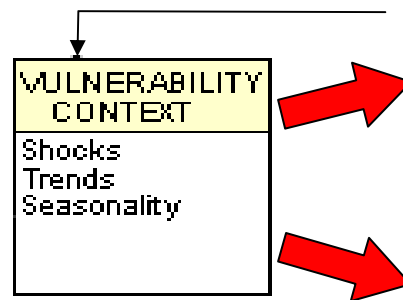


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The Vulnerability Context: Is There Something Wrong With This Picture?



Embedding vulnerability in livelihoods models: a work in progress

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Abstract

This paper explores the characteristics of complex emergencies and places a central focus on the role of violence as the key, singular and defining characteristic of a range of disasters categorized as “complex emergencies”. The nature of violence and its implications for relief responders is briefly reviewed. The majority of the paper analyses the challenges facing livelihoods specialists working to analyze the impact of complex emergencies on livelihoods systems using presently available sustainable livelihoods frameworks. Specifically, the particular relationships between violence and: a) assets; b) processes, institutions and policies; and c) outcomes are explored. Further work is needed to complete the analysis, particularly with respect to the impact of violence on other elements of livelihoods frameworks, specifically: access and influence; and, livelihoods strategies. This paper concludes that some aspects of sustainable livelihoods frameworks need to be modified in order to increase the utility and relevance of livelihoods frameworks in complex emergencies. Importantly, this entails a shift of focus from sustainable livelihoods to resilient livelihoods.

Livelihoods and the humanitarian imperative

In complex humanitarian emergencies (CHEs) and other violent settings, crisis-affected populations rely extensively on their livelihood systems for survival, resilience and crisis recovery. Humanitarian emergency assistance strategies rarely are oriented towards directly addressing the full range of elements that comprise livelihoods systems. Instead, emergency relief usually is focused on the provision of a narrow range of relief supplies and, to a limited extent, emergency welfare services such as health, shelter, nutrition, water and sanitation. Such approaches have been criticized for potentially undermining rehabilitation and development efforts (Anderson, 1999). Of greater concern to humanitarians, however, is that standard disaster relief practices have had limited impact in some emergencies, especially chronic complex humanitarian emergencies. A broader range of strategies is needed in order to meet the fundamental humanitarian imperative of saving lives with dignity where populations are threatened with or managing the consequences of violence (The Sphere Project, 2001).

Awareness of the importance of disaster-affected populations own strategies for survival dates to at least the Sahelian drought of the 1970s, when work on coping strategies first received wide recognition by relief workers (although work on coping strategies by anthropologists predates the Sahelian drought by many decades) (Anderson, 1968; Davies, 1996). The need to support the livelihoods systems in which these coping strategies are embedded has long been recognized but rarely practised as a mainstream humanitarian response, with the exception of the routine provision of seeds and tools. The focus of emergency interventions remains on serving the needs of the most vulnerable individual and not necessarily on addressing vulnerabilities of other components of livelihood systems, e.g. natural assets, institutions, policies, processes, physical assets, etc.

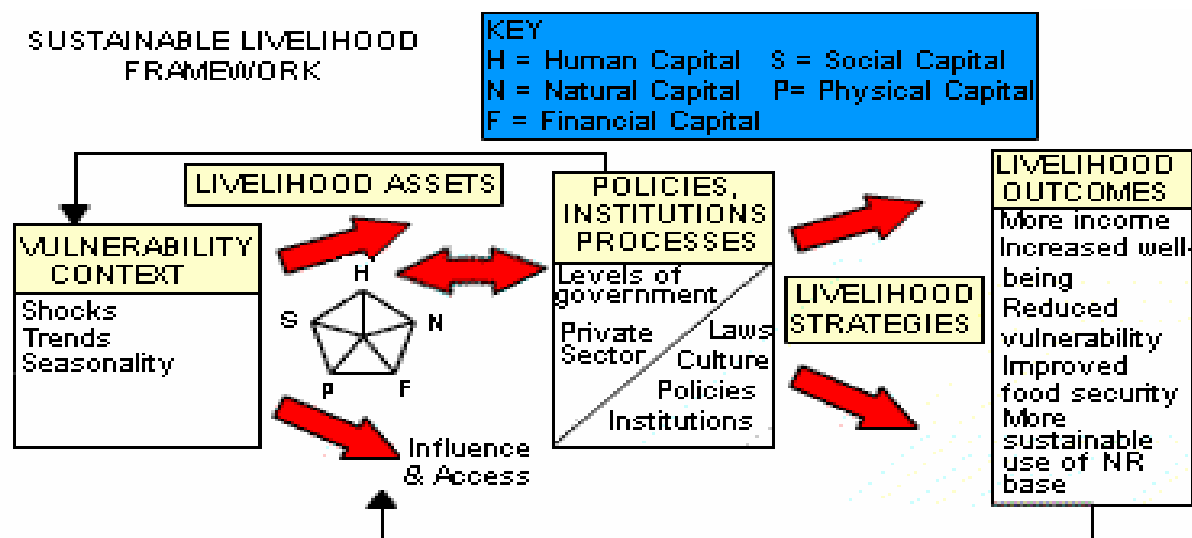
Funding for emergency interventions to support livelihoods systems in times of crises, especially complex emergencies, is uneven (Lautze and Stites, 2003). One reason for this is the persistence of institutional (and personal) assumptions that livelihoods support is inappropriate in humanitarian situations. Possible reasons why these assumptions persist in the face of the extensive livelihood system collapse in complex emergencies include:

