

Considering the Tenets of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and the Degrowth Perspective towards the Development and Sustainability of Livelihoods

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Abstract: This paper unravels the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) and the degrowth perspective, and their tenets and underpinnings towards sustaining livelihoods. Through this, the paper unpacks the key tenets of the sustainable livelihoods approach and the degrowth perspective and how the approaches meet each other in the search for sustaining people's development and their livelihoods. This is done in relation to agrarian social structures and agrarian institutions. The paper argues that for ensuring effective and continues improvement in the livelihoods of the poor, especially within developing economies, considering the current environmental and climate problems, a recuperation of cross-level governance structures, institutional systems, power, political change, politics and livelihoods, as well as a repoliticization within society in the context of the sustainable livelihoods approach and the degrowth perspective becomes significant.

Keywords: Degrowth, Development, Rural Livelihoods, Sustainable Livelihoods, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) and the degrowth perspective, and their propositions towards sustaining livelihoods. With this, the paper unleashes the main tenets of the sustainable livelihoods approach and the degrowth perspective and how the approaches catechize each other in the search for sustaining livelihoods. This is done in relation to agrarian social structures and agrarian institutions. The paper argues that for ensuring effective and continues improvement in the livelihoods of the poor, especially within developing economies, consideration the current environmental and climate problems, a recuperation of cross-level governance structures, institutional systems, power, political change, politics and livelihoods, as well as a repoliticization within society in the context of the sustainable livelihoods approach and the degrowth perspective becomes significant. The paper employs relevant literature on the topic in explaining and advancing the perspectives of sustainable livelihoods and degrowth in making and remaking development through sustainability.

The paper is structured into six substantial parts. Following the introduction, the second part unleashes main underpinnings of SLA. The third part examines strengths and weaknesses of SLA in sustaining the poor's livelihoods. The fourth part examines main tenets of degrowth perspective and its propositions for sustainable livelihoods. The fifth part looks at strengths and shortfalls of degrowth in relation to sustaining livelihoods. The sixth part catechizes the sustainable livelihoods approach and degrowth perspective on their takes on sustaining livelihoods. The final part looks at the conclusion of the paper.

Sustainable livelihoods became much emphasized within the period of the 1990s with strong efforts from institutions, such as the Institute of Development Studies in the UK (Chambers and Conway 1992). The approach has since gained strong roots in development studies and rural poverty reduction at large. The underpinnings of livelihoods approach to an extent comes to respond to some of the criticisms posed by critics of the post-development school (Lisocka-Jaegermann 2015: 15). This stems from the fact that the approach develops the argument that, people are able to create strong livelihoods economically and

socially basing on the assets they have locally, which is deeply rooted and nested in their residing environments (Scoones 2009: 171-3).

Livelihoods encompasses the activities, capabilities as well as assets that are essential for improving people's living (FAO 2020: 1; Serrat 2017: 21). Without such essential qualities in place, it becomes extremely difficult for individuals and groups to achieve reasonable living standard. Sustainable livelihoods is achieved when individuals, as well as groups have the potential in recovering from shocks and able to cope in enhancing and maintaining their activities, capabilities and assets in the present time and in the near and distant future without undercutting the natural resource value (Krantz 2001: 6-7; Serrat 2017: 21-22).

Improvement and maintenance of assets and capabilities are significant in enhancing people's livelihoods at rural level, as well as the national scale. However, in the search for sustainable livelihoods, it becomes important to take into consideration environmental needs and the need to protect environment and natural resources. This provides avenues for safeguarding society and its natural resources within agrarian economy and transformations, and not undermining natural resource base (Serrat 2017: 21-22).

MAIN TENETS OF THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH AND ITS PROPOSITIONS

Sustainable livelihoods approach entails the adaption of principles that are practically-oriented and considers actions and priorities that employs people-centredness, and takes the interests and decisions of the people who are concerned and affected by a particular issue as important for ensuring development (Serrat 2017: 22). The key features of the sustainable livelihoods approach include dynamism, people-centredness, multi-level activities, sustainability, partnership with both public and private entities (Serrat 2017: 22). The approach provides a framework for linking people in relation to the entire environmental and socio-political economy landscape in ensuring livelihoods that are improved and sustainable.

