


Appreciating the Role of Communication in Promoting Sustainable Livelihood: A Closer Look at Some Selected Literature



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ABSTRACT

Livelihood interventions are essential to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Issues such as poverty (SDG 1), hunger and food security (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), and consumption and production (SDG 12) are central to improved livelihoods. To this end, development actors are encouraged to implement carefully designed livelihood interventions to improve the lives of people. A vital argument which dominates livelihood discourses is the issue of sustainability. The debates on sustainable livelihood appear unending, especially in developing nations where poverty continues to threaten the lives of many citizens. Particularly, there are varying positions on the concept of sustainable livelihood and its core elements. Indeed, the seeming lack of clarity on the concept of sustainable livelihood presents a challenge to development actors in their attempts to ensure improved livelihoods. Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to contribute to bringing clarity to the concept of sustainable livelihood and the role communication plays in its promotion through a review of some selected literature. The authors submit that sustainable livelihood cannot be achieved especially in developing countries without access to adequate information and improved communication strategies. They maintain that no livelihood policy can sustainably be implemented without consciously designed efforts on the part of stakeholders to integrate policy communication strategies into the policy. Finally, the authors contend that participatory communication approaches are central to any sustainable livelihood initiatives and must, therefore, be given the necessary preeminence in sustainable livelihood thinking and theorizing.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent social, political and economic challenges across the globe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that newer strategies need to be employed by governments and development agencies to improve the livelihoods of people. These recent occurrences also call for a greater understanding and appreciation of the ever-increasing relevance of issues of livelihood in general, and sustainable livelihood mechanisms, in particular. Again, issues such as poverty, hunger, food security, gender equality and economic growth which

have attracted increasing attention in view of the SDGs 17 can only be meaningfully addressed if there is an adequate understanding of the multifaceted nature of issues surrounding livelihood, livelihood diversification and sustainable livelihood strategies. Governmental and non-governmental agencies especially in developing nations are under increasing pressure now to devise more concerted strategies and interventions in the area of livelihood diversification to sustainably enhance the livelihoods of the poor, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable and the excluded in society. This paper takes a closer look at some selected literature on the role of communication in promoting sustainable livelihood. Apart from the introduction, the paper is structured around five main parts. Part one provides a clear understanding of livelihood whilst part two looks at livelihood strategies. Parts three and four respectively focus on conceptualizing sustainable livelihood and the role communication plays in sustainable livelihood mechanisms. The final part concludes the paper by highlighting the key issues which should attract the attention of development agencies, researchers and individual citizens. This final part also proffers some recommendations to guide policy decisions and actions on how to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Understanding the Concept of Livelihood

Livelihood has been variously conceptualized by different scholars and researchers largely due to its multi-dimensional and complex nature. Particularly in contemporary writings on poverty and development in rural areas, the concept of livelihood is widely used. In support of this assertion, Ellis argues that the meaning of livelihood often appears vague due to different definitions being encountered within different contexts.¹ Scoones also acknowledges that livelihood is a mobile and flexible term.² A common definition is the one offered by Chambers and Conway who believe that livelihood entails the assets, capabilities and activities people and households require for a living.³ Similarly, livelihood has been defined as an amalgamation of the resources people use and the activities they undertake in order to make a living.⁴ Both Chambers and Conway and DFID recognize that a livelihood refers to a combination of resources including material and social assets and the activities people undertake in order to make a living.⁵ Serrat asserts that a livelihood involves the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living.⁶ The end goal of a livelihood, as Serrat contends, is ultimately concerned with earning a living.⁷ According to Scoones, livelihood relates to locales (rural or urban livelihoods), occupations (farming, pastoral or fishing livelihoods), social difference (gendered, age-defined livelihoods), directions (livelihood pathways, trajectories), dynamic patterns (sustainable or resilient livelihoods) and much more.⁸ In essence, individuals, households and communities make their living through an intricate network of interactions, choices and activities.

Perspectives on livelihoods are drawn based on insights from expansive volumes on the subject in the literature. An important aspect of the literature on livelihood has focused significantly on occupation-based activities and wage employment-based activities. Significant attention has also been given to non-agriculture-based activities such as salaried professions, business, and transportation. Self-employment activities in sectors other than the agricultural sector also come under livelihood.⁹ These varying activities are available to individuals, households and communities. Individuals and households tend to choose one or a combination of these non-agriculture-based activities among other options for a living based on their capabilities and assets. Indeed, household livelihood choices depend on a variety of variables such as social, economic and environmental factors. These and other factors

¹ Frank Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

² Ian Scoones, "Livelihoods Perspectives and Rural Development," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36, (2009): 171-196.

³ Robert Chambers, & Gordon R. Conway, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods", *Practical Concept for the 21st Century Ids*", (1992): 296.

⁴ Department for International Development (DFID). *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*. (London, UK, 2000).

⁵ Chambers and Conway, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods"; DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁶ Olivier Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach." The Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank, (2008).

⁷ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁸ Scoones, "Livelihoods Perspectives and Rural Development," 171-196.

⁹ Daniel Odoom, "The Impact of Cocoa Life Project Interventions of World Vision Ghana on Beneficiaries in the Wassa East District, Western Region," (Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast, 2019).

may constitute a resource or incentive upon which livelihood choices can be made. In the context of livelihoods, resources can be defined as ‘assets’ or ‘capitals’ which are key to survival and well-being.¹⁰

Farrington, Ramasut and Walker argue that to really appreciate livelihood, one must have a full understanding of what constitute livelihood assets. They explain livelihood assets to mean the resources from which individuals draw their livelihood options and also execute their livelihood strategies.¹¹ Indeed, household members combine their assets, capabilities, knowledge and skills using the different resources available to them. These combinations enable households to undertake the most productive activities that will enable them obtain the most effective livelihood for themselves. Rahman and Shaheen conceive that everything that entails generating livelihood can be classified as a livelihood asset.¹² Livelihood assets mainly include human capital in the form of age, education, gender, health status, household size, dependency ratio and leadership potential among others.¹³ There is also the physical capital which involves the basic infrastructure and producer goods, needed to support livelihoods;¹⁴ and social capital which refers to networks and connectedness. Livelihood assets also entail financial capital such as savings, credit, and remittances from family members; and natural capital which is the natural resource stock.¹⁵

