also known as the “New Class”) fosters artificial negativity, which gives the appearance of opposition, but in the process reinforces the elite and ends up leading to ever more bureaucratic red-tape and attempts at regulation. The answer? A negativity that arises organically outside and in opposition to the increased bureaucratization, the kind of opposition you find, for example, in the early years of many populist, social or community-based movements. Organic negativity reflects an underlying cultural heterogeneity and particularity, both of which are highly localized and have persisted through time and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. This localized heterogeneity and particularity resist all manner of New Class attempts to homogenize human beings and the real communities into conformity, universalize their problems, coopt and centralize their solutions, and thereby make all individuals abstractly equal when manifestly they are not. Yet, since organic negativity cannot be managed by any techno-managerial elite (it is outside management by resisting it), there can be no blueprints to implement a populism or “community development” that reflects the irreducible cultural heterogeneity and particularity of human beings as place-based persons.

What does this mean for sustainable livelihoods? Start with the associated issue of sustainable development. From the viewpoint of critical theory, sustainable development advocates differ with others in the New Class only in that they—the sustainable development proponents—see themselves, and not the others, as having answers to how to manage and assemble resources more effectively. In this view, power to manage resources must shift within the New Class, away from those who have managed the earth locally and irresponsibly to those who know how to manage it globally and responsibly. As such, sustainable development is a New Class form of artificial negativity, where “opponents”—those for a sustainable earth versus those in the earth-degrading transnational corporations—are really in sync with each other in believing that resources can and must be managed on a worldwide scale.

What is really go on in the “debate” over sustainable development is New Class experts jockeying among themselves in claiming rights to stewardship over land and resources they do not own. By generating and participating in such a debate, technical experts and managers assert rights as equal “stakeholders” in the land and resources they say are not being managed sustainably. Working on the assumption that those who sustain resources are the best stewards of those resources, the experts make a twofold claim, namely, not only are insiders, specifically local residents and communities, not stewarding their resources, but those who really know how to sustain those resources are outsiders, specifically the experts and professionally-trained resource managers. According to this argument, local people are in need of the stewardship of systems-oriented techno-managerial elites, be they experts in governments, international donor agencies, or transnational nongovernmental organizations. As a counterweight and corrective to these aspirations of New Class hegemony, critical theory recommends a combination of organic negativity in the form of ecological populism, communalistic localism and confederal municipalism.

What then are the implications for sustainable livelihoods? From a critical theory perspective,

*What are sustainable livelihoods?*

They are part and parcel of sustainable development, which is a New Class version of resource managerialism that functionally serves to globalize and perpetuate the techno-managerial elite’s control over everyday life. While opposed to standard economic growth prescriptions, sustainable development is really artificial negativity that leaves untouched the issue of whether or not the New Class resource managerialism is appropriate at all. What this

means for sustainable livelihoods is that the techno-managerial elite may well have nothing to contribute to their development beyond what local people are already doing.

*Why are they an issue?*

Ultimately, sustainable livelihoods are an issue because the New Class' older versions of resource managerialism, such as economic growth and transnational exploitation, have come under increasing criticism and complexity. These older versions now must be augmented and/or replaced by newer, aspiring versions of resource managerialism, called sustainable development (and including sustainable livelihoods), but still under the expert control of techno-managerial elites.

*Ideally, what needs to be done?*

Nothing "needs" to be done. Ideally, organic negativity would eliminate the "need" for New Class domination, in particular resource managerialism and all of its off-shoots, such as sustainable development.

*But practically what can actually be done?*

- Protect really existing communities which seek control of their own territories and practice their own forms of "sustainable livelihoods," irrespective of how the New Class defines them.
- Promote a loose federal arrangement of heterogeneous communities practicing their own forms of sustainable livelihoods, each with the right to secede from this confederation but having no right to usurp others.
- Don't be deluded into thinking in terms of "good development" and "bad development," as they both operate according to New Class principles for "development."
- Give populism and social movements a chance.

### ***Local Justice Framework***

Unlike the preceding three approaches, the local justice framework is not a theory. A theory of local justice is not possible, as the allocation systems of interest-immigration, layoffs, school admissions, rationing, and military service, among others—are too complex and messy to subsume under an all-embracing theory of justice.

The local justice framework seeks to describe and explain the allocation of scarce and heterogeneous goods and burdens made in-kind and largely outside markets by specific autonomous institutions to specific individuals. Such allocation systems are crucial to the sustainability of local livelihoods.