An important facet of sustainable livelihoods approach is seen in its interests for environmental concerns in its strategies and programs of development (Solesbury 1999). This brings in the environmental and ecological concerns, and importance towards ensuring sustained livelihoods and wellbeing for people, particularly in rural landscapes of developing countries.

The last two decades have seen strong emergence of sustainable livelihoods approach in enhancing people's livelihoods for meeting the needs of development. The approach has been seen to demonstrate and provide avenues to bring together and bridge institutions, organizations, professionals and people; including individuals and groups in making critical conversation for facilitating grassroots development (Scoones 2009: 172-3). The approach further create spaces for considering agrarian political transformations, and given attention towards activities that people at the grassroot level engages in to make a living within an improved livelihood structure. The activities include rural and grassroot development that encompasses smallholder agriculture, farm-labour, employment, small-scale business and enterprises and the like (Scoones 2009: 172).

It should be emphasized that sustainable livelihoods approach entails different paths in its application and usage. This is identified by Farrington (2001) as a system, ways or sets of principles or an analytical approach. In relation to this, international organizations and agencies of development, such as the UNDP and the DFID have in the application of the sustainable livelihoods approach tended to employ principles that they see as key within the approach, and this includes involvement and participation of the rural poor and an overall people-centredness in development programs and activities (Scoones 2009: 29). The principles identified here comes as critical sets of elements that characterizes the sustainable livelihoods approach in its activities and programs on improving livelihoods within the development arena.

Scholars who have engaged in their writings and research on the sustainable livelihoods have to some extent made a development of a specific facet of sustainable livelihoods in relation to their research interest and concerns. For instance, Ellis, whose work has been seen as one of the key and engaging works on sustainable livelihoods, has tended to be concerned mostly with livelihoods diversification and not necessarily on sustainability (Ellis 2000).

Ellis makes an argument that the conceptualization of sustainability has been hackneyed to the extent that, it's being incomprehensible (Ellis 2000). The next part of the paper examines strengths and shortfalls of sustainable livelihoods approach towards sustaining the poor's livelihoods.

STRENGTHS OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH TOWARDS IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS

An important contribution of the sustainable livelihoods approach has been seen in its sequencing of strategy types and coping strategies employed by the rural poor. A well-known and significant work in this area was carried out by Susanna Davies in 1996 (Small 2007: 31-32). With this, Davies investigated and made an analysis of the trend and sequences of activities that were employed within the Malian-Sahel by households in responding to foreseeable and actual food insecurity and shortages at the time (Davies 1996; Small 2007: 31). The coping mechanisms identified here encompasses; mechanisms of insurance, including inter household loans, disposing of productive assets, reducing consumption levels etc. The research by Davies was used in structuring response and warning system toward famine; which emphasized that not just single responses are developed by households toward crises, but they make attempts at responding at the predictable-stages (Davies 1996; Small 2007: 31). The essence of this analysis and findings within the sustainable livelihoods towards maintaining and enhancing livelihoods against shocks and unforeseen stresses amongst poor households is that, in recognizing and pointing out these mechanisms and strategies, immediate interventions are put in place prior to the seriousness of the food insecurity and shortages.

In close relation to Davies research, other researchers including Ellis (2000), as well as Dorward and Poole (2003), have recognized and noted within their studies response sequences and strategies that are employed by households in mitigating situations of stress and unprecedented shocks that deteriorates their livelihoods (Small 2007: 31-32). In doing this, the authors provide structural bases for assessing resources and assets that are permeated by poor households in responding to stress and shocks that they may experience. An important advancement of these finding and the earlier one by Davies discussed in the preceding paragraph is that, it gives concern for people-centredness, as well as participatory actions as a focus for sustaining the poor's livelihoods (Small 2007: 31). It also gives attention to the fact that poor individuals and households may draw in and out of poverty situations, including food insecurity and shortages and they possess a range of capabilities, resources and entitlements that they rely on as remedies for sustaining their livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods approach provides deeper spectrum for ensuring local-scale development. This is done by connecting local perspectives on development with micro level development perspectives, institutional as well as policy measures in line with people, mostly the poor livelihoods across all spheres including the community, district, national and global scale of development and policy programmes (Scoones and Wolmer 2003: 5-6). This in turn brings into light the essence and the need for multi-level governance structures and arrangements, as well as the significant relationship and links that comes within power, politics and livelihoods (Scoones 2009: 191). It therefore becomes important for attention to be placed on relevant themes that are crucial to sustaining livelihoods of the poor, such as power, politics, knowledge and diverse ideas in relation to livelihoods, particularly for the poor.