Policies and institutions which exert significant influence on a household’s ability to access livelihood assets also constitute important aspects of livelihoods.¹⁶ For example, institutions are the social cement which connects stakeholders to access capital of various kinds through the exercise of power to delineate the gateways through which they pass on the pathway to positive or adverse livelihood adaptation.¹⁷ In fact, socio-economic features of people and households including education, sex, age, experience, the value of their assets, farm size, and the value of livestock have significant impact on livelihood choices, especially in the rural areas.¹⁸ Thus, socioeconomic characteristics influence the livelihood strategies implemented to bring about improvement in the lives of people.

Livelihood Strategies

Livelihood strategies refer to a variety of choices that people make and the activities they undertake in order to fulfill their livelihood aims or goals. Livelihood goals may include investment strategies, productive activities and reproductive choices.¹⁹ Similarly, Ellis defines a livelihood strategy as consisting of activities that generate the means through which households survive.²⁰ Livelihood strategies involve a well-planned activity which men and women undertake so as to create their livelihoods.²¹ They are those activities designed and carried out by individuals and households to improve their means of living. These strategies are unique and complex at all levels. Brown et al. submit that there are different methods and means that characterize household livelihood strategies in the literature.²²

¹⁰ Frank Ellis and Edward Allison, *Livelihood Diversification and Natural Resource Access*, Overseas Development Group Working Paper 9, (University of East Anglia UK, 2004).

¹¹ J. Farrington, T. Ramasut, and J. Walker, *Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches In Urban Areas: General Lessons, With Illustrations from Indian Cases*, (London: ODI, 2002).

¹² Sanzidur Rahman and Akter Shaheen, “Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh.” *Journal of South Asian Development*, 9(3), (2014): 287-308.

¹³ Dirk J. Bezemer and Zvi Lerman, *Rural Livelihoods in Armenia: The Centre for Agricultural Economic Research*, Department of Agricultural Economics and Management Discussion Paper No. 4.03, 2003; Rahman and Shaheen, “Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh,” 287-308.

¹⁴ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*, (London, UK, 1999).

¹⁵ Bezemer and Lerman, *Rural Livelihoods in Armenia*; Care International, *Participatory Livelihoods Assessment, Kosovo*: Care International UK Urban Briefing Notes, (London, UK: Care International, 2001); Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*.

¹⁶ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

¹⁷ Ian Scoones, *Sustainable Livelihoods, A Framework For Analysis*, Ids Working Paper Number 72, (Brighton, 1998).

¹⁸ Rahman and Shaheen, “Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh.” 287-308.

¹⁹ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

²⁰ Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*.

²¹ Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*.

²² Douglas R. Brown, Emma C. Stephens, James Okuro Ouma, Festus M. Murithi, and Christopher B. Barrette, “Livelihood Strategies in the Rural Kenyan Highland,” *African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 2006, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1846849>

A critical element in any livelihood strategy relates to how to diversify livelihoods. Livelihood diversification refers to the efforts individuals and households undertake in order to obtain newer ways to generate incomes and minimize environmental risks. Livelihood diversification varies sharply by the extent of freedom of choice individuals and households have (to diversify or not), and how reversible the outcomes are. It entails both on- and off-farm activities which people undertake to raise income to complement that which is obtained from their core agricultural activities. This is realized through the production of other agricultural and non-agricultural goods and services, the sale of labor, or self-employment in small firms.²³ In an attempt to strengthen understanding of the concept, Ellis maintains that livelihood diversification ought to be framed as the process through which families create a variety of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival.²⁴ The overarching motivation behind this struggle, as Ellis submits, is for families to improve their standards of living. However, he goes on to caution against attempts at equating livelihood diversification to income diversification. In that regard, Ellis argues that livelihood diversification is not necessarily synonymous with income diversification.²⁵ On their part, Dercon and Krishnan assert that diversifying livelihood through non-agricultural activities is very important in the overall development of nations. In many instances, non-agricultural activities have been analyzed using economic models²⁶ and household food security approaches.²⁷

As a result of the differences in people's ability to access basic necessities of life, there are wealthy individuals and households that are able to meet all their basic needs without difficulty. There are also poor individuals and households that are unable to meet one or more of their basic needs. The poor tend to have difficult and exhausting livelihoods as they always struggle to access basic necessities of life.²⁸ Unlike the poor, the rich have a broader choice of livelihood options. This is due to the fact that the rich have more resources and so are able to afford education or training that can add value to their skills and thereby enlarging their livelihood assets and capabilities. This is not the case for the poor who chronically lack access to expanded resources outside the basic necessities of life.

To reiterate, agriculture-based activities constitute the bulk of livelihoods in most developing nations. Although agriculture is seen as mainstay of livelihood source, especially in rural areas in most developing countries, there is a huge potential for non-agricultural livelihood options. The transformative potential in the off-farm sectors has been identified going back three decades.²⁹ Households in rural centers diversify their livelihood strategies to raise income to be able to cope with negative factors and conditions associated with the agricultural sector.³⁰ Agriculture-based livelihood is the preferred category for rural households with cropland. Nonetheless, there is a need for rural households to pay attention to diversifying their livelihood options due to factors such as climate change and how they impact agriculture and food security.

²³ Michael Carter, "Environment, Technology, and the Social Articulation of Risk in West African Agriculture." *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 45(3), (1997): 557-591.

²⁴ Frank Ellis, "Household Strategies and Rural Livelihood Diversification," *Journal of Development Studies* (1997).

²⁵ Ellis, "Household Strategies and Rural Livelihood Diversification."