The best way to start is to contrast local justice with global justice. Briefly put, global redistributive policies have three characteristics. First, they are designed centrally, typically by the national government. Second, they are intended to compensate people for various sorts of bad luck that happen to befall some individuals. Third, they usually are in the form of cash transfers. Local justice policies differ on all three counts. They are designed by relatively autonomous organizations which, although they may be subject to constraints laid down by the center, have some autonomy to develop and undertake their chosen scheme. Also, they are not compensatory, or only partly so. An initiative for allocating scarce health resources may compensate patients for bad medical luck, but not for other kinds of bad luck (including the bad luck of being denied another scarce good). Finally, local justice centers around the actual allocation of in-kind goods and services, not money or cash transfers.

Complexity in local justice systems comes not just from the fact that the goods are scarce, heterogeneous and in kind and vary because local situations vary. Local justice systems also differ because policies are tied to complex (and not always consistent) criteria, mechanisms, procedures, and schemes for allocation. Equally important, the actors in local justice systems are multiple. *Politicians*, make first-order decisions over



how much to allocate; *allocative officers* make second-order decisions over how to distribute the amount to be allocated (these on-the-ground allocative institutions are the special province of local justice systems); and *recipients* make or respond to third-order decisions (particularly incentives and disincentives) that either affect the recipient's need for the scarce good being allocated or their likelihood of receiving it. These actors, in turn, are motivated by different principles. First-order politicians are motivated primarily (albeit not exclusively) by efficiency concerns; second-order allocators by equity as well as efficiency; and third-order recipients by self-interest. There also can be a fourth "actor," that of a diffuse public and public opinion, especially in the form of the media. This hodgepodge of heterogeneity and multiple actors subscribing to mixed principles and practices makes for compelling complexity in local justice systems.

Local justice systems have clear implications. Not only are such systems not designed to compensate for global injustices, local justice systems can actually lead to those injustices. Throughout a person's life, s/he interacts with a succession of organizations, each of which is able to give or deny that person some scarce good or service. Sometimes, the cumulative impact of these interactions may be very unfair. Imagine the person who through sheer bad luck is subject to all burdens but denied all the goods, because in each case s/he is just below the cutoff point of selection. Under local justice systems, those responsible for allocating a scarce good or service rarely if ever evaluate recipients in the light of their past successes or failures in receiving other scarce goods and services. Remember, local justice is largely noncompensatory, without mechanisms for redressing bad luck in other allocation areas.

The nature of chance events means some persons will always miss every boat: they are turned down for training, drafted into public service, fired during an economic downturn, and refused scarce medical services; in addition, their partner develops kidney disease, their assets become worthless, and their community is invaded by outsiders. For such cases, it is neither desirable nor possible to create a mechanism to compensate cumulative bad luck. In the first place, if people knew they were going to be compensated for whatever happens to them, they could take more risks and thereby incur more harm and thus require more compensation. More important, the machinery for such compensation would be hopelessly complex and costly. Obviously, such objections do not exclude all forms of inter-institutional compensation, but, in the view of the local justice framework, there is not much we can achieve along these lines.

With that in mind, what would a sustainable development—of which sustainable livelihoods are an essential part—look like if made consistent with the local justice framework? Start with the insight that local justice can lead to global injustice. From a local justice perspective, sustainable development poses the opposite problem. The global justice of sustainable development, like any other universalized approach to goodness, will lead to local injustices, when the former is implemented uniformly over an altogether heterogeneous landscape. For the local justice framework, the gap between local justice and global injustice is largely one that cannot be filled. So too by extension is the gap between global justice and local injustice unbridgeable.

Such considerations point to justice/injustice cycles at work in sustainable livelihoods. To break arbitrarily into such a cycle: ...the more unjust the global economy becomes, the more pressure there is for sustainable development and livelihood strategies everywhere. The more sustainable development becomes a global phenomenon, the more locally unjust its uniform application would necessarily be in terms of actual sustainable livelihoods. The more uniform the application, the more local pressure for suitably heterogeneous livelihoods. But the more heterogeneous the applications of sustainable development and livelihoods on the ground, the greater the chance of global injustice arising from the decentralization and lack of coordination in sustainable livelihoods on the ground.