- *Concerns* that livelihood interventions could conflict with humanitarian principles, especially the principle of neutrality;
- *Inadequate institutional awareness* of the depth and breadth of emergency livelihoods experiences already undertaken across a range of disaster settings, contexts and time periods;
- *Inexperience* by humanitarian actors, especially in livelihood interventions that require engagement with policies, institutions and processes;
- *Perceived donor unwillingness* to fund livelihood interventions in emergencies;
- The *complexities* of conducting humanitarian work in violent contexts; and,
- A *lack of knowledge* about livelihoods systems, and how they are threatened and changed by violence and, in turn, how livelihoods systems demonstrate resilience in the face of such violence.

The sustainable livelihoods framework and violent crises

In contrast to disaster settings, it is widely accepted that livelihood-based strategies are important in recovery and development contexts. This is partly due to the success of sustainable livelihoods initiatives, most notably the promotion of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) supported by the U.K. Government's Department for International Development (DFID) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sustainable livelihoods framework



Source: www.livelihoods.org

The very success of the sustainable livelihoods approach in transforming the development community has contributed (unintentionally) to reluctance by the humanitarian community to pursue livelihoods-oriented programming in emergencies. The main culprit is that livelihoods approaches writ large have become synonymous with the sustainable development agenda. DFID clearly states that they are focusing on only one possible application of the livelihoods framework in their guidance sheet, a point inadequately appreciated in the humanitarian community. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, according to DFID, has “a normative dimension: DFID’s objective is to promote *sustainable* livelihoods” (DFID Guidance Sheet 2.6, page 25, emphasis in the original). This leaves open the way to other adaptations of livelihoods work for other objectives and in other settings, including adaptations for emergency work.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is not readily applicable in emergencies, especially those characterized by violence, political instability and protracted timeframes. This is unsurprising, given that it was not designed for disaster work. The focus on sustainability has limited relevance given the challenges of emergencies contexts, where a more appropriate focus arguably lies in the dual realms of vulnerability and resilience. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework needs to be re-conceptualized as a means of providing humanitarians with tools for increasing their capacities for appropriate analysis, intervention, monitoring and evaluation.

In particular, the SLF needs to be modified in order to better capture the dynamics of the violence that characterizes complex emergencies. CHEs involve an intricate web of political, economic, military and social forces engaged in violent conflict. Though definitions vary, the primacy of violence remains the central and defining characteristic of complex humanitarian emergencies, fuelled by a ready supply of inexpensive weapons and a generation(s) of uneducated and unemployed youth (Richards, 1996; Nordstrom, 1997).¹ The targeting of civilians, the manipulation of humanitarian relief efforts for military, economic or political gain, widespread environmental destruction, and violent processes of disenfranchisement and

¹ Given the similarity in some impact between the HIV/AIDS pandemic and Complex Humanitarian Emergencies, there are some attempts to classify HIV/AIDS as complex emergencies, e.g. in the FAO Workshop on Food Security in Complex Emergencies for which this paper was originally drafted (September 23 – 25, Tivoli, Italy).

disempowerment combine to generate widespread vulnerability to excess morbidity and mortality in CHEs (Anderson and Zandvliet, 2002; Le Billon, 2000a; Kaldor, 1999).