²⁶ Stefan Dercon, and Pramila Krishnan, "Income Portfolios in Rural Ethiopia and Tanzania: Choices and Constraints." *Journal of Development Studies*, 32(6), (1996): 850-875.

²⁷ Susanna Davies, *Adaptable Livelihoods: Coping With Food Insecurity in the Malian Sahel*, (1996b); Michael Drinkwater and M.A. McEwan, "Household Food Security and Environmental Sustainability in Farming Systems Research: Developing Sustainable Livelihoods." *Journal of Farming Systems Research Extension*, 4(2), (1994): 11-126.

²⁸ Fingani Annie Mphande, *Infectious Diseases and Rural Livelihood in Developing Countries*, (Singapore, Springer Science Business Media, 2016).

²⁹ Junior R. Davis, *The Rural Non-Farm Economy, Livelihoods And Their Diversification: Issues And Options* (Chatham: Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, UK, 2004); Klaus Deininger and Pedro Olinto, "Rural Non-Farm Employment and Income Diversification In Columbia." *World Development*, 29, (2001):455-465; D. R. Smith, A. Gordon, K. Meadows, and K. Zwick, "Livelihood Diversification in Uganda: Patterns and Determinants across Two Rural Districts" *Food Policy*, 26, (2001): 421-435.

³⁰ Christopher B. Barrett, Thomas Reardon, and Patrick Webb, "Non-Farm Income Diversification and Household Livelihood Strategies in Rural Africa: Concepts, Dynamics, and Policy Implications", *Food Policy*, 26, (2001): 315-331; Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*; Rahman and Shaheen, "Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh." 287-308; Frank Ellis, and H.Ade Freeman, "Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction Strategies in Four African Countries." *Journal of Development Studies*, 40 (4), (2007): 1-30.

Wage employment and non-agricultural livelihoods are also influenced by land size.³¹ There are negative signs of total land area on the livelihood choices with farming as the base category. It is very possible that people would be disposed to renting out their lands to tenants so as to gain the resources to engage in non-agricultural activities that generate more income.³² Nonetheless, Hatlebakk believes that for many households with land, agriculture is the more likely livelihood choice.³³ In the view of Bryceson, non-agricultural activities (or non-farm/off-farm activities), non-agricultural employment and de-agrarianisation underpin livelihood diversification. These three related strategies reflect the very nature by which sub-Saharan Africa nations are increasingly becoming more urban in character.³⁴ These and many other activities are part of efforts to diversify livelihoods and are essential in defining the sources of living for people.

Non-agricultural livelihood activities are commonly found in places with advanced infrastructure. In other words, people tend to diversify their livelihoods with the presence of developed rural infrastructure. Carney doubts the potency of the natural resources sector in contributing to substantial livelihood improvement. Rather, he believes the best prospects for significant improvement in livelihoods lie in the generation of off-farm income.³⁵ According to Barrett *et al.*, participation in non-farm activities tends to decrease due to the distance from rural to urban centers. This suggests that access to the physical market is crucial for improving livelihood choices.³⁶ In concurrence with the observations of Barrett *et al.*, Abdulai and Crolerees submit that families in remote places are not likely to participate in non-farm livelihood activities.³⁷ Many of the livelihood diversification activities of rural households especially in Africa entail micro-enterprises. Thus, micro-enterprises are crucial in creating employment and raising incomes in many rural communities of Africa.³⁸ However, Ravallion has called on policymakers and development actors to consider other ways of helping the poor through rural public employment.³⁹

As already noted, a number of socio-economic issues influence the strategies households adopt any time they are obligated to select from among livelihood options.⁴⁰ Despite the already sizeable volume of the literature on livelihood, the scope of the field needs further expansion due to its policy implications. Also, the complexity of the analysis of rural livelihood options is ascribed primarily to the fact that people engage in a variety of economic activities.⁴¹ It is very clear from the above discussions that the concept of livelihood lends itself to a myriad of interpretations and conceptualizations. Nevertheless, livelihood strategies and interventions inform livelihood diversification options and subsequent livelihood outcomes within a given context. In spite of the varying interpretations and understandings, an important part of the discussion on livelihood that is lacking in depth is the question of livelihood sustainability.

³¹ Rahman and Shaheen, "Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh." 287-308.

³² Magnus Hatlebakk, "Regional Variation in Livelihood Strategies in Malawi." *South African Journal of Economics*, 80, (2012): 62-76.

³³ Hatlebakk, "Regional Variation in Livelihood Strategies in Malawi." 62-76.

³⁴ Deborah Bryceson, "Deagrarianization and Rural Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sectoral Perspective." *World Development*, 24(1), (1996): 97-111.

³⁵ Diana Carney, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods. What Contribution Can We Make?* Department Of International Development. (Nottingham: Russell Press Ltd, 1998).

³⁶ Barrett, et al, Non-Farm Income Diversification and Household Livelihood Strategies in Rural Africa, 315-331.

³⁷ Awudu Abdulai and Anna Crolerees, "Determinants of Income Diversification amongst Rural Households in Southern Mali." *Food Policy*, 26, (2001): 437-452.

³⁸ Graeme Buckley, "Microfinance in Africa: Is It either the Problem or the Solution?" *World Development*, 25(7), (1997): 1081-1093; Mphande, *Infectious Diseases and Rural Livelihood in Developing Countries*.

³⁹ Martin Ravallion, *Reaching the Poor through Rural Public Employment: A Survey of Theory and Evidence*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, Discussion Paper 94, (1990).

⁴⁰ Adugna Eneyew, "Determinants of Livelihood Diversification in Pastoral Societies of Southern Ethiopia." *Journal of Agriculture and Biodiversity Research*. 1, (2012): 43-52; Yemiru Tesfaye, Anders Roos, Bruce M. Campbell, Folke Bohlin, "Livelihood Strategies And The Role Of Forest Income In Participatory-Managed Forests of Dodora Area in the Bale Highlands, Southern Ethiopia." *Forest Policy and Economics*, 13, (2011): 258-265.