From this wider perspective, sustainable development and livelihoods strategies can be reconceived as a justice/injustice cycle, and not just equated to one of its moments as is commonly done by most sustainability advocates. Sustainable development and livelihoods must be seen as not ending when unjust global systems become more fair, but rather as continuing through a set of iterations whose moments include a *rejection* of an overly globalized sustainable development and approach to sustainable livelihoods. What keeps the cycle one of being about sustainability is not its "success" at one particular point, but its constantly coming back to that insistence that resources should

be used today in ways that keep livelihood options open for tomorrow, whether locally or globally.

From a local justice perspective then,

*What are sustainable livelihoods?*

At best, they are a justice/injustice cycle that recurrently comes back to the notion that we should manage resources today in ways that leave open future options for sustainable livelihoods.

*Why are they an issue?*

Ultimately sustainable livelihoods are an issue because local justice systems are fairly complex in practice and invariably involve elements of injustice throughout its operation.

*Ideally, what needs to be done?*

Ideally, the complexity of local justice systems should be reduced, the homogeneity of sustainable livelihoods strategies complexified, or both.

*But practically what can actually be done?*

Be prepared to accommodate the reality that local justice systems are inevitable and, as such, they will invariably alter sustainable livelihood strategies on the ground.

### **Triangulation**

Using these four sets of answers, how do they generate the triangulated answers that started this section?

At the first read-through, little convergence is readily apparent. The answers especially to first and last questions—*What are sustainable livelihoods?* and *Practically, what can actually be done to realize them?*—are very different. For their part, the centrality of learning, the role of communities in generating sustainable livelihoods, the importance of justice in such communities—all have been touched upon at one time or another in UNDP/SL meetings and documentation as well as elsewhere.

That said, a closer inspection of the answers points to some convergence. Most clearly, answers to the third question—*Ideally, what needs to be done?*—intersect on a call to reduce the complexity and uncertainty that give rise to demands for sustainable livelihoods in the first place. (In the case of critical theory, organic negativity is the way to get such certainty.) Simply put, we need the time, resources and wherewithal to reduce the complexities that drive us to want to live more sustainably. In this way, sustainable livelihoods are a response to complexity, not the means to reduce it. By implication, the answers of the different approaches to the third and last questions underscores the very large gaps between the ideal and the practical, on the one hand, and between implementation and results on the other when it comes to addressing complex policy issues.

The complexity is also reflected in the various answers to *What are sustainable livelihoods?* and *Why are they an issue?* While sustainable livelihoods are many things to many people, the subject is complex because, wherever we stand and no matter how we look at it, it always comes back to having something to do with using resources today in ways that keep livelihood options open for use in the future—and we really know few, if any, ways how to do that. But this is not the only reason sustainable livelihoods are complex. As the answers to *Why are they an issue?* indicate, they are complex precisely because many other factors are making them so in addition to the drive to manage livelihoods more sustainably for the future. Wealth, culture, managerialism, and issues of justice and much more come to complicate sustainable livelihoods considerably.

When it comes to responding to such complexity—*Practically, what can actually be done to realize sustainable livelihoods?*—there appears to be too many different answers for any triangulation to be possible. At a very broad level, it is clear that whatever sustainable livelihoods are, they must accommodate “difference,” particularly at levels

below the global or the general. Fortunately, there are other commonalities across the preceding four subsections, and the **Guide** casts them as a set of injunctions to the analyst in answer to *Practically, what can actually be done to realize sustainable livelihoods?*

*Differentiate!*

All four analyses insist, each in its own way, that analysis starts with differentiating situations, particularly the local. Girardian economics sees local differentiation as a response to crises of undifferentiation; critical theory insists on the pre-eminence of cultural heterogeneity in local communities; cultural theory finds an irreducible pluralism in basic cultures that define each other by being fundamentally different from each other; while the local justice framework insists that local is not global and what is local has many viable forms. The imperative to differentiate does not, however, tell you, the analyst, how to differentiate or the dimensions on which to differentiate. That you have to determine from your site assessment, always mindful that sites differ case-by-case.

*Beware persecutory language!*

A great deal of development work, while well-intended, often ends up as a form of persecution of poor people, and each of the preceding approaches has noted this persecution. The New Class damns any populism that would think differently than the techno-managerial elite; egalitarians and individuals literally see each other as the enemy when it comes to issues of sustainability; each, in turn, is willing to scapegoat and sacrifice the other in the name of some higher good, like “Halt population growth!” or “Free markets everywhere!”; and, even if these exclamations were globally true and just, they surely lead to local injustices, given wide inter-local variation. Indeed, such statements as, “Halt population growth!,” have zero-repeat, zero-policy relevance in the absence of you and other analysts like you providing estimates for the site you are analyzing as to what levels of population and consumption have to be in place so that people there can have markets, participate in their development, and manage their own livelihoods sustainably. And you cannot know those estimates unless you work on a case-by-case basis.