Violence in complex humanitarian emergencies is overwhelmingly targeted at civilians and their livelihood systems. Such violence is both *functional*, i.e., it has utility for those controlling it, and *specific*, i.e., it is deeply infused with meaning in support of economic, political and/or social agendas (Robben and Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Das *et al.*, 1997; Turpin and Kurtz, 1997; Apter, 1997; Keen, 1994). For example, in the 1970s in Argentina (during the era of the “Disappeared”), the military junta sought to stifle civilian groups and opposition parties by kidnapping civilians at night. Bodies were dismembered and scattered without a trace not only as a final act of humiliation and annihilation but also as a way to increase fear, to prevent the dead from becoming martyrs, and to preclude the possibility of physical relics inspiring and mobilizing opposition (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Simpson and Bennett, 1985). Table 1 provides other examples of specific and functional violence in select CHEs.

Table 1: Examples of specific and functional violence in CHEs

Nature of Violence	Function/Specificity	Example
Gender violence (castrating men, mutilating women’s breasts, gang raping women, raping men)	Attacks on women as attacks on the nationality/the “mother nation”; ethnic cleansing; emasculating male pride/strength	Rwanda; Former Yugoslavia; Mozambique; Sierra Leone
Massacres, mutilation, mass rape, genocide	Terrorize, weaken political opposition, depopulate, “ethnic cleansing”	Rwanda; Bosnia; Cambodia
Forced displacement, impoverishment, asset stripping	Economic benefit to raiders; weaken political opposition	Sudan; Angola; Sierra Leone, Liberia
Child soldiers; forcing children to kill	Terrorize, increase fighting forces, destabilize communities	Mozambique, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka
Trafficking; sexual slavery	Economic; terrorize communities	Former Soviet Union, Burma, Thailand, DR Congo, Sudan
Suicide bombs, car bombs, attacks on UN/NGO/Red Cross	To show strength of outnumbered/ outgunned oppositions; to signal loss of neutrality of humanitarian actors	Iraq, Israel, Columbia

The SLF is not designed to capture adequately the implication of violence for livelihoods systems. In Figure 1 above, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, the “Vulnerability Context” is depicted as external to livelihoods systems. Using the SLF, the violence that is central to complex emergencies is modeled as an exogenous factor, i.e., something that is both beyond the control of and unrelated to household livelihoods systems. Vulnerability appears to flow (weakly, as indicated by a thin arrow) from society’s processes, institutions and policies, exerting in turn an influence (strongly, as indicated by thick, red arrows) on households. This is an unsatisfactory depiction. Viewing violence and other sources of vulnerability (“shocks, trends and seasonality”) as exogenous to livelihoods systems is indicative of the developmentalist bias that unapologetically informs the SLF. This view can be critiqued in a fashion similar to the analysis of the “relief to development” continuum that reached its apogee in 1994, e.g. that disasters are temporary disruptions to the otherwise smooth and positive processes of development (Macrae *et al.*, 1997; Duffield, 1994).

Towards a new livelihoods framework for complex emergencies

For a livelihoods model to successfully capture the dynamics of the myriad of households' lived experiences in complex emergencies, a livelihoods framework must be infused with and informed by recognition of the many ways that violence influences these experiences. Vulnerability must be incorporated as thoroughly endogenous within and inherent to livelihoods systems – not outside of them. The first step, then, in re-conceptualizing the SLF for use in complex emergencies is to reject the concept of an external vulnerability concept. This requires eliminating the external “Vulnerability Context” and devising new ways of incorporating the components and dynamics of vulnerability into each component of a basic livelihoods model (asset pentagon, influence and access, processes, institutions and policies, livelihoods strategies, outcomes, and the feedback factor).