⁴¹ Ellis, and Freeman, "Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction Strategies in Four African Countries." 1-30; Rahman and Shaheen, "Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh." 287-308.

Conceptualizing Sustainable Livelihood

Sustainable livelihood has been variously defined by scholars, researchers and organizations. Chambers and Conway defined sustainable livelihood as a livelihood comprising the assets including resources, claims, stores, and access and the capabilities and activities households and individuals need for a living.⁴² They add that a livelihood becomes sustainable when it is able to cope with and recover from shocks and stress, and conserve or improve its assets and capabilities.⁴³ Sustainable livelihood also provides for the unborn generations opportunities which are sustainable and can contribute net benefits to other livelihoods at both local and global levels over the short and long term.⁴⁴ Widening the livelihood capabilities of people is critical to a Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF). The sustainable livelihood framework was developed by Chambers and Conway as part of the strategies to ensure poverty eradication.⁴⁵ Serrat supports the views of Chambers and Conway by noting similarly that livelihood is seen as sustainable if it can cope with and recover from shocks and stresses, and preserve or improve its activities, assets, and capabilities both present and in the future.⁴⁶ Serrat adds that sustainable livelihood should not be seen to be undermining the natural resource base.⁴⁷ Implicit in Serrat's views is the notion that sustainable livelihood relates to the kind of livelihood which withstands and recovers from shocks and stresses, and preserves or enhances its assets, activities and capabilities both now and in the future and hardly disrupts the base of natural resources.⁴⁸

Within the donor community, a livelihood is said to be sustainable when it entails a set of assumptions and framework which provides a broad and logical understanding of the diverse factors that enhance or inhibit livelihood opportunities, how these factors are related, and its overall developmental goal.⁴⁹ Clearly, according to the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), sustainable livelihood should be understood as a set of distinct principles and assumptions which offers logical explanations for the core factors and issues enhancing or impeding livelihood opportunities, the relationships between these core factors and issues and their overall development objective.⁵⁰ The SLF (Figure 1) offers a broad although, multifaceted approach to understanding how individuals make a living. Generally, this approach serves as a useful guide to a variety of issues that are significant for livelihoods.⁵¹ There are five main livelihood assets namely human capital, physical capital, social capital, financial capital and natural capital which are considered in the measurement of sustainable livelihood. These assets play an important role in survival strategies both in rural and urban livelihoods.⁵² The core factors of SLF, according to DFID are: vulnerability context, capital assets, processes and livelihood outcomes which are all related to poor livelihoods.⁵³

The SLF points out the need to understand the framework within which individuals live, the assets available to them, livelihood strategies they use based on prevailing policies and institutions, and intended livelihood outcomes.⁵⁴ In fact, critical issues for researchers and practitioners in any analysis of livelihood are the specific context, the kind of livelihood resources that need to be combined and the kind of livelihood strategies required to build livelihoods capacity. Also, it is vital to focus on the expected outcomes or impact of such strategies on the overall livelihoods of individuals.⁵⁵ The starting point of the analysis of SLF is the vulnerability context.

⁴² Chambers and Conway, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods."

⁴³ Chambers and Conway, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods."

⁴⁴ Chambers and Conway, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods."

⁴⁵ Mphande, *Infectious Diseases and Rural Livelihood in Developing Countries*.

⁴⁶ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁴⁷ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁴⁸ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁴⁹ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁵⁰ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁵¹ Nazneen Kanji, James MacGregor, Cecilia Tacoli, *Understanding Market-Based Livelihoods in a Globalising World: Combining Approaches and Methods*. (International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), 2005); William Solesbury, *Sustainable livelihoods: A case study of the evolution of DFID Policy London. Development*, (2003): 1–36.

⁵² Mphande, *Infectious Diseases and Rural Livelihood in Developing Countries*.

⁵³ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁵⁴ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁵⁵ Rahman and Shaheen, "Determinants of Livelihood Choices: An Empirical Analysis from Rural Bangladesh." 287-308; Scoones, *Sustainable Livelihoods, A Framework for Analysis*, IDS Working Paper Number 72.