*Acknowledge the unmanageable!*

Each of the preceding four subsections recognizes that an important part of what managers want to manage for sustainable livelihoods is itself unmanageable or uncontrollable. In critical theory, we saw the unmanageable in organic negativity. In Girardian economics, it took the form a rapidly cascading crisis of undifferentiation. In the local justice framework, we saw the impossibility of designing a compensatory management mechanism to rectify the global injustices accumulated through the workings of locally just systems. In cultural theory, we wondered at the difficulty of designing and managing policies around multiple cultures which see themselves as mutually exclusive in fundamental respects. What this means is that in each case of sustainable livelihoods, there will be a point at which managers find they cannot manage what they want (have) to manage. Efforts to live and manage sustainably quickly confront a complexity that is unmanaged, if not unmanageable; but a complexity that has not been (or even cannot be) managed puts all the more pressure on managers to try to control it—and as soon as possible.

### *Search for feedback cycles!*

The feedback cycle in the last sentence is not the only one that matters for sustainable livelihoods. Each of the four preceding analyses identified its own “perverse” feedback cycle—differentiation/undifferentiation, over-regulation/underregulation, opposing cultures/inevitable pluralism, local/global justice and injustice. Many more exist, if simply because the analyst is operating in a world where causality is always unclear. The more you search, the more perverse feedback cycles you will find. And the more feedback cycles you find, the more you will understand why sustainable livelihoods, like sustainable development, are *necessarily* so difficult to realize. The triangulation reminds us that, no matter where you stand or how you look at it, sustainable development and livelihoods strategies embrace hard issues that are going to be around for some time, *especially* in this increasingly complex world.

### *Problematize need!*

In none of the four approaches is “need” straightforward. For Girardians, wealth create needs; for critical theorists, so many of our needs today are ones of artificial negativity cultivated by our New Class gardeners; in the local justice framework, needs are very messy to determine and often insufficiently specified; and for cultural theorists, need is fundamentally dependent on one’s way of life, and ways of life vary, always. Whatever the merits of these individual arguments, their convergence underscore that “human needs” are rarely as simple as you or the organizations you work for might think. This means that a sustainable livelihoods approach that is based solely on needs (and not on people’s strengths, abilities and capacities) is surely to encounter insurmountable problems.

Note just how different these triangulated answers are from most current recommendations advocated for sustainable development and livelihoods. Many advocates recommend holistic and systemic thinking; the triangulation recommends that, if you do adopt a holistic approach, you must first differentiate the kinds of thinking and analyses that go into it. Many recommend the need for a long-term perspective; the triangulation recommends that, if you adopt such a perspective, you must first question and problematize the need that drives you to take a long-term view. Many recommend a new balance between economics, development and environment; the triangulation recommends that, if your goal is such a balance, then you must first search for and try to accommodate the perverse feedback cycles that undermine any stable balance. And many recommend viewing the planet as a whole; the triangulation insists that, if you do take a global perspective, then you must first acknowledge just how unmanageable a great deal of the planet is.

But what does all of this mean for you, the analyst, in your fieldwork? We turn to the answers in the **Guide’s** concluding section.

## **3 Participatory policy making for SL**

### **3.1 Key issues in participatory policy making**

In the past decade the dominant theme of development work has been that of local participation in development strategies. At the micro level this is manifested by participatory rural assessment, rapid rural appraisal etc. exercises. These are done to ensure that projects are appropriate for each community. At the macro policy level it is equally important to ensure that local communities have an input into development policy used by multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies, including UNDP.

Issues of particular importance to the link between communities and policy making concern ownership, credibility and process.

### ***Ownership***

Ideally the participatory policy making process should be owned by governments and communities. In reality, initial ownership will probably rest with CSO's. Once the latter groups have begun the process, governments can be presented with evidence highlighting desirable change. The latter should stimulate government participation and ownership in the process. UNDP has a vital role to play in encouraging government involvement in participatory policy making and in bridging the gap between communities and government and in facilitating the involvement of other stakeholders (local, national and international research institutes, local government etc.).

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is essential to convince policy makers. Three factors which contribute to increased credibility are listed next.