Questioning the vulnerability context as exogenous is a concept well supported in the literature on disasters. Duffield demonstrates that disaster vulnerabilities, especially in complex emergencies, are embedded in a range of processes, especially globalization (Duffield, 2001). Blaikie's work on natural disasters argues against viewing the sources of vulnerability as exogenous to social policies, institutions and processes (Blaikie *et al.*, 1994). These works highlight that while vulnerability is manifest most starkly in the individual (e.g. *the starving child, the abandoned widow, the dispossessed man, etc.*), the vulnerability of processes, institutions and policies should be a critical concern to humanitarians seeking to realize the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and reducing human suffering with dignity in crises. To actually achieve this, however, humanitarians will have to reinvent themselves in ways that are hardly media-friendly, e.g. saving vulnerable policies, providing protection to institutions endangered by violence, engaging with processes under threat, developing alternative livelihoods strategies, etc.

If vulnerability is not usefully constructed as exogenous, the challenge then is to infuse each element of the livelihoods framework with notions of violence and other forms of vulnerability. This full task is still a work in progress for the authors. Here, we present briefly a modification to the Asset Pentagon (the foundation of household livelihoods systems that includes human, natural, financial, physical and social capital), a discussion on violence and the Process, Institution and Policy Box, and then conclude with a comment on outcomes before presenting a framework partially modified for CHEs.

Modifying the “Asset Pentagon”

Assets are closely related to vulnerability in complex emergencies through three pathways: a) a lack of assets, b) a lack of diversity of assets/reliance on a limited range of assets, and c) the ownership (or the perceived or actual possession thereof) of assets that are either valued or seen as threatening. The analysis of complex emergencies brings to the fore the importance of the third point especially (Schafer, 2001; Le Billon, 2000b; Keen, 1994).

Political economy analysis has revealed that the particular nature of violence in complex emergencies has the singular capacity to transform livelihoods assets into life-threatening liabilities, although we are not aware of other authors who have attempted to model this dynamic in these terms.² A simple way to grasp this concept is to consider the issue of households and credit. When loans are not needed, or access to cash is sufficient for the household to service their debts, access to credit is clearly an asset. However, when households cannot access needed credit, or when existing loans become unmanageable, credit becomes a liability. In emergencies, this can become a life-threatening liability. The

² Sarah Collinson and others at the London-based Overseas Development Institute are working on applying political economy analysis to adapt livelihoods frameworks. In these works, however, the vulnerability context remains external, although it helpfully is depicted as having a direct relationship with each element of the livelihoods framework. See www.odi.org.uk.

debt burdens of farmers in Ethiopia today are an important force in the current famine, while accumulated debt from multiple years of drought in Afghanistan is leading to distress sales of assets, including putting girls into marriage at younger and younger ages (Lautze *et al.*, 2003; Lautze *et al.*, 2002).

Elsewhere, the asset/liability paradox has been examined by leading scholars writing about CHEs. Keen and Deng have demonstrated how the livestock assets that are the foundation of Dinka livelihoods in southern Sudan are transformed into famine liabilities in the context of violent raiding. Uvin’s and Pottier’s works on the Rwandan genocide reveal how the historical access to power by ethnic Tutsis in Rwanda was translated unequivocally into a liability in the late spring of 1994. The educated classes in Cambodia, the Taliban-supporting pastoral Kuchi populations in Afghanistan, and the myriad of populations that live where natural resources abound (e.g. diamonds, oil, or coltan) have all had their livelihoods destroyed when their assets were transformed into liabilities by the violence of conflict.

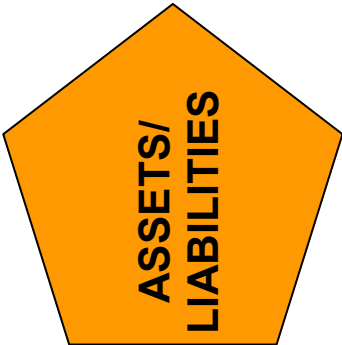
This is not a one-way process, however; liabilities can be transformed into assets through violence. Authors such as Turton and Le Billon have demonstrated how the politicization of historical or current marginalization has been transformed actively into assets, albeit assets that benefit the few at the cost of many. Some examples flow from the authors’ works noted above, e.g. the impoverishment of the Baggara pastoralists of western Sudan as key to their eventual enrichment through raiding their wealthier Dinka neighbors. To illustrate these concepts, Table 2 provides examples of how each element of the asset pentagon can be turned into liabilities in times of disaster.