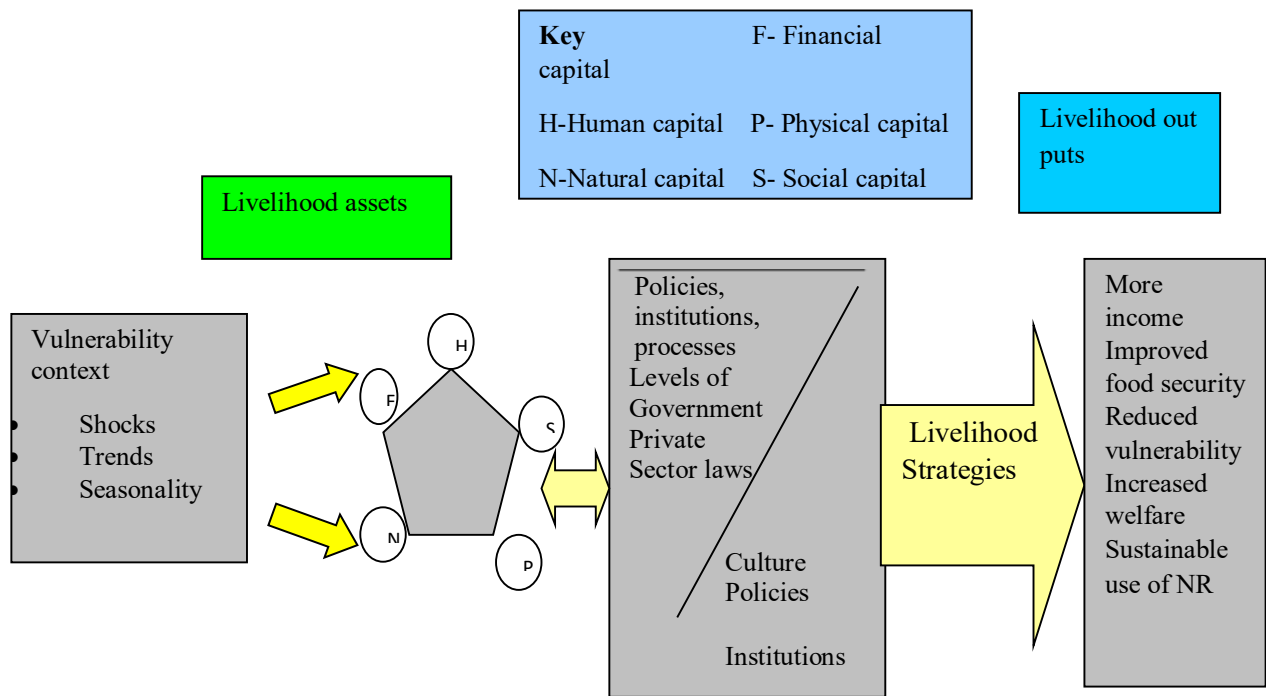


Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Source: Adopted from Adugna Eneyew and Wagayehu Bekele, “Livelihood Strategies and its determinants in Southern Ethiopia: The case of Boloso Sore of Wolaita Zone.” (2012)

Livelihood strategies and outcomes do not only depend on access to diverse capital assets or are inhibited by the vulnerability contexts. The poor people are strongly influenced by factors that make them and their assets vulnerable. Some of these factors include trends including population variation, national and international economic trends; shocks including civil conflict, economic crises and natural disasters; seasonality variations in production, prices, food supply and economic fortunes.⁵⁶ The SLF is dependent on five types of capital or assets upon which people build their livelihoods. Enhancing access to assets including rights to use can make a significant contribution to poverty reduction. Human capital is conceptualized as the knowledge, skills and ability to labour and good health which collectively helps individuals to pursue diverse livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood goals.⁵⁷ Social capital represents the kind of social resources from which individuals and households pursue their livelihood goals. It entails networks, participation in productive or social groups and mutually-helpful relationships. On the other hand, natural capital deals with the natural resources from which goods and services beneficial for livelihoods are obtained. Physical capital involves the simple infrastructures and producer goods required to sustain livelihoods. Financial capital refers to the monetary resources which people rely on to accomplish their livelihoods. Financial capital can be seen in several forms including jewelry, cash, bank deposits and livestock. It also includes resources derived from credit-providing institutions and regular inflows of money, such as pensions, earned income, remittances, and other transfers from the state.⁵⁸

Structures and processes are critical ingredients in SLF. Structures relate to organizations in both public and private sectors which formulate and implement policies and legislation; provide services; and purchase, trade, and undertake all forms of other functions which impact livelihoods. In short, policies and

⁵⁶ DFID, *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets*; Serrat, “The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.”

⁵⁷ Wanyenda Chilimo and Leonard Ngulube Patrick, “Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Sustainable Livelihoods in Selected Rural Areas of Tanzania.” *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 21(2), (2011): 145-157

⁵⁸ Chilimo and Ngulube, “Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Sustainable Livelihoods in Selected Rural Areas of Tanzania.” 145-157.

institutional factors are key in any SLF.⁵⁹ Structures and processes include policies, institutions, organizations and procedures which are critical in influencing livelihoods. Transforming structures and processes can occur at various levels including the household, the global arena; and in all areas, from the farthest private to the public.⁶⁰ These different levels are also transformed by environmental structures and processes.⁶¹ The context here refers to the policies, political, historical, agroecological and socio-economic conditions that are imperative to the success of livelihood strategies. Policies, laws, rules, regulations, agreements, operational arrangements, societal norms, and practices govern the way by which structures function. Processes and policies are vital to all aspects of livelihoods since they become incentives which inspire people to make improved choices. Processes and procedures can create or prevent people's access to assets. They also enable people to transform one type of asset into another through markets. Processes can exert great control over interpersonal relations. A vital problem the poor and the vulnerable often face has to do with processes and procedures which define their livelihoods and may logically become an obstacle to them.

In the view of Chilimo and Ngulube, livelihood outcomes refer to the achievements or outputs of livelihood strategies.⁶² Scoones argues that livelihood outcome manifests themselves in the form of increased incomes; increased well-being including intangible goods such as health status, access to services, self-esteem, and sense of inclusion; and minimum vulnerability which involves better resilience through increased assets. It is also seen in better food security (e.g. increase in financial resources in order to purchase foods) and sustainable use of natural resource stock such as suitable property rights.⁶³ Livelihood outcomes include higher income levels, low vulnerability, enhanced food security, and more sustainable use of natural resources. Livelihood outcomes become sustainable in so long as they show resilience against all kinds of external stresses and shocks.⁶⁴ Jaspars, O'Callaghan and Stites also list increased income, food security, wellbeing and dignity, reduced vulnerability, personal survival, and the sustainable use of natural resources as key aspects of livelihood goals.⁶⁵

The Livelihoods Centre Report identified the scope of livelihood protection thresholds, access to inputs and services which are productive, income diversification and improvement and the protection of livelihoods and natural resource base as vital livelihood outcome indicators. The Centre's report further developed some key indicators for measuring the livelihood outcomes ranging from increased diversification of income sources, increased access to productive assets, increased productivity and improved food security and nutrition. Other indicators included increased knowledge of livelihood activities, improved access to livelihood-support services, improved management of natural resources and better policies and laws for livelihood growth.⁶⁶

The SLF promotes the identification of concrete priorities for actions which are based on the interests and opinions of stakeholders.⁶⁷ Serrat cautions against an attempt at replacing the sustainable livelihood approach with sector-wide approaches, integrated rural development, or participatory development. SLF is a connection between people and the general supportive environment which influences the outcomes of their livelihood strategies. SLF brings attention to bear on the apparent potential of people including their access to financial resources, skills, social networks, and capacity to impact core institutions. SLF enables development actors to plan their activities and examine the contributions existing activities make in

⁵⁹ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁶⁰ Chilimo and Ngulube, "Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Sustainable Livelihoods in Selected Rural Areas of Tanzania." 145-157.