Furthermore, sustainable livelihoods approach's emphasis on diversity of livelihoods and ideas make a significant contribution towards the sustainment of rural poor livelihoods. With this, Ellis (1999) has argued that, with the diversity of circumstances and situations of people within different rural areas of the world, it is essential to embrace the diversity of livelihoods. As such, in embarking on development projects, the need for consideration of the human and political agency of the poor and the diversity with regards to local assets with attention given to the vulnerability situations that might exist is important, and must be key to any agenda on development and sustaining livelihoods (Ellis 1999; Scoones 2009: 172-3). The mechanisms of livelihoods employed gives room for ensuring outcomes that are inclusive and desiring taken into consideration the vulnerability of the poor and the effects of the mechanisms on the poor's assets. Notwithstanding the numerous strengths of the sustainable livelihoods approach towards improving people's living in sustaining their assets and livelihoods, it also entails some shortcomings.

SHORTFALLS OF THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH

Sustainable livelihoods approach has been criticised for not given much attention towards handling the persisting shifts within global politics and markets. With the emphasis of the approach on multi-level dynamics, and a focus on the local, issues with regards to global politics and market shifts were placed within a crate with a labelling as "contexts". (Scoones 2009:181; Small 2007). The questions that comes here is what becomes the impacts and outcomes if contexts becomes the most significant element that determines the interactions that comes within micro-level parleying and agreements that are manifested towards accessing assets in relation to the different actors that come into play (Scoones 2009: 181). With policies within developmental agencies and organizations pushing for and pinpointing the effects of a loosen localism, as well as the liberal examinations that depicts idealistic tendencies, the hardened economists were in favour of a growth policy that entails principles at hard macro-economic scale (Scoones 2009: 181-182).

In addition, sustainable livelihoods approach has been criticized for its limited consideration for politics as well as power and the relations that emerges between interactions of governance, and the connection with livelihoods within the context of development (Scoones 2009: 182; Small 2007). Some efforts from the sustainable livelihood domains were put in place towards making engagement with livelihoods, politics and power. This includes works such the right based approach by (Moser and Norton 2001), and the work of (Manor 2003) and that of (Ribot and Larsen 2005), concerning livelihoods and decentralization. Other works included that of (Lahiff 2003) on the connections between arguments and questions regarding the broader agrarian change (Scoones 2009: 182; Small 2007).

Notwithstanding these works, it could be realized that less was advanced by the sustainable livelihood domain in linking actively with the key players and actors that are engaged in governance structures and regimes, politics and power. Also, little is seen in linking activities in engaging with persisting debates and interactions within the framework of social movements and bodies that are tuned to radical agrarian change (Scoones 2009: 182). This to some extent stems from the point that sustainable livelihoods approach was tuned to its own activities and preferences with a focus on the local community and providing space, and generating livelihoods for practitioners of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), consultants, researchers, as well as trainers on their works on livelihoods (Small 2007).

The sustainable livelihoods approach is also hit with its limited efforts at the current debates and interactions on shifts with regards to agrarian change and transformation issues and questions, and shifts within local rural economies (Lisocka-Jaegermann 2015; Scoones 2009: 183). It is therefore necessary and significant to give a clear attention and consideration to the trend of livelihoods in the present times and in the future in relations to emerging and current climate change and environmental conditions, considering the local agrarian agency of the people in relation to the global dynamics of the environment and climate policies and changes. Several works within the livelihood domain, including the

work of (Bryceson 1996), as well as that of (Ellis 2000) have pointed to the need for attention on issues of de-agrarianisation and livelihoods-diversification respectively (Scoones 2009: 183). With this, the paper argues that with the element of people-centredness, local dynamics and diversification providing avenues for poverty reduction, it should generate and encompass spaces within agrarian change, agency and transformations at sustaining livelihoods in the future.