- Organisations facilitating participatory policy making must be seen to be transparent and self critical about their methods and findings
- Reports and output from the process must highlight the 'voice' of the poor in terms of what they have said and in the form of diagrams which they have made
- Ideally the group presenting to policy makers should include members of the community or people directly representing them.

### ***Process***

Process is more than presenting a report to policymakers. It means seizing on windows of opportunity that provide access to policy makers and being aware of the complex nature of the 'policy machinery' in a country. The policy machinery is made up of constitutional decrees, legislative acts, instructions, rules, guidelines and orders that can be issued by officials at different levels and local traditions and practices. The community's voice must be targeted at the appropriate part of the 'policy machinery'. Although local community issues relevant to policy making will be cross sectoral and complex, policy tends to be simplified and set within sectoral government ministries or multi lateral departments (i.e. UNDP gender, UNDP urban management etc.). This conflict needs to be dealt with to ensure effective participatory policy making.

### ***3.2 Interpreting local realities into a usable framework for policy formulation***

Policymakers require a policy product. Participatory research provides an opportunity to deliver specific policy recommendations and a learning experience for policymakers. In order to successfully create the policy product that authentically echoes the voices of the poor and increase the probability of implementation, the following action points have been provided:

- It may be more useful to select a few advocacy issues out of the many that emerge within the work of development agencies. These few ideas should have the potential for a significant impact. After the ideas are selected, the agency will need develop a plan of action to influence the decision maker's knowledge, appreciation, acceptance and ability to act upon the given proposal.
- Governments can be helped to establish formal or semi-formal mechanisms to assist participatory policy. For example, through the setting up of policy implementation units. These units are typically attached either to ministries. Their job is to work in a collaborative way across ministries to promote participation in decision-making within the government, and then to reach outside that arena to get input from other sources.
- Challenge intermediary structures and bring officials and local people together in the field. Merging their discourse can be more successful than providing second hand reports to officials.

- Information and knowledge must flow between change agents, policymakers and those in the field. Bringing policymakers to the field must be complemented by field members enhancing their knowledge of the work of policymaking. Policy change advocates, although filling a necessary and vital role, must also understand the government and the ways in which policies are formulated. Fundamental questions such as how and who should be approached in government with what require time and effort. Knowing precisely which legislative acts, rules, guidelines, and government orders operate within each level of government increases the policy-change advocate's ability to facilitate development, introduce new policies or modify existing policies.
- It is useful if the information collected is "broken down" into issues to bring order to the analysis. For example, a wealth of data on education services and the poor was collected in Ghana. The material appeared more coherent when the researcher broke the issue down to access, quality and relevance. These topics, of course, could then further broken down for additional coherency and clarity.
- In presenting policy recommendations to the appropriate change agent, the proposal should include a strong case for the change, including why it is necessary and important, and who will benefit and by how much. The proposal should also contain information on the proposing organization, problems in the field that are blocking development, the precise policy that needs change and a request for a personal meeting to explain the details.
- Contacting like minded organizations and individuals to join in presenting the proposal is valuable. Also, the media could create a favorable climate for the proposal's acceptance.
- The gap between policymaking and policy implementation should be followed up on. Policy changes do not always lead to changes in outcome. Policy can exist as an intention or as a symbol, but may never be put into practice. Therefore, policy change advocates should follow up with the progress of the proposal as it moves around within the different levels of government and departments until the desired change is issued.
- Participatory policy making is a Process, not an Event. Participation makes it necessary to be responsive to a range of interests that may or may not have been fully understood at the outset. As a practical matter, this suggests the desirability of phased programs, rolling designs, and flexibility.
- Extensive Use of Workshops and Forums. UNDP has a comparative advantage in facilitating forums—opportunities for people who don't normally get together to discuss things, or for people whose positions tend to isolate them, to get input from a variety of sources.

### 3.3 *Case studies*

#### **South African Participatory Poverty Assessment**

In February 1995, the South African Participatory Poverty Assessment (SA-PPA) was commissioned. The assessment contributed to the South African government and World Bank's goal of developing the policy voices of the poor. The specific objectives of the assessment were to improve policy analysis, build participation and increase stakeholder inclusion in South Africa.