⁶¹ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁶² Chilimo and Ngulube, "Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Sustainable Livelihoods in Selected Rural Areas of Tanzania." 145-157.

⁶³ Scoones, *Sustainable Livelihoods, A Framework For Analysis*.

⁶⁴ Chilimo and Ngulube, "Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Sustainable Livelihoods in Selected Rural Areas of Tanzania." 145-157.

⁶⁵ Susanne Jaspars, Sorcha O'Callaghan and Elizabeth Stites, *Linking Livelihoods and Protection: A Preliminary Analysis Based on a Review of Literature and Agency Practice*. HPG Working Paper, December 2007.

⁶⁶ Odoom, *The Impact of Cocoa Life Project Interventions of World Vision Ghana on Beneficiaries in the Wassa East District*.

⁶⁷ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

sustaining the livelihoods of individuals.⁶⁸

The Role of Communication in Promoting Sustainable Livelihood

Like any other concept in the social sciences, communication defies a single definition. Different scholars, researchers and organizations tend to view communication from varying perspectives. For instance, communication can be defined as involving any dynamic process of sharing information.⁶⁹ Owusu also defines communication as the flow of information in a specific system.⁷⁰ It is clear from both definitions that information constitutes a vital aspect of communication. How information is shared is critical in communication. On his part, Mefalopulos asserts that communication entails the process of transmitting information and messages.⁷¹ This means that messages and how they are transmitted are also a relevant part of communication. Odoom agrees with Mefalopulos that communication involves transmitting information and messages.⁷² However, Mefalopulos maintains that merely transmitting information and messages using various channels constitutes just one aspect of the communication process.⁷³ Keyton also defines communication as involving the transmission of information from one individual to another as well as reaching a common understanding. Implicit in Keyton's definition is the recognition that effective communication processes should lead to ensuring shared understanding between individuals. Implicit in Keyton's definition is the recognition of both the process and the outcome of communication. Effective communication should be focused on transmitting messages and promoting shared understanding between the interactants.⁷⁴ Communication also involves the process of sending and receiving messages through verbal or non-verbal means.⁷⁵ Nordquist strengthens the positions of scholars including Mefalopulos, Keyton and Odoom that effective communication should promote shared understanding among stakeholders. Nordquist adds that communication is about creating and exchanging meanings.⁷⁶ In essence, communication can only become effective through sending and receiving information and messages, creating and exchanging meanings to reach shared understanding using both verbal and non-verbal means. The authors of this paper hold the view that communication involves transmitting and exchange of information and messages to generate shared understanding among individuals. That, the underlining focus of effective communication should be on promoting common understanding between the individuals involved in the interactio.

Communication is essential in livelihood policies, interventions and strategies. To be able to make the right decisions on livelihoods and to ensure sustainable livelihood strategies requires a decent understanding of the role of communication. Access to information and improved communication are critical to improved livelihood options.⁷⁷ In the estimation of Crowder, individuals need access to adequate information on marketing to be able to sell their products to improve their livelihoods. Crowder adds that in the agricultural sector, for example, stakeholders including farmers will find it very difficult to enhance their livelihoods if they do not have information about market dynamics. Inherent in Crowder's submission is the belief that where individuals lack access to information including marketing information they will find it very challenging to achieve sustainable livelihoods.⁷⁸ Information on price mechanisms is important

⁶⁸ Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁶⁹ Esther Owusu, "The Role of Communication in Sustaining Development Projects. The Case of Ejura Sekyedumase Municipality, Ghana." Unpublished MSc.Thesis, KNUST, 2014.

⁷⁰ Owusu, "The Role of Communication in Sustaining Development Projects."

⁷¹ Paolo Mefalopulos, *Development Communication Source Book: Broadening the Boundaries of Communication*. (The World Bank, Washington, D. C., 2008).

⁷² Daniel Odoom, "Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 1 (1), (2020): 37-48.

⁷³ Odoom, "Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature," 37-48.

⁷⁴ Joann Keyton, *Communication and Organisational Culture: A Key to Understanding Work Experiences*, 2nd Ed, (Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage, 2011).

⁷⁵ Richard Nordquist, What Is Communication? September, 2019. Accessed 16 February 2021, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-communication-1689877>

⁷⁶ Nordquist, What Is Communication?

⁷⁷ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁷⁸ Loy Van Crowder, "Marketing Information Systems for Small-Scale Farmers." *Information Development*, 13(4), (1997): 179-183.

to most people in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Whether or not livelihood initiatives and opportunities are available in these sectors will depend on the information provided. Similarly, the approach used in communicating the availability of such livelihood initiatives and opportunities is key to achieving sustainable livelihood. When key stakeholders conceal relevant information on livelihood initiatives and opportunities, the dream of attaining sustainable livelihood, especially at the household level becomes a mirage. In short, achieving the SLF depends on access to information and better communication strategies.

Moreover, adequate information and communication activities are necessary for connecting and informing decision-making processes at all levels of livelihood policies and programs.⁷⁹ This means that SLF will only be meaningful when there are adequate information and better communication strategies on livelihood policies and programs. Processes leading to policy design and implementation of livelihood interventions are effective only if they are informed by clear communication strategies and reliable information flow.⁸⁰ Information flow and communication strategies are critical when formulating policies and when implementing livelihood interventions. It is very difficult to design and implement livelihood policies and interventions when stakeholders do not have access to adequate information and effective communication strategies. Sustainability, productivity and profitability of livelihood policies, programs and interventions all depend on clear communication strategies and reliable information flow. It is of little surprise, then, that Roling calls for the inclusion of policy communication in development services.⁸¹ Roling contends that policy communication is extremely useful whenever new policies and regulations are to be formulated and unveiled. The FAO corroborates Roling's assertion by observing that policy communication is central to the success of every policy including policies relating to livelihoods.⁸² Policy communication focuses on clearly informing and educating people about the existence of policy initiatives and persuading them to accept and participate actively in the policies. Thus, when people are well informed and educated about the existence of livelihood policy initiatives they tend to accept and actively participate in such policy initiatives knowing very well their overall impact on them and on the larger society.