Table 2: The asset pentagon and the asset/liability paradox

Type of capital	Example of asset	Example of liability
Human	Education	Education (educated classes in Ugandan under Idi Amin)
Natural	Oil	Violent exploitation of oil in southern Sudan
Financial	Savings	Savings (target of looting – everywhere)
Physical	Farmland	Farmland (e.g. white farmers in Zimbabwe and South Africa)
Social	Religion	Religion (US-coalition attacks in the “Sunni Triangle” in Iraq)

In our modified livelihoods framework, liabilities are placed side by side with assets to form the Assets/Liabilities Pentagon, as per Figure 2.

Figure 2: The assets/liabilities pentagon



Policies, institutions and processes – the “PIP box”

Assets alone do not determine or delimit the nature of disaster vulnerability or the range of livelihood strategies that households pursue. Scholars have paid increasing attention has been paid to the compounding factors that generate vulnerability and complicate efforts to alleviate the consequences of CHEs, including public health threats,³ natural events,⁴ environmental stresses,⁵ and socio-political processes.⁶ Formal and informal processes, institutions and policies (PIPs) enable or hinder livelihood strategies, thereby generating or reducing vulnerabilities. All individuals and households live within, shape and are shaped by a set of informal and formal practices, norms and rules that constitute the institutional environment. As Pain and Lautze (2002:15) explain:

These influencing factors play a key role in mediating access to resources, shaping the context of vulnerability, and setting opportunities or constraints to pursuing various livelihood strategies. Customary practices related to marriage, gender roles, inheritance, ownership, management of and access to resources (land, water) and ‘real’ markets all fall within the sphere of informal institutions. These are dynamic rather than fixed institutions, and are subject to continual re-negotiation and change according to context and power. Formal institutions relate to the role of the state, for instance in setting and enforcing laws, regulating markets or extracting taxes. There is a constant interplay between the informal and formal institutions.

In addition, institutions themselves can be vulnerable in times of disasters. Government ministries for the provision of social welfare (e.g., the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, or Education) are often drained of resources when governments redirect domestic budgets towards war efforts or when implementing structural adjustments programs. Ethiopia’s war with Eritrea that coincided with the 1999/2000 crisis in Ethiopia, reducing economic growth to just 1%, serves as an example (The World Bank, 2003).

The policy environment can be a source of both resilience and vulnerability for households over time. The PIP Box of the livelihood framework is useful for understanding the nature of the impact of a range of policies and institutional changes that have characterized various governments in CHE-affected countries. Poorly conceived agriculture policies have led to an intensification of cereal cropping, bringing increased total outputs to some and unmanageable debt burdens for others. Land tenure policies have yet successfully to provide an adequate level of security to induce farmer investment in ecological protection in some countries, while there have been a range of policies regarding land use (e.g., villagization, resettlement, monopolies on private investment) that have prompted large scale population movements; construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of villages and settlement sites; creation and later abandonment of institutions such as producer cooperatives, etc.

International policies also affect households’ ability to access and utilize assets, such as when the US Governments anti-terrorist concerns prompted the closure of some channels used to send and receive remittances to the Horn of Africa. Other processes that generate household vulnerability include religious extremism, health crises (e.g. HIV/AIDS), militarization and globalization (Rashid, 2000; Enloe, 2000; Duffield, 2001).

In addition to policies and processes, the livelihoods framework requires analysis of both formal and informal institutions. The utility of the framework can be demonstrated through again returning to the example of the institutions of gender and generation in Ethiopia, both

³ For example, HIV/AIDS. See: de Waal (2002) and Smith (2002).

⁴ For example, the droughts in Ethiopia and southern Africa and floods in Somalia. See Hammond and Maxwell (2002).

⁵ For example, global warming, and desertification. See Devereux *et al.* (2002) and Homer-Dixon (1996).

⁶ For example, globalization, marginalization and pauperization. See Duffield (2001).

of which are strongly socially defined. All Ethiopian agro-ecological livelihood and production systems depend upon a division of labor based on gender, age and (in some cases) occupational caste and ethnicity. Divisions of labor are subject to vulnerability relating to natural and man-made hazards. A livelihood framework and mode of analysis enables a better understanding of the dynamics of the household economy as well as the distribution of power (and related resources) within the household.