From the previous paragraph, it could be emphasized that notwithstanding the focus of sustainability of the poor's livelihoods within the sustainable livelihoods approach, less has been seen in terms of stringent efforts at the long-run changes and conditions of the environment (Lisocka-Jaegermann 2015; Scoones 2009: 183). Considering that much evidence and data have been brought to light, concerning the potential effects on the livelihoods of people, mostly in developing parts of the world due to the impacts of current environmental conditions and climate change, the attempts of sustainable livelihoods have not been much rigorous in the eyes of its critics at sustaining the poor's livelihoods in the future (Small 2007). A restructuring and redesigning of sustainable practices and approaches are needed for harnessing the threats of the persisting climate changes and environmental conditions. The next part of the paper moves to discuss the main tenets of degrowth perspective in relation to improving and sustaining livelihoods.

MAIN TENETS OF DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE IN RELATION TO SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS

Degrowth perspective entails reduction or slowing down of growth with the aim of resolving environmental and ecological crisis, promoting equality and community relations (Gerber 2020). Within the current ecological crisis therefore, the degrowth perspective with its propositions of a slow down in economic growth comes as a remedy to the problem, as it argues that the persisting environmental degradation have been negatively shaped by the existing economic growth and social structures (Gerber 2020; Laufenberg 2014: 1-2; Kallis 2011). Degrowth is as such seen as coming in direct opposition to economic systems, such as capitalism and sustainable growth. The degrowth perspective share some features with notions such as the post-development school, with its insistence on ensuring transformation and repoliticization of the local as well as the global society (Kallis 2011). This aims at challenging dominant notions that have tended to shape what constitutes an economy; and what should be seen as the reality.

The present system according to degrowth perspective is designed in such a way that it becomes locked up in growth. This in turn creates socio-economic inequality, hardships, and suffering on the poor, who are mostly found in developing economies of the world (Laufenberg 2014: 3). The structures within capitalist systems finds it hard to degrow within an equal, voluntary and safe space (Alexander 2012; Kallis 2011). For degrowth to be manifested and applied with focus on downscaling economic growth and facilitating positive effects on the prevailing ecological structure, a different system that moves away from the capitalist undertones to consider social and economic equality, as well as a climate-friendly and safe environmental structures will be much beneficial for grassroots and inclusive development.

The degrowth perspective is also critical of the notion of sustainable development, with the view that sustainable development persistently proposes for economic growth. As such, not only that degrowth cannot thrive and operate within the capitalist economic system, but also not in the notions of sustainable development on continuously advocating and advancing economic growth (Laufenberg 2014: 3-4).

Additionally, sustainable development is seen by degrowth to entail non-viable suppositions with regards to technological headways and discoveries that are being speculated to solve the energy and climate problems across the globe without substantial destruction and defacement of environment and livelihoods of people (Kallis 2011). For instance, renewable energy is seen to capitulate a less of a superfluity or surplus that may be anticipated and looked forward to with a consideration of the energy that would be

required in producing it, as well as the time and the costs involved in moving from a society that depends on fossil-fuel to one that is characterized by renewables (Laufenberg 2014).

Further to this, considering the Prius Paradox, the tendency for a boomerang upshot must be taken into consideration and not ignored to the backside (Kallis 2011). This is because advancements in the efficiency of energies which might enhance increment in revenues as well as drop in prices, could also facilitate an increment in consumption. The situation may lead to an increment in the consumption of the eco-fuel, that is produced or the use of the revenues from the structure in other spheres, which could result in less drop in actual consumption and production (Fournier 2008)

Degrowth with its critical questioning of sustainable development on its advocacy for continuous economic growth, gives substantial propositions which are embedded in economic downscaling toward resolving environmental problems in view of paving way for social, economic, and political equality, and enhancement of livelihoods of the poor within a trend of a climate-friendly structure. In the next part of the paper, we examine the strengths and shortcomings of degrowth perspective on its propositions for an ecological safe society that enhances livelihoods of the poor.

THE STRENGTHS OF DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE AND RELATIONS WITH ITS PROPOSITIONS FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THAT ENHANCES LIVELIHOODS

Degrowth perspective despite its critical look at the concept of sustainable development makes moves and suggest strategies that are important for improving people's livelihoods and wellbeing. One key area of development that can be identified here is the idea of diversified economies and diversities in prosperity (Sachs 2009). This idea is also supported by the post-development school. With a slowing down in growth, expenditures and material needs, it becomes necessary for humans to look at diversity of seeing wellbeing. This could be realized in identifying meaning within community and family relations. This comes in line with the "Buen Vivir" that entails the idea of the good life and suggests that wellbeing and improved livelihoods would be possible within the community (Gudynas 2011). Gibson-Graham for instance, considers multiple ecologies within economic-productivity that encompasses economic, social and physical assets (Gibson-Graham 2005). This will help in sustaining wellbeing as well as material-survival which in turn enhances livelihoods. A similar point is made by Sachs in terms of considering factors that go beyond money and promotes wellbeing within its diverse nature (Sachs 2009). This enhances capacities of people to resist uncertainties and shocks.