According to DFID, the information needed to support SLF has a dual function. The first function is to supply the information needed by the underprivileged to effectively execute livelihood strategies which are sustainable. This suggests that for people to embark on sustainable livelihood strategies, there is a need for them to be supplied with relevant information, especially about livelihood options. If people do not have access to relevant information on livelihood options and policies, it will be very difficult for them to initiate any meaningful sustainable livelihood activities and pursue them. In other words, information and communication help people to initiate and implement sustainable livelihood activities. The second function is to supply information required by institutions charged with the responsibility to make decisions which affect strategic livelihood options.⁸³ This also means that institutions mandated to make decisions about improving the livelihood of people cannot achieve positive results if they do not have access to relevant information. If state institutions and agencies do not have access to relevant information on livelihood options and policies, their task of embarking on sustainable livelihood activities will be extremely difficult. For example, information about the challenges people face in an attempt to diversify their livelihood is critical to institutions responsible for making decisions about the livelihood of people. In each of these two cases, it is only through increased access to adequate information that individuals and institutions can make informed choices about the opportunities and constraints associated with livelihood options and strategies.

In addition, communication strategies in support of SLF are only effective if they are inclusive and participatory. This is because even though messages and information are necessary they are often insufficient

⁷⁹ William McLeod Rivera and M. Kalim Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*, (Rome: FAO, 2003).

⁸⁰ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*; Rivera and Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*.

⁸¹ Niels G. Roling, "Communication Support for Sustainable Natural Resource Management. In Special Issue: Knowledge Is Power? The Use and Abuse of Information in Development." *IDS Bulletin*, 25 (2), (1994).

⁸² Odoom, "Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature." 37-48.

⁸³ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*; Charles Kenny, "Information and Communication Technologies and Poverty," *Techknowlogia*. (2001).

for enhanced decision making about livelihood. Making a decision involves a number of political processes and the participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes is very essential. To this end, information and communication strategies in support of SLF will be effective only if there are opportunities for increased participation among stakeholders especially the poor and the vulnerable.⁸⁴ This reinforces the need for participatory communication strategies in matters relating to livelihoods based on the certainty that communication can open up spaces in the political process only if it is inclusive. The SLF is essentially people-centered and requires a thorough participatory evaluation of information and communication requirements of stakeholders including target beneficiaries. This should be part of the early activities in the program design.⁸⁵ Participatory communication is therefore critical to SLF. Participation, in this context, focuses on horizontal and dialogic approaches to communication that encourage shared understanding of identified problems and their expected solutions, as well as bottom-up techniques which seek to increase the awareness level of key decision-makers.⁸⁶

Rivera and Qamar maintain that the potential of communication and information in enhancing the quality of life of individuals, appears underutilized especially in rural centers. A good approach to information and communication needs assessment is, therefore, critical to sustainable livelihood strategies.⁸⁷ The Department for International Development for example, contends that an effective information strategy to support SLF should be characterized by a clear identification of the multiple levels of decision-making where information and communication are used. Also, an effective information strategy in support of SLF should lead to the promotion of a two-way flow of information among stakeholders. In other words, two-way and dialogic communication is central to achieving SLF.⁸⁸ The two-way horizontal flow of communication enables people to share their experiences and unique opportunities and challenges associated with livelihood options and strategies available to them. Two-way communication further strengthens the importance of inclusive participation, facilitates shared understanding among stakeholders, and ensures that development actors discard one-way linear communication approaches that involve merely circulating messages, conveying information, or persuading individuals to alter their behaviors.⁸⁹

Beyond just agreeing with Bessette on the importance of the bottom-up approach in participatory communication, Flor maintains that embedded in an effective bottom-up approach is improved communication and information. Flor contends that when effective communication and information strategies inform the bottom-up approach it leads to collective actions which are internally driven and are based on dialogic information sharing. Thus, communication and information are critical in sustainable livelihood strategies since they allow for meaningful participation in livelihood interventions.⁹⁰ In this sense, improved communication and information in respect of livelihood interventions and strategies can become a tool for emancipating the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized from their problems.

An effective information flow and communication strategy in support of SLF focuses on promoting partnerships and collaborations between various agencies in the public and private sectors, international development agencies and civil society organizations. It should focus on building on current strengths and prospects to complement and augment present systems.⁹¹ A good approach to achieving sustainable livelihood

⁸⁴ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁸⁵ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.; Kenny, "Information and Communication Technologies and Poverty."

⁸⁶ Guy Bessette, *People, Land and Water: PDC for NRM*. (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 2006); FAO, *Application of ICTS for Enhancement of Extension Linkages, Coordination and Services*. Proceedings of a Sub-Regional Workshop, (Hammamet, Tunisia, 22–24 November 2004); Alexander G. Flor, *Development and Knowledge Management: ICT Applications for Sustainable Development*. (Los Banos: Seameo Searca, 2001); Roongkan Musakophas and Weerapong Polnigongit, "Current and Future Studies On Participatory Communication in Thailand," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, (2016): 68-73; Odoom, "Understanding Development Communication: A Review of Selected Literature, 37-48.

⁸⁷ Rivera and Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*.

⁸⁸ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

⁸⁹ Guy Bessette, *Involving the Community: A Guide to Participatory Development Communication*. (Penang, Malaysia: Southbound, and Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2004).

⁹⁰ Flor, *Development and Knowledge Management: ICT Applications for Sustainable Development*.