Violence as process, institution and policy

Most acts of violence in CHEs are functional, i.e., designed to serve specific objectives. These elements of organization and deliberation suggest that violence can be policy, institution and/or process. A household's relationship to the violence within and beyond its threshold strongly determines its access to assets, the nature of liabilities and choice of livelihoods strategies in complex emergencies. As livelihoods systems react and adapt to violence, physical and material outcomes familiar to humanitarians become apparent: malnutrition, destitution, morbidity, mortality and displacement. Less apparent are the deeper social implications of widespread violence.

Inter-disciplinary research on violence has the potential to afford humanitarians a better understanding of the impact of violence on community social and cultural systems. Anthropological, psychoanalytical, sociological and political perspectives have contributed to understanding the functions and processes of contemporary violence as well as ways that communities manage and respond to violence. Identifying the practical implications of these response systems is a critical component in enhancing livelihood interventions in times of crisis in order to promote survival. In order to translate research on violence into practical tools for humanitarians, violence must be understood as not outside of the "PIP" Box, but rather violence must be understood in its various forms: violence as process, violence as institution and violence as policy.

Writers generally categorize violence as:

- *Structural violence*, e.g. chronic, historical political-economic oppression, or social inequality. This can stem from national as well as international factors such as terms of trade, local working conditions, structural adjustment programs, etc. (Galtung, 1981).
- *Everyday violence*, e.g. interpersonal, domestic, delinquent, with a primary focus on how these daily expressions of violence become routine, daily acts of terror with which communities have to constantly live.
- *Symbolic violence* refers to the ways that communities and individuals internalize humiliation and racial, class and sexual inequalities, including how they act to recognize or "misrecognise" such violence (Bourgois, 2004).
- *Direct political violence*, e.g. targeted physical violence implemented by official armies, police and other state apparatus as well as unofficial non state entities and parties in opposition.

Organized violence creates its own processes, institutions and policies. The organization of violence requires the development and maintenance of practices, social relationships and ideologies to sustain and confirm acts of terror, e.g. concentration camps with hierarchies of guards and even inmates who are organized to serve their violent purposes (Taussig, 1987). The present day labor camps, the militias, brothels and other unlawful administrations and institutions found in CHEs have developed complex systems based on distorted and warped networks and systems of violently enforced reciprocity and trust. This is an active process; individuals and communities have to be "socialized into living in a state of fear." Linda Green's work on Guatemala has shown how rumor, gossip and false accusations are powerful institutional mechanisms whereby dominant military groups subdue communities

and generate constant states of fear, terror and mistrust even as households and communities follow their seemingly normal, regular routines (Green, 2002) .

Violence shapes the very nature of society, distorting other processes, institutions and policies. David Alexander (1997: 291) observed that in disasters, “normal social functions are not merely affected, but they undergo a profound mutation, or even outright suspension.” Torturing and humiliating individuals in front of their families is a deliberate tool intended to sever family bonds. Forcing family members to witness acts of violence grossly undermines the extensive social and cultural web of respect that grows between people, e.g. when the “protective” father figure is rendered impotent in front of his children or when the “nurturing” mother -- who should inspire respect -- is raped and insulted in front of her children.

Violence not only affects physical and material factors but also undermines the basic glue that enables social relations and networks to function. Individual and community survival rests on the bonds of reciprocity and obligations that are formed and reformed between individuals and groups; a key element of this is basic trust and faith, both of which are severely jeopardized by violence and the new social relations that violence itself creates and distorts.

Social violence lives on through generations and shapes social and political identities. Histories of victimization and past grievances are powerful factors in shaping agendas for revenge and hatred. These affect both the individual and communities at large. The aspirations for martyrdom of suicide bombers, for example, are fed on a long diet of historical narratives of past wrong deeds that need avenging and rectifying. Communities can exist for many years on particular episodes from history. This “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1996) will be repeated and ritualized in ceremonies, rituals, literature, oral histories, etc. that will serve to sustain an ideology of revenge and remembrance.

Violence distorts the very process of death and dying, holding strong implications for the household and society. Acts of violence require acts of healing. The healing process involves psychological as well as socio-cultural practices that enable closure, e.g., bodies need to be identified and buried, and a proper mourning and other ritual acts need to take place that honors and legitimizes the transition from life to death both for the living and for those who have departed. Individual and community trauma is created when these processes are incomplete. Mourning and burial are expensive in all cultures; they are intense social events, which involve considerable outlays of resources. Money is needed for payment to ritual leaders, feasts, and other appropriate ceremonies. In complex emergencies where communities have been stripped of resources and when key people such as traditional ritual leaders, priests, imams and other spiritual leaders have been massacred, imprisoned or otherwise made unavailable, this adds to the hardships that communities face.