The organization, Data Research Africa (DRA), was selected to conduct the assessment. To do this, DRA convened a workshop with over fifty South African research and development organizations, academia members, community members, government and NGO representatives in attendance. The workshop determined that:

selected research teams would conduct participatory community assessments based on the workshop's research criterion;

a direct link to senior civil servants and politicians would be established with the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) office to provide ongoing communicating the assessment;

a Management Committee (MC) was formed with representatives from the various organizations to direct the assessment and facilitate the writing of policy recommendations;

a stakeholders workshop was organized to engender a high level of ownership and commitment and ensure the implementation of the study to be efficient and effective.

Sixteen organizations were selected to spend three months in various communities conducting participatory research. NGOs already working in the various communities comprised the bulk of the research teams to ensure that the research conducted would contribute to the ongoing development process. The teams each collected, analyzed, recorded and extracted policy implications and suggestions from their research to submit to the MC. The MC identified and grouped the key points within each research report to write a synthesis report. The various key points resulted in a series of flow diagrams. These diagrams guided the detailed writing of a synthesis report. Several of the individual research results could be triangulated across other qualitative, quantitative and participatory work allowing the analysis to move more quickly to generalized findings. The research teams were reconvened for feedback on the draft synthesis report.

The synthesis report was then converted into actual policy recommendations. The objective, and the greatest challenge, was to structure the synthesized report in a manner that translated the wealth of participatory findings from the various research reports into an analytical framework without losing the local voices. The challenge lies in the fact that poverty is complex, multi-dimension and cross-sectoral while policy is simple, one-dimension and single-sectoral. Furthermore, the South African government is divided into sectorally defined departments, budgets and responsibilities.

An additional challenge was propelling the policy recommendations into implementation. To achieve this objective, the participants in the study engaged in "strategic activism" which includes identifying the appropriate institution, person or forum and the appropriate vehicle for the different policy issues to be placed on the agenda.

In addition to the SA-PPA assessment, the South African cabinet approved the preparation of a report on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa in October 1995. The group to compile this report included some members from the SA-PPA process. The knowledge of the SA-PPA members was directly incorporated into the conception of the Poverty and Inequality report and recommending ways in which policies can be improved. As a result, the SA-PPA was finally positioned to ensure that the voices of the poor were heard by policymakers. To date, the policy objectives have been met.

### **Jamaica – a study of urban violence**

In September 1995, the Jamaican government and the World Bank conducted a study on perceptions of urban violence in Jamaica. The study was commissioned to provide preliminary data on poverty and violence for the Jamaican Urban Poverty Study and to assist in the identification of the sub-project menu for the Jamaican Social Investment Fund. In this case, violence could not be studied as an isolated phenomena, but in terms of its causal relationships. Therefore, the specific objective was to increase understanding of the complex processes that produced and reproduced violence in urban poor communities. An understanding of the interrelationship between social institutions, violence and poverty provided the design and framework for the policy recommendations.

The study was implemented in two stages. First, the research team used PRA tools to conduct research in five poor urban areas. In the interest of using appropriate indicators to measure perceptions of the problem, the study purposely avoided defining violence as a problem. Instead, it researched the extent to which communities perceived violence as a problem and the importance of this problem and the different types of violence. Then, analysis and exploration of the causal relationship between violence, poverty and social institutions was undertaken. For example, community members identified the lack of work and employment opportunities as the direct cause of poverty which directly affected the levels of economic violence. The PRA research generated extensive descriptive data; participants from the five different communities provided important perceptions and insight into the problems of violence.

The second step of the study utilized focus-group discussions with stakeholders to triangulate the different perceptions of poverty and violence. To elicit solutions, the PRA focus groups described their ‘dream communities’.

Once the fieldwork was complete, the research team underwent the challenge of transforming and synthesizing the collected information into a framework that managed to capture participant voices for policymakers. To do this, the research team aggregated the community’s perceptions into a five fold matrix. This framework allowed policymakers to grasp the results of the research; and the matrix even provided information that was counterintuitive to the policymakers knowledge. The ‘dream community’ information was translated in a manner accessible to policymakers, the focus group’s concrete answers were separated into different sub-project categories of the upcoming Jamaican Social Investment Fund.

To inform the policymakers of the findings, the Jamaican Social Investment Fund staff was briefed at different stages throughout the study. In addition, stakeholders workshops were held throughout the study and were attended by a number of policymakers from a diversity of government ministries, the business community, churches and donors. Also, the use of the local media provided a dissemination tool. Research-team members participated in a number of press briefings, as well as in a highly popular peak-hour morning local radio phone-in show. Finally, those able to influence policy were targeted and briefed, including members of the government’s social policy think-tank, prime ministerial level advisers and opposition leaders.