Degrowth with its campaign for ensuring ecological and environmental responsible society will better improve livelihoods of the rural poor. Studies have indicated that the limits for global gas emissions have almost or being reached (Ward et al., 2016). It becomes difficult to decouple the greenhouse gas within economic growth in its outright terms (Steffen et al., 2016) Therefore, it is necessary to degrow in slowing down the economy, and ensuring safe environment and climate conditions in safeguarding livelihoods especially for the poor.

SHORTFALLS OF THE DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE

The downscaling of the economy proposed by "degrowthers" is attacked that this could inflame levels of poverty (van der Berg 2011:881-882). This could bring consequences that would result from lower per capita income and excessive unemployment within the economy (Schwartzman 2012:120). This may come as an explanation to some extent for researchers and practitioners that continuously campaign for economic growth, mostly in developing countries notwithstanding its degradation effects on environment and climate conditions.

Additionally, degrowth is criticized for focussing much on the local, but providing less emphasis for the anthropogenic shifts in the context of the trans-political system (Schwartzman 2012). Degrowth is therefore seen to not actually examining the qualitative aspects of economic growth (Schwartzman 2012). The progression to degrowth strategies as such, necessitates actual societal-repoliticization without which the process becomes difficult.

INTERROGATIONS OF THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH AND DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINING PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS

Both the sustainable livelihoods approach and degrowth perspective makes substantial contribution towards the multi-faceted array of rural poor development and development in general. Both approaches make sense with the significance of community relations, people-centredness, equality and inclusiveness in development projects.

The livelihoods approach for instance, makes a deeper impact in development and livelihoods by creating connection with micro level development activities together with poorer community participants, districts, national levels and the broader institutional and policy structure of the society (Scoones 2009:190-191). The relations here draw significance of the connections between governance structures, institutions, institutional arrangements and livelihoods (Scoones and Wolmer 2003:5) This allows for its people-oriented nature in incorporating the poor's capacities and assets in resisting shock and crisis. Degrowth perspective also highlights significance of ecological and climate protection for societal survival, particularly for the poor in developing countries (Kallis 2011). This is emphasized through campaign for community relations in environmental needs and development projects. The point being made here is that, the sustainable livelihoods approach despite its efforts at localisms and people-centredness in enhancing livelihoods, gives less emphasis on environmental and climate concerns which are important for securing the lives and progress of the rural poor (Scoones 2009:191). Also, sustainable livelihoods approach despite its incorporation of micro-level, community participation with wider institutional structures, places less emphasis on key issues, including power, politics and political change (Scoones 2009: 190-191). A reenergization of the sustainable livelihoods approach to encompass cross-level diverse changes in political dynamics, power and politics becomes very significant. This provides an enhancing challenge for sustainable livelihood to augment rural development and improved livelihoods. Degrowth on the other hand, notwithstanding its massive campaign for environmental protection, requires substantial societal-repoliticization. This will provide adequate stands for progressing its ecological and climate safety agendas.

CONCLUSION

The paper has unpacked the strategies of the sustainable livelihoods approach and degrowth perspective on improving livelihoods particularly for the rural poor. Both approaches advance on the importance of community relations, people-centredness and equality in development agendas toward enhancing livelihoods. The degrowth perspective, particularly expresses concerns for ecological safety within the current climate crisis and calls for economic downscaling in meeting climate objectives, which will provide room for enhancing the poor's wellbeing and livelihoods. Notwithstanding the contributions of the approaches, a strong reinvigoration of a cross-level political change, with consideration for power, politics and knowledge in relation to livelihoods, as well as massive societal-repoliticization would be significant for sustainable livelihoods approach and the degrowth perspective respectively, in augmenting and improving the poor's livelihoods in meeting the contemporary development needs.

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