Modifying “livelihood outcomes”

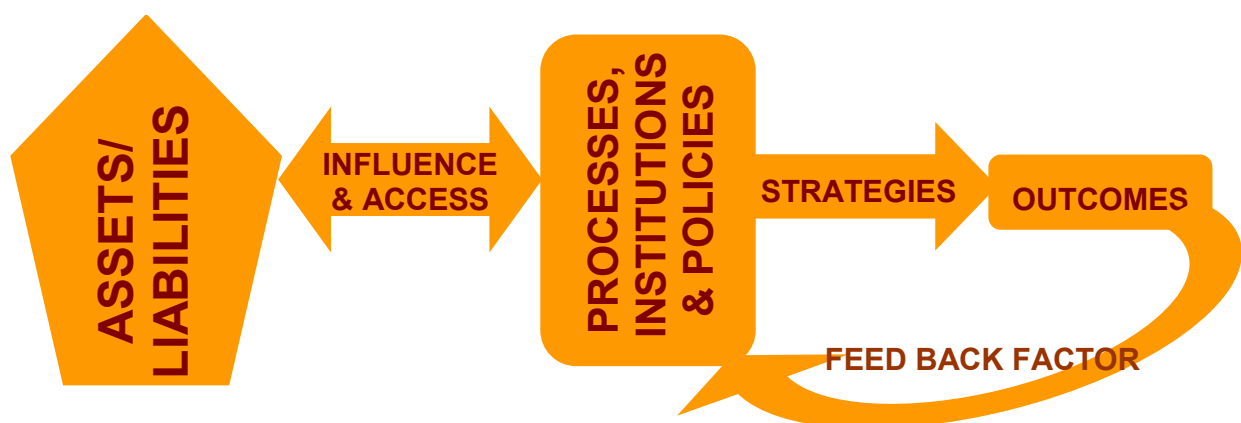
In the Sustainable Livelihoods Model, “Livelihood Outcomes” are listed to include “more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, more sustainable use of natural resource base”. For populations living in conflict zones, these may be remote aspirations. Duffield has referred to this as the “myth of modernity”, i.e., a staunch belief that conditions for society will improve over time. More often than not, however, the actual outcomes of livelihood systems in complex emergencies include starvation, poor health, mortality, destitution, shame and/or displacement. These outcomes, in turn, are mediated back to households through the lens of society’s policies, institutions and processes, a dynamic that translates these outcomes into assets but more frequently as liabilities for households, e.g. the financial burden of caring for the sick in the absence of functioning health systems, the cost (social, productive, financial) of mourning the dead, or the encumbering impacts of social disgrace.

In CHEs, if livelihoods frameworks are to be used for assessment, analysis and action, it is best to leave these outcomes to be defined by the population affected by the crises, rather than providing an aspirational list. Identifying the actual outcomes of livelihood systems in crisis is, after all, the very foundation of vulnerability and capacity assessment. It is in the success or failure of livelihoods systems that individual vulnerability is most easily identified by humanitarians, e.g. malnutrition, morbidity, mortality, dispossession, shame, etc.

Adapting livelihoods frameworks for CHEs: a work in progress

Bringing together the adaptations introduced in this paper, we present a livelihoods framework partially modified for use in complex emergencies in Figure 3. Thus far, we have introduced three adaptations to the SLF: 1) the elimination of an external vulnerability context; 2) the expansion of the asset pentagon to include liabilities and 3) the integration into the PIP Box of violence as process, institution and/or policy. Much work remains to be done, e.g. a fuller analysis of how violence shapes household access and influences relationships with society, how households adapt their livelihoods strategies to accommodate and manage the risks and vulnerabilities generated by violence, and how livelihoods outcomes are interpreted in the context of violence through the feedback factor.

Figure 3: A humanitarian livelihoods model adapted for violent CHEs



This paper was presented at the FAO Conference on Food Security and Complex Emergencies as a work in progress for discussion. Work continues on modifying the model and expanding the analysis presented here.

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