## 4 Conclusions

The chief lesson of the preceding sections is that a complex policy analysis means treating sustainable livelihoods on a case-by-case basis. Any program or approach to sustainable livelihoods must be consistent with analyzing, formulating, implementing and redesigning each case of those livelihoods on its own merits. Again, there can never be just one kind of sustainable livelihood.

The first section of the chapter underscored the importance of complex adaptive systems and their management for the promotion of sustainable livelihoods. To repeat, the overall objective is to manage systems so that they can be as self-sustaining as possible, especially when it comes to producing livelihoods within such systems. How this management should proceed is a crucial topic for any analyst making recommendations on a case-by-case treatment of sustainable livelihoods. The **Guide** concludes with ten suggestions for the analyst on complex adaptive management that follow from the preceding sections and triangulation.

### *Inevitable Differences*

First, the analyst should not be surprised—or, for that matter, even bothered—by the fact that very different conceptions of “complex adaptive systems” are at work when people seek to manage these systems. There will always be different cases of complex adaptive systems, and, given so many people are involved in making sustainable livelihoods a reality, the analyst cannot be expected to privilege just one type of system or sustainable livelihood. As was just seen, the analyst has to differentiate “complex adaptive systems” before he or she can even think of their “management.”

### *Inevitable Confusion*

Thus, some confusion over complex adaptive management for sustainable livelihoods is inevitable, and it must be expected that resource managers and communities—even the analyst—will from time to time talk at cross-purposes around the same table.

### *The Red Herring of Boundaries*

Some people cannot manage a complex adaptive system without knowing its borders. They ask, Where does the landscape (site) end, and another begin? However, the preceding sections imply that the analyst should not be overly worried about boundaries. Why? Because resource managers (including communities) have different definitions of what complex adaptive systems are, and they are unlikely to give up their own definition simply because the perimeter of any such system is unclear or inexact. What matters more than boundary is the set of biological, physical and ecological interactions within the complex adaptive system of interest which people agree to manage for sustainable livelihoods. There are thus multiple reasons why case-specific decisions and compromise over the perimeter of the managed area and the set of interactions therein to be managed are to be expected and indeed invited by the analyst as part of the “management” side of complex adaptive management.

### *The Necessary Evolution of Complex Adaptive Management*

If complex adaptive management is necessarily a variety of different concepts and conventions over just what a complex adaptive system is, then it should come as no surprise to the analyst that management is more likely to be effective when it validates these differing understandings rather than forces stakeholders to choose one among them. One such way to legitimate the co-existence of multiple cases of systems is to insist that complex adaptive management is *evolutionary*: Managers start with the expectation that the complex adaptive system is out there waiting to be identified, realize once in the field that there are problems in delineating system features, later acknowledge that such problems arise in part because what is out there depends crucially on how what “it” is they are looking for is defined in the first place, and then end up in better understanding that what works best in any particular situation is a function of customizing the ideal and the practical to meet the specific objectives agreed upon in complex adaptive management, case-by-case.

### ***The Argument So Far***

In light of the preceding sections on complex policy analysis and triangulation, it should be clear to the analyst that (i) there is no single conception of “complex adaptive system,” so don’t worry about it; (ii) there is no single way to determine the borders of these systems, so start with the recognition that boundaries are always case-specific (in short, there may be nothing necessarily wrong about managing systems within pre-existing administrative areas or political boundaries); and (iii) since the real issue is one of agreeing over what set of interactions within the system are to be managed in order to have “complex adaptive management,” the place to start is by asking, What interactions, if any, are common across complex adaptive systems?

### ***Abilities Matter Most***

When it comes to the choice of common interactions for complex adaptive management, it depends not on the needs of the systems, but on what sets of interactions resource managers (including, again, communities) are *able* to manage. What they are able to manage, in turn, depends fundamentally on what they take complex adaptive systems to be. In particular, these systems can be treated as real, objective units that exist in the landscape, but they can also be treated as the always-changing creation of resource managers as they interact with the landscape by trying to manage and alter it. Accordingly, the analyst must always recommend that the team responsible for complex adaptive management should include members who are comfortable with treating different cases of complex adaptive systems as legitimate. One way to ensure this is to have team members work at scales different *both* in kind *and* in degree, e.g., the social scientist works on a sector, the hydrologist over a landscape, the plant ecologist in a niche, and residents within a community. (The analyst should note that this is NOT the same as saying complex adaptive management should be hierarchical, i.e., starts with the site, then moves to the ecosystem, then onto the landscape. Units in such multiscale hierarchies are only different in degree, not in kind.) A complex adaptive management that focuses more on what it is able to manage than on what needs to be managed follows as well from the preceding sections of the **Guide**. Indeed, one of the best ways to observe the triangulation finding, *Problematize need!*, is to insist abilities differentiate behavior much more effectively than do needs, when it comes to sustainable livelihoods.