⁹¹ DFID, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Guidance Sheet*.

is to raise incomes through the provision of training programs and sharing of information on agricultural and non-agricultural activities.⁹² It is therefore in the interest of developing countries to support services aimed at providing viable, income-generating activities in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors by exchanging appropriate information and communication with populations, especially in the rural areas.⁹³ Apart from directly educating and informing their rural populations about the financial value of agricultural information, developing countries can also help them to obtain the needed financial capacity to pay for such services.⁹⁴

Finally, communication at the interpersonal, community and national levels is critical in determining the gaps in knowledge, attitude and practice of people and communities. For this to be possible, Flor, for example, suggests the inclusion of the media in activities which seek to enhance the lives of individuals. Flor adds that the inclusion of local media in programs aimed at enhancing the lives of individuals is key. Implicit in Flor's call is also the need for increased emphasis on indigenous media in policies and programs aimed at promoting sustainable livelihood.⁹⁵ Rivera and Qamar support Flor's emphasis on the media asserting that new media are increasingly relevant for enhancing the livelihoods of people. Mass media communication activities should be planned and employed in a more collaborative way based on the mutual goal of supporting people in income-generating undertakings, in both agricultural and non-agricultural areas to achieve sustainable livelihoods among people.⁹⁶ Interpersonal communication, traditional media and new media help in promoting interactions, exchange of ideas and constructive dialogue among all stakeholders with respect to development interventions which aim to improve livelihoods.⁹⁷ Also, new ICTs such as computers, cell phones, and satellites could be useful for the promotion of the livelihood choices of people. Importantly, integrating multimedia approaches, and indigenous and new media contribute to technological advancement and overall development goals.⁹⁸

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper attempted to locate the place of communication in sustainable livelihood mechanisms based on a review of selected literature. The authors submit that sustainable livelihood focuses on the kind of livelihood that is able to withstand and recuperate from shocks and stresses, and preserve or improve its assets, activities and capabilities both for the present and the future. Sustainable livelihood does not lead to the irreversible destruction of the natural resources of nations. That, when individuals and households make conscientious efforts to diversify their livelihoods in a sustainable way, they are able to withstand and recuperate from any shocks, stresses and dislocations. Individuals and households are also able to preserve and improve their assets, activities and capabilities both now and in the future if they adopt carefully designed strategies to diversify their livelihoods. However, the authors argue that discussions on livelihood diversification and sustainable livelihood will be incomplete without consideration of the potential of the national economies. They argue that a closer look at the potentials in diverse sectors of the national economy including both agricultural and non-agricultural areas especially in developing nations is vital to achieving sustainable livelihoods among individuals and households. Livelihood opportunities in the agricultural sector are complementary to those in the non-agricultural sectors in the context of effective livelihood diversification mechanisms and sustainable livelihood theorizing. Any nation or development organization that relegates any of these sectors

⁹² William McLeod Rivera, *The Changing Nature Of Agricultural Information and the Conflictive Global Developments Shaping Extension*; June 2000; Liu Yonggong, *Institutional And Policy Reform Of Rural Extension In China During The Transition Towards A Market Economy*. Training For Agricultural & Rural Development. (Rome: FAO, 1997-98).

⁹³ Rivera and Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*; Serrat, "The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach."

⁹⁴ FAO, *Agricultural and Rural Extension Worldwide: Options for Institutional Reform in the Developing Countries*. (Rome: FAO, 2001); Rivera, *The Changing Nature of Agricultural Information and The Conflictive Global Developments Shaping Extension*.

⁹⁵ Flor, *Development and Knowledge Management: ICT Applications for Sustainable Development*.

⁹⁶ Rivera and Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*.

⁹⁷ Bessette, *Involving the Community*.

⁹⁸ Flor, *Development and Knowledge Management: ICT Applications for Sustainable Development*; Rivera and Qamar (Eds.) *Agricultural Extension, Rural Development and the Food Security Challenge*.

to the background will find it very difficult to promote sustainable livelihood. Sustained investments in both sectors in national economies will provide a variety of options for individuals and households to improve their livelihoods. Nevertheless, achieving sustainable livelihood is a shared responsibility. All stakeholders including state agencies, development organizations, the media and individual citizens have a responsibility towards the promotion of sustainable livelihood mechanisms. The authors emphasize that no sustainable livelihood can be achieved without effective communication strategies. That, adequate information flows and inclusive communication strategies are indispensable in sustainable livelihood strategies.

Government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the media should periodically provide relevant pieces of information on livelihood policies and initiatives to the citizens. This is because citizens need access to relevant information and better communication on livelihood policies and initiatives to be able to adopt livelihood diversification strategies that are sustainable. To this end, policy communication should be at the heart of any successful livelihood policy decision and intervention. Governments, development organizations and the media need to invest in capacity building in the area of policy communication to be able to effectively communicate policy decisions and interventions aimed at promoting sustainable livelihood. Again, state agencies and institutions mandated to make decisions which affect the livelihoods of people need access to adequate and reliable information about livelihood prospects and challenges of people. Similarly, development organizations also require relevant information to be able to design and implement livelihood interventions which can significantly improve the lives of the very people they seek to serve. Citizens are, therefore, encouraged to cooperate with state agencies, development organizations and the media by sharing relevant information on livelihood options and challenges they face. This will largely enable state agencies, development organizations and the media to be able to make the right decisions about livelihood diversification policies, strategies and interventions.

Researchers will need to conduct periodic studies on livelihood diversification and sustainable livelihood and supply citizens, state agencies, development organizations and the media with the findings of such studies to help inform policy decisions on sustainable livelihood. Furthermore, state agencies and development organizations should consider integrating multimedia techniques, traditional and new media into livelihood diversification strategies to help them effectively promote sustainable livelihood. Finally, ensuring adequate access to relevant information among stakeholders calls for increased attention to participatory communication strategy. In other words, designing a sustainable livelihood strategy or policy requires the input and suggestions of all stakeholders. Participatory communication is deeply rooted in a two-way, horizontal, interactive and dialogic approach to communication, with the views of all stakeholders allowed to influence the processes and outcomes of the decisions made. In essence, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and all institutions charged to help improve livelihoods should integrate participatory communication approaches into their programs, policies and interventions to enable them to maximize outcomes. Participatory communication should be central to any development projects and initiatives aimed at improving the livelihoods of people.

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