### ***Multidisciplinary Works Best When It Is Case-By-Case***

Another way to put the preceding point is: The analyst should avoid thinking that a complex adaptive management team is multidisciplinary simply because it is a mix of professionals, e.g., a forest ecologist, a forest products economist and a population biologist. In the latter case, the professions are different, but their operating scales are far too similar and limited for the purposes of validating different conceptions of complex adaptive systems, which, as with the landscapes in which they are found, are fundamentally socio-ecological in character. One considerable benefit of having a multidisciplinary team organized around members who work at different scales and according to different system concepts is the increased likelihood that (1) each team member will have to rely on his or her own best judgment about specific interconnections between scales and (2) the team as a whole will thereby be better able to treat each case of complex adaptive management on its own merits.

### ***In Complex Adaptive Management, Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Planning Doesn’t Matter as Much as Outside-In Versus Inside-Out Planning***

From the perspective of sustainable livelihoods, the most pressing problem with any multidisciplinary planning for complex adaptive management is not that the planning by experts is top-down rather than bottom-up, but that it is most likely *outside-in planning*. Assume your management recommendation, as the analyst, is that all the stakeholders “in” the landscape sit down at the table and hammer out a management plan for the site(s) in question. Assume the stakeholders in this case are community residents, large business- and landowners, representatives from NGOs, and government officials and planners responsible for the area in question. What if the businesspeople and large landholders own land in the area but do not live there, the NGO personnel actually operate out of somewhere else and visit the area only occasionally, while the government officials come from the capital only for such meetings? They may be

“stakeholders,” but do they have the same “stake in” the landscape as do the local residents, who are the only stakeholders in this bottom-up planning exercise that actually reside long-term in the area which is to be adaptively managed? Such stakeholder planning today isn’t so much bottom-up in contrast to top-down as much as it is an outside-in planning that equates outsiders and insiders as well as experts and residents as equivalent “stakeholders,” simply by asserting that the claims of expertise or government responsibility in the landscape is equivalent to the claims arising from full-time residence there.

### ***The Way Inside-Out Planning Should Work***

The obvious challenge for the analyst is to come up with recommendations that promote *inside-out planning* for complex adaptive management, where local leaders and residents are themselves the experts and where the planning process (including policy formulation, implementation, and redesign) is itself initiated and guided from within the local ecosystem/landscape. The NGO personnel, businesspeople, large landowners, and government bureaucrats would not be excluded, but they come to the table by local invitation and only as outsiders from other areas. Why is inside-out planning better than outside-in? Because, as the **Guide** has stressed, information becomes much more policy-relevant under situations of high complexity when those who gather it are also those who end up using it—and this is much more probable under inside-out planning than otherwise, where local residents are gathering the very information they will be using in making local decisions. If, however, the analyst has to work within a planning process where any interested party (including the analyst!) is a potential participant to that process, then it is all the more imperative to ensure the process is evolutionary and one that legitimates there being different (case-specific) examples of complex adaptive systems.

### ***Why Process Matters***

What if none of this works? What if complex adaptive systems and landscapes remain unmanageably complex and their interactions always uncertain, no matter how detailed and well thought out are the analyst’s proposed management recommendations? The best analysts can do under these circumstances is to recommend establishment of a *process* whereby specific system definitions and management strategies are constantly revised and evolved through time. Remember, in a complex policy analysis, policy is not policy unless it can be revised through time. In these cases, the analyst has to recommend a process which ends up stabilizing the assumptions for complex adaptive management, even when any one definition may become increasingly unworkable. As different strategies for complex adaptive management develop locally, there will be diffusion and interchange between localities that adopt and adapt these strategies to meet their own local sustainable livelihoods. As the **Guide** noted earlier, the very best an analyst can hope for under conditions of high complexity is to have complex adaptive management for sustainable livelihoods practiced somewhere and all the time, though not everywhere and always in the same place or way.